TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

GROUP 2
ENGLISH B EXTENDED ESSAY

The functions of the artificial language 'Nadsat' in the plot of the novel 'A Clockwork Orange' by Anthony Burgess.

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ABSTRACT

Anthony Burgess, the writer of the novel 'A Clockwork Orange' created a new, artificial, language for his book. After watching the movie 'A Clockwork Orange' directed by Stanley Kubric, I wanted to read the book, the original story behind the movie. As I turned the first page, I realised that I didn't understand a word in these paragraphs. After some research I learned about the existence of 'Nadsat' and I wondered why someone would work to create a brand new language, just to be used in one book. I found out, later on, that it had several purposes to it and I was mesmerised. This research inspired me to write my extended essay. Even though it was a fun subject to research and write about, at the same time it was quite difficult in the sense that it was written from the point of view of a literature person and thus it seemed to lack the perspective of a linguist.

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1) **<u>INTRODUCTION</u>**

The tendency seen in all social animals, such as bees, cats, dolphins or apes, is to try and communicate with others. However, it is only humans who have developed languages that are more than a set of signals mixed with sounds. Hence, it helped the formation of national and regional languages such as English, Turkish, Russian, French, German, etc. These types of languages usually show a wide range of popularity around the world.

However, languages kept evolving. There were sudden and vast changes in the world. Both of these helped form another type of language; which we now classify as 'Artificial Languages'.

A terminology used to describe Artificial Languages is:

"An artificial language is a language that has been deliberately designed by one person or a small group of people over a relatively short period of time. Synonyms for the term artificial language include planned language, constructed language, model language, and invented language. Artificial languages designed for specific purposes are also known by an array of other terms. Those used in works of fiction are called imaginary languages or fictional languages. Those designed to facilitate global communications are called universal languages, auxiliary languages (auxlangs), interlanguages or interlinguas, international languages, etc. The realm of artificial languages also includes logical languages, number languages, symbolic languages, and pasimologies (gesture languages)." [1]

As can be seen through the definition above, there are a variety of areas where artificial languages are used. A research on artificial languages shows a more detailed listing of these usages. These are as follows:

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[1] <http://www.cs.uu.nl/wais/html/na-dir/language/artificial-languages-FAQ.html>

Linguistic research (used by scientists to examine how a language is learned)

1. Artificial intelligence (used in programming computers and similar machinery)

2. International communication (neutral, easy to learn languages used by tourists, traders etc.)

3. Works of fiction (every writer creates his or her own language which has its own purposes such as Tolkien's Elvish, Burgess' Nadsat and Orwell's Newspeak)

4. Art for art's sake (Artificial languages created primarily in response to aesthetic impulses. These are also called artlangs.)

5. Secret languages (languages created mostly for fun between the members of a relatively small group such as Pig Latin used by English speaking children)

6. Psychiatry (A psychiatrist can gain insights into a patient's mind by studying the patient's invented language(s) or by studying the ways in which a patient uses an artificial language to express himself.)

"__A Clockwork Orange__" is set in the future version of London. This is where the protagonist of the novel, 15-year-old Alex, and his three friends live. These young men devote their life to ultra-violence. They commit all sorts of crimes from raping girls to beating up old men. They torture and murder with no doubts nor limits. However, considering all their inhuman and brutal criminal actions, they usually stage a very happy disposition. Alex is the only one in his gang who has full conscience while commiting these crimes. His 'droogs' (his friends and partners in crime) on the other hand, commit crimes in a rather childish way and with no understanding of the act whatsoever. While committing these ruthless acts, Alex maintains to keep an eminent attitude. However, one day after another ruthless act of violence, the arrival of the police complicates everything. As his droogs run away without a single glance backwards, Alex is left behind and is caught by the officials. After this, the government decides to brainwash him with the 'Ludovico therapy', which takes away all the desire to

perform an act of violence, even in a boy who was committing crime in full consciousness. Ironically, the way this treatment is realized is brutal on its own accord. Not only how the treatment is performed but also the fact that it takes away Alex's free will is unnatural and inhuman.

The language used in this futuristic dystopia is called Nadsat and it is an artificial language created by the author Anthony Burgess especially for his novel "A Clockwork Orange". Alex, the narrator (also regarded as the anti-hero) of the book, uses Nadsat both for telling the story to the reader and to communicate with other characters in the novel, such as his friends, his parents, his victims, and the authority-figures, such as the police and government officials he comes face to face with.

