



Breaking Barriers: Exploring the Nexus of War and Communication in Delany's *Babel-17*

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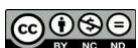
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ABSTRACT

Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17* (1966) is a visionary exploration of language's pivotal role in conflict dynamics. Beyond its science fiction facade, the novel delves into the profound essence of language as the bedrock of human communication. Delany embarks on a literary odyssey, dissecting how specific linguistic attributes deeply influence human cognition, leading to global political disparities. These differences manifest in entrenched borders and hostilities, or in the emergence of a new paradigm where boundaries of selfhood dissolve.

Babel-17, positioned as a potent tool in the struggle between humans (Alliance) and extraterrestrial beings (Invaders), serves as both an effective instrument and a perilous weapon in the theater of war. Delany contrasts the extremes of linguistic impact on politics, seeking a middle ground. Set against the post-Cold War era's backdrop, rife with tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, the novel encapsulates the zeitgeist of the 1960s. Unlike its contemporaries, *Babel-17* transcends dystopian speculations, delving into the phenomenological core of global conflict. Delany deliberately eschews materialistic details, focusing solely on language's role. Implicitly, the novel suggests that the linguistic and cognitive facets of human conflict were underexplored or underestimated at its time. The novel paints two conceivable discourses of communication in the theater of war, prompting readers to contemplate the profound influence of language on our world and how the omission of "us" and "them" could put an end to global conflicts.

Keywords: Science fiction, Post-Cold War era literature, "us" and "them" discourse, language role on human conflicts.

Introduction

"War is what happens when language fails" (Atwood 43).

Babel-17 (1966), Samuel R. Delany's acclaimed science-fiction, delves deeply into the pivotal role of language in both the emergence and resolution of conflicts. Within this novel, the realm of fantasy serves as a veneer, concealing the author's profound exploration into the essence of language as the fundamental conduit for human communication. Delany embarks on a literary odyssey with the aim of scrutinizing how specific linguistic attributes can profoundly shape human cognition, thereby giving rise to political disparities on a global scale. Such differences may manifest in the establishment of rigid borders and subsequent antagonisms or, alternatively, in the emergence of a new paradigm of human subjectivity in which borders dissolve, and as a result the border of selfhood is shattered too. *Babel-17*, positioned as an advanced language central to the conflict between humans (Alliance) and extraterrestrial beings (Invaders), emerges as the ultimate tool—an efficacious instrument or, conversely, a perilous weapon—employed in the theater of war. Through a comparative analysis of the polar extremes of linguistic impact on politics, Delany attempts to reach a moment when humans can venture a third way in between. He does so by contrasting two empirical worlds; or better say two divergent political discourses.

It is noteworthy that *Babel-17* was originally published during the post-Cold War era, a period defined by pervasive tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. The narrative of the novel is deeply influenced by the zeitgeist of its time. The 1960s witnessed a proliferation of literary works that envisioned hypothetical conflicts between these two superpowers. Science fiction authors, attuned to the pillars of the Cold War—scientific progress and psychological warfare—actively engaged in contemplating the repercussions of these conflicts by envisioning diverse future scenarios. However, confining *Babel-17* solely within the context of Cold War production would be reductive, as the novel endeavors to instigate a broader discourse on the nature of global conflicts as a whole. What sets this novel apart from others addressing the same era is its distinct endeavor to explore the very essence of conflict in a phenomenological sense, transcending the confines of dystopian conjectures. Samuel R. Delany, rather than speculating on dystopian futures rooted in the conflicts of his time, strives to examine the mechanisms underlying global power structures and their perceptual foundations. To achieve this, Delany deliberately distances himself from the materialistic details of the conflict and limits his study to the role of language. Implicitly, the novel posits that the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of human conflict remain largely unexplored or, at the very least, underestimated at the time of its publication. Built upon this premise, *Babel-17* portrays two conceivable discourses of communication in a warlike setting.

War of Words: Communication on the Battlefield

In the modern world, communication has emerged as a potent instrument of power. It has gained unprecedented significance, surpassing any other period in recent history. The field of communication science has solidified its position as a transformative discipline capable of effecting profound global changes. Historical documents from the Cold War era shed light on how the West strategically employed communication as a military weapon during pivotal moments, aiming to expand its ideological territories. In *Peace and War in the Modern Age* (1965), John Jr. Richardson emphasizes the impact of free broadcasting stations, such as Radio Free Europe, in advancing the Western agenda. Richardson contends that these communication channels, in conjunction with the development of advanced warfare technologies, played a pivotal role in the conflict against communist forces (Barnett 376-381). However, the utilization of communication and language in the context of warfare is not exclusive to the Cold War era.

