



# Language as a Tool of Manipulation and Exploitation in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

**Sohail Ahmad**

Department of English Linguistics, Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Corresponding author: [cisco27@gmail.com](mailto:cisco27@gmail.com)

## Abstrak

Language plays a central role in shaping thought and influencing social and political realities. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell portrays language not merely as a medium of communication but as a mechanism of power and control (Orwell, 1945). This paper explores how language is used as a tool of manipulation and exploitation in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The study focuses on the choice of words in the propaganda slogans used by the ruling pigs and how these linguistic structures serve to control thought and behavior. Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a framework, the paper examines how simple, repetitive, and emotionally charged words shape ideology and normalize inequality. The analysis also draws comparisons with modern political slogans to show that the manipulation of language remains a global and timeless phenomenon. The study concludes that Orwell's work reveals how linguistic choices reflect power relations and how language, when monopolized by the powerful, becomes a weapon of exploitation rather than a medium of truth.

---

### Article Info

Received: 18 September 2025

Revised: 11 October 2025

Accepted: 25 October 2025

Available online: 04 November 2025

### Keywords

Language

Political

Manipulation

Exploitation

Discourse

---

## 1. Introduction

Language is more than a tool for communication—it is a medium of power and ideology. The choice of words used in political contexts often determines how people think and behave. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell exposes how ruling groups use language to exploit and dominate others (Orwell, 1945). The pigs, as the ruling elite, carefully select and modify words to maintain authority and suppress dissent. Their slogans are not simply expressions of belief but strategic linguistic constructions designed to control thought. This paper focuses on how the choice of words in Orwell's slogans functions as a tool of manipulation and exploitation. It also connects Orwell's fictional use of language to modern political practices where slogans serve similar purposes. Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, the study examines how words shape ideology, construct authority, and naturalize inequality in both literature and real-world politics (Fairclough, 1989).

---

## 2. Literature Review

Numerous scholars have examined Orwell's *Animal Farm* as a political allegory, but fewer have explored its linguistic mechanisms of control (Orwell, 1945). Rodden views Orwell's fiction as an exploration of how language shapes social reality (Rodden, 2017). Fairclough (1989, 1995) argues that

discourse is a social practice through which power is produced and sustained (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). Wodak and Meyer extend this idea, showing how linguistic structures can legitimize inequality (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Simpson emphasizes Orwell's deliberate simplicity of language, linking it to how political systems limit critical thought (Simpson, 1993). Chilton notes that slogans compress complex political issues into emotional catchphrases, thereby simplifying ideology for mass acceptance (Chilton, 2004). This compression, as seen in Orwell's and modern political slogans, is a powerful strategy of control. Building on these insights, this paper uses Fairclough's CDA model to examine Orwell's linguistic manipulation and compares it to contemporary political slogans where similar techniques repetition, simplification, and emotional framing are used to exploit the public.

---

### **3. Methodology**

This research is qualitative in nature and is based on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which helps to study how language is linked with power and ideology (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough's model has three dimensions. Fairclough argues that language is a social practice, meaning that it does not exist separately from society but is deeply connected to social structures and power relations. The first dimension, called textual analysis, focuses on the words, grammar, and sentence structure used in a text. The second dimension, discursive practice, looks at how language is produced, shared, and repeated in a society. The third dimension, social practice, studies how language connects with social systems, politics, and power. In simple terms, the model helps us understand not only what is said, but also how and why it is said within a social context.

The data for this study consists of five main propaganda slogans used in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "Napoleon is always right," "Four legs good, two legs bad," "Four legs good, two legs better," "All animals are equal," and "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." These slogans are selected because they clearly show how the pigs use simple and emotionally powerful language to control the thoughts and actions of other animals. Each slogan is examined using Fairclough's model to explore how language works as a tool of manipulation and how these patterns still appear in modern political communication.

---

### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Napoleon is always right**

The slogan "Napoleon is always right" establishes the linguistic foundation of authority on the farm. Its grammatical simplicity conceals its ideological power. The adverb "always" conveys permanence and eliminates any space for doubt or debate. The adjective "right" constructs moral superiority, suggesting that Napoleon's decisions are inherently just. Together, these words create a closed semantic system in which the leader's correctness is absolute and unquestionable. From a linguistic perspective, the slogan reflects the presupposition of infallibility, a technique often used in political discourse to suppress alternative voices. In Fairclough's terms, it operates at the level of ideological reproduction, where repetition turns belief into truth. This mirrors real-world political rhetoric such as Donald Trump's declaration, "I alone can fix it." The lexical choice of "alone" centralizes power, while "fix" portrays the leader as a savior figure. Both expressions rely on syntactic reduction and pronoun centralization to replace collective responsibility with individual glorification. The linguistic pattern transforms political leadership into cult-like obedience.