1) <u>**NARRATION**</u>

   a. <u>**NARRATION TO HAVE A UNIQUE VOICE**</u>

Literary progress cannot occur if every writer, every poet copies each others' techniques. In order for a literary piece to be of some importance, it must have a unique narration; in other words a unique voice. The search among writers, for a unique voice has played a major role in the flourishing of new ways in story telling and in the case of "<u>*A Clockwork Orange*</u>", it has made Burgess create a new language.

When the book is read for the first time, even from the beginning, from the first paragraph, it strikes readers with its incomprehensible vocabulary and sentences.
" 'What's going to be then, eh?'There was me, that is AIex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our assoodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry." (p.1)
The above extract is very important because it is the first time the reader meets with Alex, the narrator. The first thing that hits the eye is, of course, the language, an incomprehensible, weird language which seems to dominate all the entire book.

The way this section of a futuristic, dystopian tradition is represented, minorly, in the first paragraph of the book, is as follows:
 " The Korova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto and you may, O my brothers' have forgotten what these mestos were like, things changing so skorry these days and everybody very quick to forget, newspapers not being read much neither. Well, what they sold there was milk plus something else. They had no licence for selling liquor, but there was no law yet against prodding some of the new vesches which they used to put into the old moloko, so you could

peet it with vellocet or synthemesc or drencrom or one or two other veshches which would give you a nice quiet horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And All His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your Mozg. Or you could peet milk with knives in it, as we used to say, and this would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one, and that was what we were peeting this evening I'm starting off the story with." (3)

This catchy, half-clear imagery created by Nadsat words hint a narration with a very unique voice from the very beginning of the novel. The readers figuring this out at the very beginning is a great support for the plot. The reason for this is that in order for Alex to be classified in a category besides 'unbareable criminal' in the readers mind, he has to be intriguing. The reader should want to discover more about him and the way he leads his life and the ending of his story. Alex's being such a unique narrator grants him a place out of the 'criminal' classification which, as stated before, is a quite supplementary for the understanding of the plot.of the novel.

b. <u>FIRST PERSON NARRATION TO BE SINCERE</u>

To begin with, as the novella has first person narration, the readers face Alex who provides them with biased therefore unreliable pieces of information. Throughout the book, Alex never justifies his actions to his audience, nor does he have to. This creates a sense of him being somewhat sincere. This results in the reader facing a narrator who, as unlikely as it may seem considering the story, evokes pity by telling his everlasting suffering. Alex's narration is efficient because the way he describes his actions is very easy to relate to, even and especially when the situations he describes are not. This is a result of the usage of Nadsat, not to leave out the fact that Alex also has a very sentimental form of speech.

"Pete and Georgie had good sharp nozhes, but I for my own part had a fine starry horrorshow cut-throat britva which, at that time I could flush and shine artistic. So there we were dratsing away in the dark, the old Luna with men on it just coming up, the stars stabbing away as it might be nice anxious to join in the dratsing. With my britva I managed to slit right down the front of one of Billyboy's droog's platties, very very neat and not even touching the plot under the cloth. Then in the dratsing this droog of Billyboy's suddenly found himself all opened up like a peapod, with his belly bare and his poor old yarbles showing, and then he got very very razdraz..." (14)

As can be seen from this section, a very terrorizing scene of a street fight becomes barely understandable therefore creating half an image in the readers mind. Also, the way Alex explains the events is as if he's explaining a regular event at his school, such as: 'I could wave around my pen as it shined artistically' but in the original quotation, he is talking about his very shiny (and sharp) razor. This acts as a proof of the "euphemizing" function of Nadsat in the plot of the book.

3) <u>PREVENTING THE AGEING OF THE LANGUAGE</u>

Change is an inevitable part of life. As time proceeds so do the other aspects of our lives. Language is one of the many tools that form our lives. This is why it is a fact that a language is bound to age and of course, change. These changes (the ageing of language) are the outcome of time and time only; but, changes do occur in a variety of ways. These ways can be the changing perspective and likes of the youth, developments in technology and sciences, the influences of foreign languages etc.

If Anthony Burgess had chosen the language of a certain era, no matter the time, it would have aged until the time it was brought to be published. By creating Nadsat, an artificial language used only by fictional characters, Burgess has stepped in the way of natural evolution. He has prevented the ageing of 'his' language. By doing so, he has also made the plot and the book ageless; or in other words permanent.

4) <u>DISTANCING THE READER</u>

A nadsat dictionary[2] would never have existed if it weren't for the American publishers of Anthony Burgess. Burgess never intended for the meanings of Nadsat words to be made public. As the story moves forward, some meanings which appear to be in critical locations are revealed to the reader by Alex; but otherwise whilst reading the book, the reader comes face to face with a lot of unknown words.