The idea of deploying communication and language at war is nothing specific to this era. Dating back to the seventeenth century, propaganda has always been considered an essential component of wars (Wallace 193). Modern global powers have extensively employed propaganda machinery to disseminate their own agendas (Ibid. 193-213). Over the past decade, the world's most powerful militaries have focused their strategic doctrines on effectively harnessing communication theories to enhance the efficiency of their military operations. The emergence of Strategic Communication (SC) planning within the United States military serves as a notable example. Caroline Holmqvist from the Swedish National Defence College observes that the concept of SC has attained prominence in strategic thinking among U.S. military circles, emphasizing the need to communicate "effectively" with local populations (1). Holmqvist further argues that "the logic of SC, in essence, is that if only populations received the right message about what the intervening forces are attempting to do in Afghanistan/Pakistan, they could be made to support the mission" (1). In essence, SC perceives communication as an immensely powerful weapon serving military objectives. It was identified as one of the five "areas of particular emphasis considered critical to the Department of Defense's ability to act in a strategic environment" in the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review of 2006 (Holmqvist 3). Initiatives such as SC exemplify how military discourse actively employs communication and language as instruments of power in the context of warfare.

Delany's Sublimation of Communication

Practices such as Strategic Communication (SC) in the US Army and the utilization of Radio Free Europe during the Cold War serve as noteworthy exemplars of how governments and power structures deploy communication strategies to disseminate propaganda and advance their vested interests. These instances illuminate the extent to which military discourse actively employs communication strategies to further its own agenda. However, Delany's project transcends the confines of such conventional military thinking, advocating for a radical departure from the entrenched "military goals" (Delany, *Babel* 4). Delany's ambitious undertaking is primarily concerned with a comprehensive re-evaluation of communication tools, with a specific focus on language, within the realms of humanism and the philosophy of language. The novel, in its entirety, serves as a compelling exploration of how language differences shape individuals' political perceptions of opposing forces. It delves into the profound implications of these linguistic variations, elucidating how a breakdown in communication, precipitated by such disparities, can give rise to devastating conflicts. This urgent issue confronts us with the compelling realization that *Babel-17* represents a captivating stride toward unraveling the complexities of human difference and its far-reaching ramifications.

Within the narrative of *Babel-17*, a sprawling interstellar conflict unfolds between the Alliance, consisting of humans, and the Invaders, a species of human aliens who have mastered a cryptic language known as Babel-17. The complex plot reveals a series of unsettling discoveries made by Alliance military leaders, as they uncover a multitude of infiltration and sabotage incidents scattered across their territories (Delany 11). In each case, the insidious presence of Babel-17 leaves its indelible mark (12). Manifestly, the novel asserts that this language holds immense power, operating as a weapon of unparalleled potency (Delany 213). The same trend is also existent in Feminist texts like those of Elgin who assumed language to be women's weapon against the patriarchal society of her time (Barati, *Native Tongue*). Yet in Delany, by eroding the very fabric of human subjectivity, Babel-17 engenders a remarkable augmentation of human capabilities (139-44). It exerts a seductive allure, ensnaring its speakers and learners in a treacherous dance, ultimately transforming them into unwitting traitors to the Alliance's cause. The essence of this linguistic phenomenon lies in its ability to reduce individuals to mere objects, their actions mechanistically guided by the perceptions bestowed upon them by Babel-17. This dehumanizing process underpins the enigmatic label of "human aliens" assigned to those under its sway. Exemplifying this profound influence, the actions of Butcher, a proficient speaker of Babel-17 within the Alliance, reveal an alarming lack of discernment as he mercilessly targets adversaries and commits heinous acts, including audacious bank robberies—"Babel-17 as a language contains a preset program for the Butcher to become a criminal and saboteur" (215). Yet, as the novel progresses, a transformative narrative twist challenges this initial perception of Babel-17's influence, forcing a profound reevaluation of its true nature and the consequences it engenders.

