

# THE PROFOUND SHOOM OF LIP-MUSIC: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF AN INVENTED LITERARY LANGUAGE

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## WHAT IS NADSAT?

Nadsat (from the Russian suffix *надцать*, meaning ‘teen’) is the strange dialect of Alex, the violent youth protagonist of Anthony Burgess’s cult dystopian novella ‘A Clockwork Orange’. A curious compound of anglicised Russian loan-words, gypsy bolo, rhyming slang, Elizabethan locution and criminal cant, Nadsat is a literary art-language, invented solely for the purpose of artistic expression, akin to Tolkien’s Elvish, or the Klingon language in ‘Star Trek’.

## WHY IS IT OF INTEREST?

‘A Clockwork Orange’ is one of the most popular novels of the late 20th century, and has sold millions of copies. Additionally, it has been filmed three times, including versions by Stanley Kubrick and Andy Warhol, and has been translated over fifty times into nearly thirty different languages. Nadsat is therefore one of the most widely-encountered languages which has no actual speakers.

## WHAT IS OUR PROJECT?

We are investigating two main questions regarding Nadsat. The first is the extent to which corpus-based analysis, involving techniques such as keyword analysis and concordance analysis, can be used to help identify these Nadsat items and problematize the extant glossaries, which were not originally included with the text and were disapproved by the author.

The second, which is a by-product of the first, is the question of whether such glossaries were really necessary for comprehension of Nadsat, again using a partly corpus-based methodology to identify direct and indirect glosses provided by Burgess in the original text.

The findings of this research will feed into the wider aims of our multidisciplinary project, which is conducted in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Birmingham and Charles University, Prague, to create parallel translation corpora of ‘A Clockwork Orange’.

This project aims to analyse the ways in which translators have represented Nadsat in other languages, a translation task which poses unusual challenges since Nadsat has no real-world native speakers and hence no context of cultururation.

## Top 24 Keywords (log likelihood) from ‘A Clockwork Orange’ compared with LOB as reference corpus

Rank	Keyword	Rank	Keyword
1	like	13	very
2	I	14	MORROSHOW
3	my	15	real
4	brothers	16	you
5	then	17	STARRY
6	said	18	MALENKY
7	YECK	19	old
8	DIA	20	bit
9	viddy	21	VIDDIED
10	all	22	COLOSS
11	and	23	LITSO
12	me	24	GLAZZIES

## BUT ARE GLOSSARIES NECESSARY?

The first two Nadsat words appear in the first two lines of the novel without explicit explanation: “There was me, that is Alex, and my three **droogs**, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim, Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our **RASSOODOCKS** what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry.”

1. There was me, that is Alex, and my three **droogs**: droogs occurs 40 times in the book.

There was me, that is Alex, and my three	droogs	that is, Pete, Georgie, and Dim
we came across Billyboy and his five	droogs	. Now in those days, my brothers,
Billyboy and his	droogs	stopped what they were doing
malchicks like me and my	droogs	, and then only for a yell or a razrez
I got out of the auto, ordering my	droogs	to shush their giggles
Then she went off, and my three	droogs	had got out of the auto quiet

Repetition and context thus clearly defines the meaning of ‘droogs’ for the reader. Such is the potency of this methodology that the term ‘droog’ has now entered the Oxford English Dictionary with the definition of “a young man belonging to a street gang.”

2. we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our **RASSOODOCKS** what to do with the evening: rassoodocks only occurs twice in the entire novella.

## Top 10 1R-3R collocates (log-likelihood) of {make/V} up \_DPS (883 hits; min. 5 collocations)

Rank	Word	Observed	Log-Likelihood
1	mind	601	7269.565
2	minds	124	1645.432
3	own	132	922.4517
4	whether	43	260.1642
5	about	68	250.6334
6	what	35	72.5113
7	to	131	70.2606
8	.	195	64.8894
9	face	13	50.4443
10	yet	10	33.2376

Given the significant salience of ‘mind’ or ‘minds’ in this phrasal construct in regular English usage, the author was able to use the invented word **RASSOODOCKS** a mere two times in the novella and still accurately convey its intended meaning to the reader without the requirement of a glossary.

## WHAT'S GOING TO BE NEXT THEN, EH?

What emerges from this analysis is that Nadsat can be seen as an example of ‘language contact’, with the unknown Russian lexis cleverly contextualised by Burgess. With our research collaborators – Gabriela Saldanha and Sofia Malamitidou (University of Birmingham) and Patrick Corness (Charles University, Prague) – we next plan to investigate what happens when the novel is translated into other languages. The aim is to establish how translators deal with the issues that Nadsat creates and whether they are as careful as Burgess, while examining the translation strategies they use.

Nadsat words tend to come to the top of the keyword list, particularly those in first 5 categories, but there is a similar problem to the glossaries - no indication of part of speech, or collocates etc.

Moreover, because of tokenisation, several two-word hyphenated items are not counted: ‘day-wise’, ‘in-grin’, ‘lip-music’, etc.

Keyword list suggests inclusion of a few other grammatical words, e.g. ‘thou’ that also need to be seen in context:

“Well, if it isn’t fat stinking billygoat Billyboy in poison. How art thou, Come and get one in the yarbles, if you have any yarbles, you eunuch jelly, I nudged him hard, saying: “Come, gloopy bastard as	thou	globby bottle of cheap stinking chip-oil? .” And then we started. art. Think thou not on them.
So I said: “Never fear. If fear	thou	hast in thy heart, O brother, pray banish it forthwith.”

## THE PROBLEM WITH GLOSSARIES

Since the publication of the first US edition of the novella by Norton in 1963, many editions of ‘A Clockwork Orange’ in English and in translation have featured glossaries by editors to assist readers in understanding the invented lexis of Nadsat.

However, this was against the author’s own wishes, as he intended the reader to be ‘brainwashed’ into learning Nadsat (and by extension, basic Russian) to reflect Alex’s experience of suffering brainwashing within the text. Glossaries therefore reflect the respective attempts by editors to define Nadsat, and not authorial intention nor the reader experience.

Glossary	Stanley Edgar Hyman (1963)	Andrew Biswell (2012)
Number of Items	241	202
Types of Items	Russian words: brat, dim, viddy Other unfamiliar words: cutter (= money), lighter (=old woman) Baby talk: eggiweg, skolliwol Rhyming slang: luscious glory, pretty polly New coinings/abbreviations: in-out in-out, drencom ‘marginal’ items: splodge, warble (n.), pee and em	

The glossaries disagree primarily about ‘marginal items’. Biswell excludes many of these, such as ‘sod’ or ‘snoutie’, on the basis that they are British slang, whereas Hymen considers them to be Nadsat, being less familiar with British language use. The glossaries issue is further compounded by the fact that translators of the text, such as Anibal Leal (‘La Naranja Mecanica’, 1972; 1976) and Georges Belmont (‘L’Orange Mécanique’, 1972) also included glossaries of Nadsat in their translated texts, which raises the prospect of defining Nadsat in terms of linguistic encounters between languages.