#### **4.2 Four legs good, two legs bad**

The slogan "Four legs good, two legs bad" functions as the linguistic root of the animals' ideological conditioning. The binary adjectives "good" and "bad" eliminate complexity and moral nuance. Such

polarization exemplifies what Fairclough calls the ideological simplification of discourse, where complex social realities are reduced to emotionally charged opposites. The rhythm and parallelism of the slogan make it phonetically memorable and cognitively easy to repeat. This pattern converts moral reflection into mechanical chanting. It mirrors modern populist discourse where similar binary simplifications are used. Donald Trump's "Build the wall" reproduces the same linguistic reduction: an imperative verb and a concrete noun form an emotionally effective but semantically narrow command. In both cases, the lexical economy of the slogan—few words, strong emotions—creates a powerful ideological tool. The simplicity of syntax disguises the sophistication of manipulation.

### **4.3 All animals are equal**

The slogan "All animals are equal" represents the revolutionary ideal in its linguistic infancy. The quantifier "all" gives the illusion of universality, while the adjective "equal" evokes fairness and unity. However, Orwell intentionally constructs this statement as semantically hollow a phrase that sounds just but lacks definitional clarity. From a linguistic perspective, this vagueness is strategic. In political discourse, terms like "equality" and "justice" function as floating signifiers they carry emotional resonance but remain undefined, allowing those in power to reinterpret them. The universality encoded in the word "all" suggests inclusiveness, yet it ignores the structural constraints of real societies. In a capitalist or free-market economy, true equality is linguistically and practically impossible because power and wealth inherently create asymmetry. Thus, the slogan's universality becomes a discursive illusion, giving the oppressed psychological comfort while concealing the impossibility of actual equality. The linguistic simplicity of this phrase is its power: by reducing a complex social concept into two short words, Orwell shows how language can transform an ethical principle into a political trap.

### **4.4 All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others**

The transformation of the earlier slogan into "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" demonstrates the peak of Orwell's linguistic irony. The comparative adjective "more equal" introduces a logical paradox a syntactic structure that is grammatically coherent but semantically absurd. This paradoxical phrase represents how power manipulates language to normalize inequality under the guise of fairness. In modern democratic societies, similar contradictions are visible. Most constitutions, including Pakistan's, guarantee that "all citizens are equal before the law." Yet, in practice, bureaucrats and politicians enjoy privileges far beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Even within prisons, elites receive comfort and respect, while the poor endure deprivation. This disjunction between the linguistic ideal and social reality reflects Orwell's concept of linguistic inversion, where language expresses the opposite of what it claims.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, this slogan operates through semantic normalization: once repeated enough, an absurd statement becomes socially acceptable. The phrase "more equal" no longer sounds contradictory it becomes part of the ideological common sense. Similarly, in contemporary political systems, the language of equality persists as a moral slogan, yet its meaning is continuously distorted to maintain elite control. Equality, when undefined, becomes a linguistic instrument of exploitation rather than liberation.

### **4.5 Four legs good, two legs better**

The slogan "Four legs good, two legs better" marks the moment of complete ideological reversal. The substitution of "better" for "bad" alters not only the meaning but also the moral direction of the discourse. This single lexical change one comparative adjective symbolizes how totalitarian regimes rewrite truth through controlled vocabulary. The comparative form "better" introduces a false sense of progress, implying improvement while concealing regression. Linguistically, the slogan demonstrates semantic drift a process where repetition and familiarity allow a word to adopt new, contradictory meanings without resistance. The rhythmic similarity to the original slogan masks its moral inversion, creating the illusion of continuity. Comparable techniques appear in modern political rhetoric, such as

Narendra Modi's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" ("Together with all, development for all"). The words "all" and "development" convey inclusiveness and progress, yet critics argue that they often mask exclusionary practices. In both Orwell's and real-world slogans, positive lexical items like "better" and "development" are used to legitimize inequality, showing that word choice alone can redefine truth.

---

## **5. Conclusion**

This study concludes that in *Animal Farm*, Orwell masterfully demonstrates how the choice of words in political slogans becomes a subtle yet powerful tool for manipulation and exploitation. Through simple, repetitive, and emotionally charged language, the pigs transform ideals of equality and freedom into instruments of control. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis reveals that these slogans operate on textual, discursive, and social levels to shape thought and normalize inequality. The same linguistic patterns appear in modern politics, where slogans like "Build the wall," "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," and "Naya Pakistan" use appealing but vague words to influence public perception. In both fiction and reality, language that claims to unite or liberate often conceals systems of dominance. Orwell's message remains timeless: when language serves power, it becomes the most effective tool of exploitation.

---

## **References**

- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. routledge.  
Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and power. *Anderson Wesley Longman Limited*.  
Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Edward Arnold London.  
Orwell, G. (1945). *Animal Farm: A Fairy*.  
Rodden, J. (2017). *George Orwell: the politics of literary reputation*. Routledge.  
Simpson, P. (1993). *Language Ideology and Point of View*. Routledge.  
Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2015). *Methods of critical discourse studies*. sage.