In their desperate quest to counter the existential threat posed by the enigmatic language of the Invaders (Babel-17), the military forces of the human world turn to Rydra Wong, a captivating starship captain, distinguished linguist, poet, and telepath—a veritable humanist heroine. Tasked with unraveling the secrets of Babel-17, Wong's mission encompasses not only deciphering the language but also unearthing the insidious methods employed by the Invaders to infiltrate strategically vital locations within the Alliance. Up until this pivotal juncture in the novel, the reader's perception of language mirrors that of traditional military discourse, resembling strategic communication plans such as those employed by the US Army. However, as the narrative displays, a gradual departure from the simplistic application of communication science aligned with military objectives takes place, challenging the prevailing notions of human comprehension in the context of warfare.

Delany's Lack of Actual Hostility

Isiah Lavender deciphers the novel's fictional landscape by stating that "Babel-17's aliens from another galaxy are bent on conquering a galaxy similar to ours; the only difference between them and us is semantic" (Delanty 196). Lavender's interpretation initially aligns with the premise established in the novel. However, a meticulous examination of the text reveals that there are few instances within the book that definitively suggest the Invaders possess intentions of "conquering" the human galaxy. While there are conflicts between the Alliance and certain Invaders, the notion of conquest is not explicitly mentioned in the text. This appears to be a deliberate tactic employed by the author, aimed at challenging readers' preconceptions, and prompting them to perceive the story in relation to actual patterns of antagonism prevalent in the world. In the spaceship when Rydra takes to the out spaces very close to the Invaders' territory, a conflict seems imminent, but no attacks or serious confrontation happens. This seems to be mostly a ploy by the author to touch upon the reader's preconceptions that aim to fill the story with their actual patterns of antagonism in the world. Until this moment of the novel, it is extremely easy for the American readers of the sixties to identify the Invaders with the Soviet Union, who is bent on conquering the US through their Communist ideology.

The novel intricately complicates the established pattern of antagonism by introducing specific nuances within the conflict. It challenges the notion that simply being born in another galaxy automatically designates one as an Invader of the human world. Rydra's poetry is "popular on both sides" (73) and originates from a region near the borders of the Invaders; the book explicitly states that being born in another galaxy does not guarantee one's status as an Invader, as Rydra herself could have easily been one: "[B]orn a galaxy away, she might as easily have been an Invader" (Delanty 73). Notably, Rydra's poems enjoy popularity on both sides of the conflict, highlighting the notion that, at least in terms of language, the presumed vast divide between the Invaders and the Alliance may be less significant than anticipated. As a linguist, Rydra possesses a deep understanding of both sides, enabling her to give voice to people's thoughts and emotions in an artistic form. She explains that she listens to others' incomplete thoughts, fragmented sentences, and unexpressed feelings, and transforms them into polished and rhythmic compositions: "I listen to other people, stumbling about their half thoughts and half sentences and clumsy feelings that they can't express—and it hurts me. So, I go home and burnish it and polish it and weld it to a rhythmic frame..." (18). However, the fact that her poems find resonance on both sides is viewed as unsettling by humans: "That [her poems are popular on both sides] is 'upsetting'" (72). Here, Delany subtly suggests that even in the realm of literature and art, the human mind is conditioned to uphold borders and divisions. The underlying premise is that due to their designated diabolical nature, the Invaders are not expected to appreciate or endorse anything favored by the Alliance.

More than any discernible reasons underpinning the confrontation between the Invaders and the Alliance, the assumptions surrounding this antagonism are rooted in a tumultuous history. The novel alludes to an undisclosed invasion, a focal event unknown to the reader. The galaxy has endured "six ruinous embargoes" that have inflicted devastation upon the cities within the Alliance territory (Delanty 3). However, the identities of these invaders and their connection to the speakers of Babel-17 remain unclear. It appears that any species outside the Alliance territory is simply labeled as an Invader. The only concrete evidence provided by the text concerning this war is the tragic loss of Rydra's parents during the second embargo (9). Unfortunately, no further details regarding this battle, which has left a profound impact on Rydra, are disclosed (Ibid.). One of the few definitive assumptions about this enigmatic conflict, unfolding as the story progresses, is the occurrence of infiltrations initially perceived as accidents but later revealed to be acts of sabotage (Ibid. 11).

