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Title: The thematic function of fictional languages in "A Clockwork Orange" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four"

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Research question: How does the fictional language Nadsat reinforce the theme of youth versus maturity in the novella "A clockwork Orange" by Anthony Burgess and Newspeak reinforce the theme of psychological manipulation in the novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four" by George Orwell?

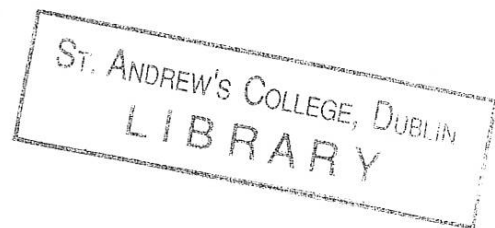
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## Abstract

"A Clockwork Orange" and "Nineteen-Eighty Four" are innovative and controversial works that present the reader with political and social problems and challenge them with fictional languages. The authors' ground-breaking styles, paired with the risky themes explored in the works create a memorable and captivating experience for the reader. Both works provoke deep consideration into the issues that are presented. This essay focuses on the relationship between the themes and the language and how this relationship works by asking:

How does the fictional language Nadsat reinforce the theme of youth versus maturity in the novella A clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess and Newspeak reinforce the theme of psychological manipulation in the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell?

The scope of this essay is confined to the novella A Clockwork Orange and the novel Nineteen-Eighty Four, yet various secondary sources have been used in order to explore the context and to further develop the understanding of these works. These secondary sources include other works by the authors, a Russian dictionary and both Nadsat and Newspeak glossaries.

This essay comes to the conclusion that themes are reinforced by the fictional languages through a number of different ways: in particular that the fictional languages make the themes more profound and memorable for the reader. Nadsat in "A Clockwork Orange" illustrates the generation gap that exists between the younger and older generations and emphasises the adolescent isolation. Newspeak in "Nineteen Eighty-Four" illustrates the oppressive regime of the Party and shows how free thought and creative expression is suppressed.

## Introduction

Newspeak increases our awareness of the various ways which politicians can use language in order to deceive the public, which is a form of psychological manipulation. The concept of Newspeak is extremely relevant in our world today where governments and politicians often manipulate the way they speak and present information to the public. Experiencing how Newspeak is used to psychologically manipulate the people of Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can give the reader valuable insight into the manipulative behaviour of their own government. In his essay "Politics and the English Language" George Orwell said "political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."<sup>1</sup>

Nadsat has relevancy today in the "internet era" where we can clearly see new slang and colloquialisms forming from interactions on the internet. In his book "Language Made Plain" Anthony Burgess claims that "language never stands still."<sup>2</sup> The language young people use in our society today often baffles the older generations. The internet's sub-culture language has its dark side however, as Nadsat does, and it can create many social problems such as adolescent isolation, lack of respect for older generations and casual attitudes towards violent and insulting language.

To put it simply, Nadsat is used by the youth to lead themselves away from the older generation and Newspeak is used by political leaders to mislead the public. Studying how these languages reinforce the themes mentioned above is beneficial to us because we can learn from the problems that arise in these novels and apply our insight to everyday life.

Nadsat reinforces the theme of youth versus maturity in "A Clockwork Orange" and Newspeak reinforces the theme of psychological manipulation in "Nineteen Eighty- Four". This essay will explore how both languages strengthen and accentuate these themes. I will compare the impact of the themes on their own and the impact of themes paired with the fictional languages to illustrate my thesis. I aim to make conclusions about how important the roles Nadsat and Newspeak are in reinforcing the themes of youth versus maturity and psychological manipulation.

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<sup>1</sup> Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, Horizon Journal (volume 13, issue 76), Cyril Connolly, 1946

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, *A Mouthful of Air*, Hutchinson, London, 1992

Nadsat is similar to English and can be understood by the reader as they both share the same alphabet, syntax and grammar. The vocabulary is the only foreign aspect to Nadsat and involves the replacement of certain English words with the Nadsat equivalent. Nadsat is not an assortment of meaningless nonsense as it may initially seem; it is a well thought out and sophisticated language with origins in Russian, German, Gypsy and English slang. Doctors Brodsky and Branom discuss Nadsat:

"'Quaint,' said Dr. Brodsky, like smiling, 'the dialect of the tribe. Do you know anything of its provenance, Branom?' 'Odd bits of old rhyming slang,' said Dr. Branom..... 'A bit of Gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav.'"<sup>3</sup>

Although it is a fictional language only a handful of the words' origins are invented and unknown with no similarities to be found in any other language. Anglicized Russian words make up a large portion of the Nadsat vocabulary. For example, Burgess takes the Russian word "khorosho" (meaning "good") and changes it to the Anglicized word "horrowshow" (also meaning "good" in the novella)<sup>19</sup>.