"I ripped away at this and that and the other, the others going haw haw haw still, and real good horrorshow groodies they were that then exhibited their pink glazzies, O my brothers, while I untrussed and got ready for the plunge. Plunging, I could slooshy cries of agony and this writer bleeding veck that Georgie and Pete held on to nearly got loose howling bezoomny with the filthiest of slovos that I already knew and others he was making up." (20)

As can be seen from the extract above, the unrevealed Nadsat words make it very hard for a reader to comprehend the situation; and they make it impossible for the readers to fully understand everything, or to create a well established imagery.

"Then after me it was right old Dim should have his turn, which he did in a beasty snorty howly sort of a way with his Peebee Shelley maskie taking no notice, while I held on to her. Then there was a changeover. Dim and me grabbing the slobbering writer veck who was past struggling really, only just coming out with slack sort of slovos like he was in the land in a milk-plus bar, and Pete and Georgie had theirs. Then there was like quiet and we were full of like hate, so smashed what was left to be smashed – typewriter, lamp, chairs - and Dim, it was

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[2] <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellpatke/en4241/nadsat%20dictionary.htm>

typical of old Dim, watered the fire out and was going to dung on the carpet, there being

plenty of paper, but I said no. 'Out out out out" I howled. The writer veck and his zheena were

not really there, bloody and torn and making noises. But they'd live." (20)

The two extracts that appear on this section are different segments of a rape scene. They both represent the same function of Nadsat. They both make the situation only partly comprehensible. However, the significace of these extracts is that they have the additional function of censoring Alex's violence, in this case a rape scene, which can be named as 'distancing'.

" Distancing" is quite an appropriate term to use since the unclarity of the scenes and the imagery distance the reader from the brutality that they actually bare within. Words that ignite strong emotional effects such as 'blood', 'to kill' or 'guts' are replaced by unfamiliar words such as 'knovvy', 'oobivat' or 'keeshkas'. Unfamiliar words do not have any emotional effects on the reader so they are distanced from Alex's brutal life style and thus the reader forms a more positive and sympathetic opinion about Alex and his actions.

5) <u>SOCIETY</u>

a. <u>ALEX ≠ "CLOCKWORK"</u>

"The book was called A Clockwork Orange for various reasons. I had always loved the Cockney phrase 'queer as a clockwork orange', that being the queerest thing imaginable, and I had saved up the expression for years, hoping some day to use it as a title. When I began to write the book, I saw that this title would be appropriate for a story about the application of Pavlovian, or mechanical, laws to an organism which, like a fruit, was capable of color and sweetness. But I had also served in Malaya, where the word for a human being is orange."[3]

Anthony Burgess defines "A Clockwork Orange" as a phrase that describes a mechanical lifestyle. In today's modern lifestyle, the common pattern of a metropolitan lifestyle threads between home, work and entertainment life. So it is not shocking to see a similar pattern present in the future London's city life. Alex's parents are mostly seen at home or whilst they are getting ready for work; and their understanding of entertainment is mostly reduced down to watching TV.

Alex on the other hand, constantly skips school, spends very little time at home (for sleeping and listening to music mostly) and his understanding of entertainment definitely doesn't include TV. Alex and his droogs see beating, rape, cursing and witty remarks as entertainment. Another unusual side (unusual when compared to his age group and their habits) of Alex is that he is a violent teenager who listens to Ludwig Van Beethoven. He, therefore, steps out of the regular pattern and habits that people his age usually follow.

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[3] <http://kubricks0.tripod.com/aco.htm>

All of these details should put both Alex and his droogs out of the classification 'clockwork orange'. However, as Alex is the only one fully conscious of his actions, to exclude his droogs out of the equation wouldn't be incorrect.

As for Nadsat; Alex has an extraordinary lifestyle and his job, within the plot as a narrator, is to tell his life and his story to his audience which he does through Nadsat. The extraordinary language used to describe extraordinary lifestyle. This may be concluded as a need to underline the fact that Alex is not a "clockwork orange" since he uses the Nadsat language. This leads to the conclusion that a basic form of English would not have been sufficient to tell such a story.