The conspicuous absence of a well-defined conflict and the mere presence of imminent threats, as contemplated within the realms of military discourse, assumes a profound significance, suggesting that Delany deliberately constructs a landscape of unmitigated hostility devoid of explicit justifications. In this regard, his artistic endeavor pertains to a critique of power structures and their militaristic discourse, particularly in relation to the manipulation of language. Rydra, cognizant of the perilous potential inherent in language, confesses to a fear surpassing even that of General Forester, esteemed as the preeminent figure in the struggle against the Invaders (22). Her trepidation emanates from the realization that "language is thought. Thought is information given form. The form is language" (23). Consequently, what unsettles Rydra most acutely is the disconcerting prospect that language possesses the capacity to shape and steer the faculties of the mind. She expounds further, illustrating that "a computer can be programmed to err, not through entangled circuits, but by skillfully manipulating the 'language' you teach it to 'think' in" (214). Evidently, the perceptions engendered by linguistic conceptions and structures assume paramount significance in the formation and direction of human thought processes.

In an illuminating moment of the novel, Baron (one of Rydra's spaceship crew) tells Rydra that "[s]ometimes I believe . . . that without the Invasion, something for the Alliance to focus its energies upon, our society would disintegrate" (74). Rydra also agrees to this statement by a meaningful smile. This scene might be considered as one of the momentous instances where Delany is revealing his abrupt criticism of the military and political discourses. The sovereignty of the nation requires that there exist an enemy to focus the attention upon, without whom the whole society might fall in the danger of collapse. Delany not only criticizes this conception, but also the unconscious ways that language provides the basis for such views to work.

Language and Human Perception

Slavoj Žižek in his *The Ticklish Subject* argues that "the most elementary form of the Spirit's externalization, of course, is language, as Hegel emphasizes again and again, our inner experience can shed the traces of external senses and acquire the form of a pure thought only by again becoming externalized in a meaningless sign - we think only in words, in language" (87). This Žižekian reading of Hegel illuminates the notion that our capacity for thought is intertwined with language, and the specific properties and characteristics of language have a profound impact on our cognitive processes. It follows, then, that language plays a significant role in shaping and governing the thoughts and perceptions of individuals. As thoughts are externalized through language, our inner experiences are manipulated, and consciousness itself becomes fragmented. In the novel, Delany skillfully explores the concept of extreme and seemingly irrational hostility through the lens of language. The central premise revolves around the enigmatic language, Babel-17, which intriguingly lacks the pronoun "I." This intentional omission has profound implications, as it negates the possibility of self-critical reflection and eradicates any awareness of the symbolic process that distinguishes between reality and its expression (214).

Consequently, Babel-17 overlays an alien perception onto the individual's reality, compelling them to engage in acts of sabotage. This transformative linguistic characteristic not only robs individuals of vital memories and cultural connections but also fractures consciousness itself, replacing the perception of self with an external, alien perspective. By deconstructing the boundaries of selfhood, Babel-17 creates a space where the distinction between self and other becomes blurred. Lavender describes this as:

Once the individual's self-awareness-the "I"-is gone, the Babel-17 language overlays his or her reality with an alien perception and compels acts of sabotage. The personality thus sublimated is robbed of vital memories and cut off from his or her culture. Consciousness splits, as the perception of the self is replaced, with an alien, external perception. She functions as a multicultural broker of acceptance, tolerance, open-mindedness, and difference, who "will enable humanity to bridge the gap between Self and Other, healing the breach of isolation and alienation" (Malmgren 12)." (196)

Thus, the lack of "I" makes a liberating space in which the border between the selfhood and otherness is absolutely blurred. Following Sapir-Whorf traditions of linguistic relativity and determinism, language determines (or shapes) our perceptions of reality. Borrowing the structuralists' view, our linguistic world is based on the binaries

oppositions. When one side of the binary is challenged, the other side is changed too. These binary oppositions create our perception in language. Once this binary is shattered, the perception would drastically alter too.