There is visible tension between the young and old characters which results in violent conflict throughout the novella. Alex and his gang are constantly tormenting adults; in the first chapter alone they assault an old man carrying books home from the library, commit a robbery, beat up a shopkeeper and his wife and taunt a group of police officers. The youths know they have authority over adults and are not likely to be brought to justice. Alex reads an article about how the modern youth needs to be more civilized and he mockingly says "Civilised my syphilised yarbles."<sup>4</sup> This shows the immaturity of youth.<sup>20</sup>

Nadsat causes emotional distance to form between the two generations because Nadsat is only spoken by teenagers and adults are unable to comprehend it, thus creating a language barrier. F. Alexander conveys confusion upon hearing Nadsat and Alex explains:

"'Oh that,' I said, 'is what we call nadsat talk. All the teens use that, sir.'"<sup>6</sup>

The language barrier gives the impression that they are from separate countries when really they

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<sup>3</sup> P. 114, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, Heinemann, London, 1962

<sup>4</sup> P. 46, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

<sup>19</sup> P. 29, Cain, *Encyclopaedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Canada, 2006

<sup>20</sup> P. 29, Cain, *Encyclopaedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Canada, 2006

<sup>6</sup> P. 167, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

just have very different mindsets. This makes the teenagers appear dissociated and it isolates them from the adults in their society.<sup>22</sup> This may be exactly what the teenagers wish to achieve by speaking in Nadsat and this language barrier only worsens the tension between the two generations as communication is more difficult. The teenagers rarely make contact with adults except when absolutely necessary or when terrorizing them. They prefer to stay together as a group, communicating with one another in Nadsat.

Nadsat creates a sense of fear in the adults when they hear this foreign language with descriptive, violent words such as “ultraviolence” (meaning rape) among a sea of nonsensical gibberish. Alex makes an observation:

“You never really saw many of the older bourgeois type out after nightfall those days, what with the shortage of police and we fine young malchickiwicks about,”<sup>7</sup>

They call themselves “malchickiwicks” (boys) which is a smart play on words; “mal” is French for bad and a chick is a young chicken (in other words they refer to themselves as bad children). They do this to intimidate the adults as it makes them appear menacing. When Alex and his gang do find an older man out at night they lure him in with polite and fluent English, referring to him as their “brother” only to switch to their regular Nadsat language calling him a “naughty old veck.” The old man is unable to reply as they speak to him and to each other in this unknown language. This is a recurring situation in “A Clockwork Orange”; Alex and his gang terrorize innocent members of the older generation, catching them off guard and confusing them with their incomprehensible speech.

The teenagers’ use and invention of Nadsat represents their indifference to societal norms put in place by adults. Children are raised to speak, act and think like the adults in society in order for society to function in a consistent and orderly manner. However, the teenagers in “A Clockwork Orange” do not follow in the adults’ footsteps and instead choose to lead their own lives in a violent and isolated manner.<sup>23</sup> By using their own language among themselves that adults do not comprehend they are able to partake collectively in acts of violence against the older generation while their plotting and hatred goes unnoticed. It also allows them to live their lives without having to conform to the social norms like the adults do. Thus they are essentially free; they prowl the streets at night beating up, stealing from and raping adults without any visible consequences, then go home to their submissive parents to eat and sleep while their parents spend all day working to earn money. “To rabbit” is Nadsat for the verb “to work” and this is a metaphor for the adults. In fact, the teenagers have so little responsibility that Alex is joyful of the fact that teenagers cannot

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<sup>7</sup> P. 13, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.humanities360.com/index.php/symbols-in-a-clockwork-orange-by-anthony-burgess-19530/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.beststudentessays.org/article/2011/05/a\\_clockwork\\_orangethe\\_intersection\\_between\\_a\\_dystopia\\_and\\_human\\_nature](http://www.beststudentessays.org/article/2011/05/a_clockwork_orangethe_intersection_between_a_dystopia_and_human_nature)

be blamed for their violent and disrespectful actions if the blame is pinned on adults:

"Every day there was something about Modern Youth, but the best veshch they ever had in the old gazetta was by some starry pop in a doggy collar who said that in his considered opinion and he was govoreeting as a man of Bog IT WAS THE DEVIL THAT WAS ABROAD and was like ferreting his way into like young innocent flesh, and it was the adult world that could take the responsibility for this with their wars and bombs and nonsense. So that was all right. So he knew what he talked of, being a Godman. So we young innocent malchicks could take no blame."<sup>8</sup>

Nadsat is used as a way of disrespecting adults. Alex and his gang actively choose to speak in Nadsat even though they are perfectly capable of speaking English. This is a disrespectful gesture because he knows that adults cannot understand it. Alex refers to his parents as "pee and em" (Nadsat for father and mother) which is disrespectful and diminishes their roles as his parents. This shows how insignificant parental figures are to him, and to every teenager in the novella. The adults are helpless and have little control over their own children and the teenagers of this dystopian world. Alex describes his parents after they have come home from work as "the poor old. The pitiable starry."<sup>9</sup> The use of the Nadsat word "starry" which means old represents how Alex's parents and the rest of the adults in "A Clockwork Orange" are starry-eyed and do not notice much of the terrible behaviour of the youth. Alex shows he is able to speak English and converse politely with adults, however he only does so when he is being sarcastic or is trying to manipulate them:

"...so I said in a very refined manner of speech, a real gentleman's goloss:  
"Pardon, madam, most sorry to disturb you, but my friend and me were out for a walk, and my friend has taken bad all of a sudden with a very troublesome turn, and he is out there on the road dead out and groaning. Would you have the goodness to let me use your telephone to telephone for an ambulance?"<sup>10</sup>

Nadsat infantilizes Alex and his gang by containing many youthful and childish words such as "appy polly loggy" (apology), "eggiweg" (egg) and "moloko" (milk). This gives the reader a false sense of innocence. It also temporarily transfers the reader's sympathy from the adults to the teenagers as one becomes aware or is reminded of how young Alex actually is at fifteen years of age. Alex's use

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<sup>8</sup> P. 46, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

<sup>9</sup> P. 51, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

<sup>10</sup> P. 60, Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*

of these words may be to arouse sympathy from his parents and the adults in order to belittle his violent actions.

In "Nineteen Eighty-Four" the reader experiences Newspeak as a linguistic concept rather than a language because, unlike "A Clockwork Orange", "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is not entirely written in Newspeak. Instead, the reader is exposed to the concept of Newspeak throughout the novel. The novel itself is written in English or "Oldspeak" as it is referred to in the novel and is only spoken by the working class. Newspeak is spoken by the government who created it. Newspeak uses the same grammar as English but its vocabulary is much more refined and limited due to the removal of synonyms, antonyms and words representing concepts that threaten the regime of "the Party". The citizens of Oceania are psychologically manipulated by their own government, referred to in the novel as "the Party". The Party controls, creates and destroys all information which is then presented to the naïve public. However Winston, the protagonist, is sceptical of the information presented by the party:

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"It might very well be that literally every word in the history books, even the things that one accepted without question, was pure fantasy."<sup>11</sup>

The citizens of Oceania are constantly receiving information in the form of propaganda from the party. There is a "telescreen" in every home, which is almost like a security camera, which watches the citizens' every move. They are constantly reminded that "Big Brother is watching [them]" to discourage any behaviour that opposes the Party. Any suspicious behaviour or thoughtcrime is reported to the Party by spies. Newspeak limits free thought<sup>18</sup>, which is how the Party is able to psychologically manipulate its citizens. The Party needs to limit its citizens' free thought because it poses a threat to their regime, which relies on a submissive and naïve society. They accomplish this by eradicating concepts that allow for free thought (such as freedom, love and hatred) from the Newspeak vocabulary so that the citizens have no thoughts about anything other than the Party and the regime.<sup>24</sup> The word "thoughtcrime" is Newspeak for unspoken thoughts that doubt or question the Party. The thought police are responsible for finding and punishing citizens who commit thoughtcrime. The word itself is enough to discourage people from thinking freely as the word "crime" suggests that they are doing wrong and will be reprimanded, so it acts as a warning.