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b. INDEPENDENT YOUTH SUBCULTURE

The word Nadsat is the match of the suffix "teen" in Russian just like it is "eigh-teen" in English. When the word is used alone it is also as a name for a language used by youngsters of an era, it is not inappropriate to assume the word has been given its meaning in the English language which is teen as in teenagers. Considering this, another purpose of Nadsat, as a language being used by a fifteen year old and his friends, is to state that the youth subculture exists independently from the rest of the society. A set of examples can be given whether they are Alex's relation with his parents, with the government officials and even with the drunk homeless people in the streets (Alex refers to them as Bum's). All of these individuals have a difficulty in understanding each other. They all have different principles, different needs, different perspectives and different lifestyles. This is why other characters in the book do not speak Nadsat, nor do they fully comprehend everything that Alex utters.

However, eventhough they all seem different, they can be separated to form a more general classification; teenagers and adults. This is why when Nadsat steps in to emphasize the difference between these two subcultures, or the independence of the youth subculture; they are separated into two as; the people who speak Nadsat (the teenagers) and the people who do not (adults).

c. <u>INDIFFERENCE TO SOCIAL NORMS</u>

Every society has norms because the ideology they are built on is co-dependence. Whether these norms are rules or cultural traditions, the majority of the people tend to comply with them. Eventhough "*A Clockwork Orange*" is a futuristic dystopia, it still has its norms. These, as seen throughout the book, are mostly set and regulated by law-enforcement against crime. Alex is indifferent to these norms. He chooses to live an extreme life of crime. Nadsat, in this case, works yet again as an emphasizer of this extreme way of life. Alex's different speech shows (while interacting with others) his difference in regard to the norms of the society.

9) <u>SHALLOWNESS OF THE YOUTH</u>

A common misunderstanding classifies Nadsat as the only language Alex is capable of using. However, Alex is more than capable of speaking standart English when he desires or needs to. This makes Nadsat just an assemblage of 'extra' words which Alex uses to describe his daily life, his thoughts, his experiences and the world he lives in.

"Nadsat is basically English, with some transliterated words from Russian. It also contains influences from Cockney rhyming slang and the King James Bible, some words of unclear origin, and some that Burgess invented. The word 'nadsat' itself is the suffix of Russian numerals from 11 to 19 (-надцать). The suffix slurs the Russian words for 'on ten' — i.e., 'one-on-ten,' 'two-on-ten,' (одиннадцать, двенадцать) and so on — and thus forms an almost exact linguistic parallel to the English '-teen.' Some of the words are also almost childish English such as "eggyweg" and "appypolylogy" (egg & apology), as well as regular English slang "sod" and "snuff it"."[4]

As can be seen from the extract above, Nadsat is not a fully developed language; the words are all concrete or semi-abstract. Alex uses this language to describe his thoughts and experiences; however, the things he tells are never too deep or philosophical. Therefore, Nadsat proves to be sufficient. If, however, Alex was to discuss something more philosofical or even just a little less shallow, he would have needed to use a more standart form of english. This is because he wouldn't have been able to find the words he would need to express himself.

This semi-abstract language is a language only used by the teenagers in the book; and the majority of the teens that appear in the book are followers of crime and are extremely shallow.

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[4] <http://thekorovamilkbar.forumotion.co.uk/>

These two facts form a bridge between the shallow existence of the modern youth and the

lack of abstract words in the Nadsat language. This brings us to the conclusion that one of the

functions of Nadsat is to underline the extreme shallowness of the juvenile thoughts.

10) <u>CONCLUSION</u>

"A Clockwork Orange" by Anthony Burgess tells the story of an extraordinary person who finds himself in extraorinary situations. The story is filled with murder, rape, violence, experimental treatments and all sorts of shocking and disgusting elements. Looking from a publisher's view, these materials (detailed rape scenes, extreme violence etc.) would have been considered unprintable; however, whilst reading the novel, the reader is able to symphatise with Alex despite all his actions; making it possible for them to feel sorry for him at the end of the novel. Burgess was able to achieve this effect by creating and using Nadsat as a tool of narration. Nadsat helps Alex to sound sincere, it helps the reader view events from a distant point of view; enabling them to feel symphatetic.

Nadsat also helps underline some key points in the plot. It expresses Alex's stance towards his society and its norms. Then, at this point, Nadsat creates a second perspective; by putting the mirror away from the society and pointing it to the teenagers, it underlines how shallow their thoughts can be.

The final purpose of Nadsat brings up the novel into the status of a 'cult'. It transforms the book into an example of unique narration. It also makes the novel an everlasting masterpiece since its language will never get old.

All these functions of Nadsat have very important purposes in the plot of this novel. Therefore, Nadsat can be listed proudly right next to the story, the imagery and the message of the book as one of the key factors that enhance the value of the novel as a literary creation.

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