Delany's exploration of language in *Babel-17* aligns with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which posits that language influences our perception of reality. Within the confines of language, our understanding is shaped by binary oppositions. Disrupting one side of a binary invariably alters the other, as our linguistic world is predicated on these oppositional constructs. In the absence of the pronoun "I" in *Babel-17*, a liberating space emerges where the boundaries between self and otherness dissolve. This transformative linguistic shift challenges our preconceived notions of identity and perception, paving the way for a profound reevaluation of the relationship between language and cognition. Furthermore, Rydra assumes the role of a multicultural broker, embodying acceptance, tolerance, open-mindedness, and the celebration of difference. Her ability to navigate and comprehend both sides of the linguistic divide enables her to bridge the gap between self and other, healing the breach of isolation and alienation within humanity's fractured consciousness (Malmgren 12). Delany's masterful exploration of language in *Babel-17* not only invites readers to contemplate the power of language in shaping human thought but also challenges the entrenched power structures and militaristic discourses that seek to manipulate language for their own totalitarian ends.

The Self-Other binary and the intricacies of communication between the two are among the most thought-provoking aspects of *Babel-17*. The language employed in the novel, devoid of pronouns such as "I," "You," and other relative pronouns, presents a profound linguistic and cognitive quandary (Delanty 139). In *Babel-17*, the absence of a complete sense of self gives rise to a fundamental challenge in perception. Without a coherent perception, the existence of bias becomes questionable. How can human aliens differentiate their responses to others when the very definition of "other" is absent from their linguistic framework? In the absence of an actor in the subjective sense, the possibility of biased reactions is called into question. A careful reading of the text reveals that the supposed acts of sabotage carried out by the enemies are, in fact, directed toward empty spaces. This challenges the traditional understanding of antagonism, as these so-called aliens are even willing to destroy themselves. Consequently, the concepts of sabotage and attacks, as defined by humans, are entirely subverted within the context of *Babel-17*. It is in this context that Rydra's role becomes significant, as she embarks on the seemingly impossible task of establishing communication in a realm devoid of selfhood. She creates a sense of selfhood in Butcher and manages to forge a shared language with him. Delany's optimism in exploring alternative modes of communication between distant worlds, aimed at averting direct confrontations, resonates as a beautiful idea that emerges from the novel. In essence, the absence of the Self-Other binary in the language of *Babel-17* challenges conventional notions of perception, bias, and antagonism. Delany's exploration highlights the potential for finding extraordinary avenues of communication between vastly different realms, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable barriers. This optimism underscores the novel's profound exploration of the power of language and its transformative potential in bridging gaps between disparate worlds.

William Schuyler in his article "Could Anyone Here Speak *Babel-17*?" poses a fundamental question. He says: If the Butcher's mode of cognition does not permit a distinction between Self and Other, how can he function at all? (Smith 95) The answer can be found in Paul Ricoeur's comments on Emile Benveniste's theory of pronouns. Ricoeur notes that "[o]utside the reference to a particular individual who designates himself in saying I, the personal pronoun, is an empty sign that anyone can seize: the pronoun is waiting there, in my language, like an instrument available for converting the language into discourse through my appropriation of this empty sign" (Ricoeur 255). Therefore, based on Ricoeur, the selfhood is an empty sign awaiting to be defined by a discourse. The language provides this empty space for any discourse to intervene. Referring to the idea that "the tool is not the weapon; rather the knowledge of how to use it" (Delanty 213), one can claim that selfhood and otherness are just the tools, and that dominant discourses of politics and military know how to fill in the blanks of the selfhood and otherness. What these discourses do is that they use the communal division between the selfhood and otherness, make a sovereign definition for 'us', and use that to define an 'other'. This is while there exists no definitive formula for the division between 'us' and 'them'. In *Babel-17*, Rydra shows us that people employing their linguistic awareness can, by means of effective communication fill this blank space of language via some insightful humanistic perception, rather than allowing the military perception to intervene.

Delany's Perfect Communication

Susan Stone-Blackburn in an article on the idea of communication in *Babel-17* writes:

The movement of *Babel-17* is directed by impulses towards more perfect communication: Rydra's psychological motivation, her unique talents, and the plot device of the mysterious language to be deciphered all point towards a climax of perfect communication. Delany emphasizes the need for it by repeatedly presenting gaps between people: between individuals...between groups...between "the Invaders" and "the Alliance" in the intergalactic war. (248)

This belief is probably the reason why despite being aware of all the seductive powers of *Babel-17*, Rydra takes the risk to learn this language. She is aware of what war is and what the consequences of wars are. She has lost her

parents in the war and believes that the military chiefs do not know what war really is, and does to the people (Delany 9). She has been suffering psychological traumas of war for a long time in her youth.