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<sup>11</sup> P. 95, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

<sup>18</sup> P. 136, Cain, *Encyclopaedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Canada, 2006

<sup>24</sup> P. 55, Veale, *The Banality of Virtue: A Multifaceted View of George Orwell as Champion of the Common Man*, University of Kansas, the United States, 2007



The word "free" still exists in Newspeak, however it cannot be used to describe the concept of "freedom" because the concept of freedom is eradicated from the vocabulary of Newspeak. This, over time, means that people will no longer be able to think about freedom as a concept because it will no longer exist as a word or definition and thus they will not be able to oppose the Party taking away their freedom. The removal and eventual neglect of concepts that threaten the regime will create a society of zombies who do not question their own government, which is exactly what the Party aims to do by creating Newspeak. Newspeak reduces the range of thought to such narrow limits that thoughtcrime will eventually be impossible because there will be no words in the Newspeak vocabulary that would enable a citizen to criticize the Party:

"Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten."<sup>12</sup>

Newspeak limits creative expression by refining the vocabulary to the extent that there is little to no choice about which words to pick when a citizen is speaking or writing. It eradicates any form of style and individuality. This is done by removing synonyms and antonyms from the vocabulary. Works by Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer and Byron are rewritten in Newspeak and therefore are entirely different. The purpose of literature is to express oneself creatively and to explore new styles of writing, however this is impossible in Newspeak and everything ends up the same because of the lack of choice in vocabulary.<sup>25</sup>

In the appendix to the novel Orwell states:

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible.

Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meaning and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and stripping such

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<sup>12</sup> P. 376, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

<sup>25</sup> [http://orwell.ru/library/novels/1984/english/en\\_app](http://orwell.ru/library/novels/1984/english/en_app)

words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meaning whatever." <sup>13</sup>

To prevent citizens from criticizing the Party, negative words are removed. So the word "bad" is changed into the word "ungood". This gets rid of any need to use synonyms which are essential to express oneself creatively and to establish individuality. In Oldspeak the word "good" has countless synonyms: splendid, magnificent, wonderful, great, fabulous. This enables people to write poetry and literature and to express their precise feelings and opinions. However, this is not possible in Newspeak because there is such a limited choice due to the refinement and reduction of the Oldspeak vocabulary. <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> P. 376, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

<sup>17</sup> P. 137, Cain, *Encyclopaedia of Fictional and Fantastic Languages*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Canada, 2006

## Conclusion

Though the themes of youth versus maturity and psychological manipulation are extremely intriguing by themselves, the use of Nadsat and Newspeak is necessary in order for the themes in "A Clockwork Orange" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four" to have a powerful impact on the reader. The themes are reinforced by the fictional languages, as I have shown in this essay. The fictional languages add depth to the themes and establish a deeper psychological connection between the characters and the reader thus making the texts more memorable and profound. As the reader becomes familiar with the fictional languages and how they work they are not easily forgotten and remain with the reader long after the book is finished. Thus, the themes also remain with the reader for a long time.

The themes are not just vague concepts that hide in the plot or are discovered in a motif; the themes are within the words themselves, the themes *are* the words. Just one word in either Nadsat or Newspeak is enough to reinforce and emphasize the theme. For example the word "ultraviolence" sums up the theme of youth versus maturity in "A Clockwork Orange" and the word "thoughtcrime" sums up the theme of psychological manipulation in "Nineteen Eighty-Four".

Nadsat is essential in order to illustrate the emotional distance between the younger and older generation and accentuate the extent to which the adolescents isolate themselves from the rest of society. Newspeak is equally important in order to illustrate the extent to which the government of Oceania limits free thought and suppresses creative expression. Without Nadsat, "A Clockwork Orange" could be seen as an excuse to merge seemingly meaningless violence with uncontrolled sexual desire and without Newspeak, "Nineteen Eighty-Four" could be viewed merely as a historical account of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. The themes in the novel and novella alone are not enough to bring these works above the level of popular fiction. Yet with the dimensions of Nadsat and Newspeak, the themes are strong and clear enough to have emotional impact on the reader and even change their political and social perspectives.

"A Clockwork Orange" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four" have had huge impacts in modern English literature, linguistics and politics and have captured the two different societies that can be seen when the government either has too much power, as in Orwell's world, or too little, as in Burgess'. The use of the fictional languages also establishes a ground-breaking and well-known style for both authors, Burgess and Orwell, and has established their rightful place in the literary canon. Both Burgess and Orwell have taken pieces of literature with controversial themes and turned them into linguistic masterpieces with creative innovation.

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