Rydra's astonishing capability to communicate effectively as a processual subject provides her with the means to overcome certain prejudices in her and between the various antagonistic communities in the novel as she socializes with generals, doctors, government officials, space crews, wrestlers, dead people, pirates, and ultimately the aliens (Stone-Blackburn 57). This quality is augmented by her exposure to Babel-17, making her mind to reach a sudden growth (Delany 113). Exposure to Babel-17 awakens Rydra's gift of telepathy, "the nexus of old talent and a new way of thinking. It opened worlds of perception, of action" (146). But, the question here is: how has she been able to reach such linguistic perception and competence, or better say, how can human reach such intellectual awareness? The answer lies in the fact that Rydra has been exposed to different languages and cultures. She has experienced the other and this quality has made her to be embracing the other rather than defying it.

As Jane Weedman argues, "when a person is exposed to two cultures, double consciousness evolves. To survive, the person must be able to function in both cultures; this means mastering both languages" (133). Weedman is right in that only by mastering the language of the other one can learn how the participants of that culture think. This is the only way to acquire a perception of the other. And, by mastering the language, Weedman doesn't mean language as a means of communication, but she means mastering the perceptual ways that language functions in the philosophical sense of the word. This level is reached only by acquiring a great conception of the culture of the other and the ways the other lives. Only after this stage one make sure to have an ability to provide a sound judgement of his/her antagonism towards the other. In one instance in the novel, on the issue of double consciousness, Rydra says: "when you learn another tongue, you learn the way another people see the world, the universe" (23), and tells the Butcher, when she frees him from the Invaders' influence, that "there are certain ideas which have words for them. If you don't know the words, you can't know the ideas. And if you don't have the ideas, you don't have the answer" (150). This way Delany is calling for a pure conception of the other before allowing the misconceptions to intervene. In Babel-17 the military discourse is residing at the stage of misconception. They have learnt to do so. Based on this reading of the novel, it is the duty of the experts of language to bring about the right ideas, and draw the right answers.

Implications of Delany's Project in Political World

Beyond the philosophical underpinnings underscoring the attributes of the Babel-17 language and its conspicuous absence of subjective pronouns, "I," an interpretative lens rooted in political analysis directs our attention to the resonance with the Cold War era's fundamental concepts. Babel-17 can be interpreted as a narrative that encapsulates the palpable tensions between the American Capitalist system and the Communist ideology of the Soviet Union. Under this analytical framework, the Alliance assumes the role of a representative of the Capitalist realm, characterized by a pronounced emphasis on individualism and self-concept. Conversely, the Communist structure operates devoid of a distinct delineation of selfhood, employing manipulative mechanisms to subsume individual subjectivity. Within this political reading, Delany assumes a critical stance toward both ideological paradigms while simultaneously endeavoring to navigate an intermediary path. Notably, the conclusion of Babel-17 unveils a promising proposition, signifying an attempt to forge a novel direction. Rydra adeptly imparts to Butcher the art of incorporating first-person perspective and selfhood into his language, a transformative modification that enables Butcher to gain a heightened awareness of his distinctness from Rydra. Conversely, Butcher imparts to Rydra the challenges intertwined with the notion of selfhood, underlining its potential to engender divisions among individuals. Galvanized by these unfolding experiences, Rydra, accompanied by his crew including Butcher, makes a resolute choice to embark on an unauthorized departure from the military installation. Throughout this voyage, Rydra reflects: "we have Babel-17 corrected—perhaps I should call it Babel-18—which is the best tool conceivable to build it toward truth" (218). In the realm of literary analysis, we encounter a profound assertion in the text as the speaker suggests a reevaluation and correction of the linguistic entity known as "Babel-17." This contemplation is accompanied by the playful notion of potentially relabeling it as "Babel-18." This seemingly subtle act holds profound implications, positioning the language as a malleable instrument for the pursuit of truth. The terminology "Babel-17 corrected" signifies an intellectual and linguistic refinement, implying an inherent imperfection in the initial construct. The speaker's impulse to consider the term "Babel-18" encapsulates a subtle acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of language—a tool capable of evolution and adaptation. By suggesting that this linguistic evolution is the "best tool conceivable to build it toward truth," the speaker posits that language itself, when shaped and adjusted, can serve as a potent vehicle for navigating the journey toward understanding and veracity. This perspective aligns with the notion that the precision and nuance attainable through language can guide the process of unraveling complex truths and philosophies.

The textual excerpt, though brief, encapsulates a compelling interplay between language and truth. It invites readers to reflect on the malleability of language and its capacity to shape and illuminate the path toward deeper comprehension. Through the metaphorical transformation of "Babel-17" into "Babel-18," the narrative gestures

towards the idea that language is not only a means of communication but a tool for intellectual refinement and the pursuit of enlightenment. In this context, Delany's narrative voice advocates for a sociopolitical paradigm akin to contemporary Western interpretations of socialism. This paradigm emerges as a potential alternative, posited as a "third way," aimed at circumventing the pronounced individualism inherent in capitalist systems, while also mitigating the communal influences inherent within Communist ideologies. According to Delany's framework, the realization of this alternative hinges upon a delicate negotiation between these contrasting ideological poles, fostering a nuanced interplay that reduces tensions. This entails a strategic integration of heightened individualism into the framework of Marxist philosophy, an infusion that, according to Delany, presents the feasibility of transcending the polarities and cultivating a harmonious coexistence between the two paradigms. Additional instances of this conceptual approach are evident in modern history.

A prominent illustration can be discerned in the nuclear standoff between Iran and Western powers, wherein an impasse had the potential to catalyze a catastrophic conflagration, exacerbating the volatile landscape of the war-torn Middle East. Notably, a pivotal shift occurred with the ascension of presidents in both the United States and Iran who exhibited linguistic, cultural, and political acumen. This tandem of leadership cultivated an environment akin to that envisioned by Rydra, wherein the incendiary trajectory was steered away from the precipice of turmoil. For Iranians, Rydra embodied Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif, who, holding a doctorate in International Politics from the University of Denver, possesses a deep understanding of foreign languages. Correspondingly, the narrative encompasses the role of US Secretary John Kerry, who, following the culmination of the Iranian nuclear deal, articulated, "When I was 22, I went to war...and it became clear to me that [I] don't want to go to war again" (Sherman). The question of effective communication within a humanistic discourse finds eloquent illustration in the documentary film *Fog of War*, wherein former US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara candidly acknowledges that the Vietnam conflict resulted from a misperception stemming from miscommunication. McNamara reflects, "We see incorrectly or we see only half of the story at times." In this light, Delany's endeavor to carve out a platform for exploring the foundational sources of numerous hostilities between nations and ethnicities is distinctive and profound. It draws parallels with the inherent complexities of communication, as echoed in real-world instances, ultimately underscoring the pivotal role of effective dialogue in ameliorating such tensions.

Conclusion

In summation, Delany's *Babel-17* emerges as an allegorical narrative that offers profound insights into the imperative for human beings to engage in direct and unobstructed communication, thereby circumventing potential confrontations. Within the novel's fabric, Delany masterfully illustrates the pivotal role language assumes in the genesis of diverse conflicts. Notably, the complex patterns woven by language within the minds of its users can inadvertently engender underlying logics, ultimately igniting conflicts. This narrative underscores the imperative of transcending these latent conflicts through the medium of direct and efficacious communication. In this context, linguists and cultural experts assume a crucial role. Their aptitude for navigating linguistic nuances and cultural dynamics can facilitate the resolution of differences by furnishing perceptual insights that elude conflicting parties. Delany's narrative thus serves as a compelling reminder of the transformative potential residing within effective intercultural and interlinguistic exchanges, echoing the possibility of averting conflicts through conscious and mutually comprehensible dialogues. As Rydra says: "We have to go to another language in order to think about the problem clearly without going through all sorts of roundabout paths for the proper aspects of what we want to deal with" (Delany 69). This way, Delany hopes to attain a moment when, with the help of experts in language and culture, humans can find a way to address the issues of cultural and national conflicts.

Babel-17 can be considered a masterpiece in that it innocently seeks a hope for reconciliation between antagonistic powers in the world. The novel ends in a sort of reconciliation found through the power of language. "This war will end within six months" (Delany 219) is said to be the best prose sentence ever written by Rydra Wong in the book. Rydra's "intuitive understanding of language and meaning" saves the entire planet (Lavender, 169). That is probably the reason why Delany states that "Rydra Wong has become this age's voice" (Delany 4).

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