

TRANSLATION OF SLANG IN CROATIAN AND RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF ANTHONY BURGESS' A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

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Abstract

For A Clockwork Orange, Anthony Burgess invented Nadsat, a youth slang based on the Russian language, challenging both his readers and translators. For the readers of the English text, the challenge is to comprehend the invented slang words, in particular if they do not speak Russian. For this, they may rely on the context in which the slang words appear. For the translators, the challenge is to create a suitable equivalent to Nadsat that will function in the target linguistic and cultural environment. Translation into Russian, the language on which Nadsat is based, creates a particularly interesting problem.

The aim of the paper is to test the importance of context and of the target readers' language when it comes to comprehension of the novel's slang in translation. Since Nadsat is based on Russian, comprehension by Russian readers is compared to that of speakers of another Slavic language, Croatian. Two translations of A Clockwork Orange into Russian and one into Croatian are used in the study. In an online survey, Russian and Croatian respondents are asked to identify the meaning of translated Nadsat words, first in isolation and then in context. As expected, comprehension is better in context than in isolation for all three translations, with Croatian respondents in particular showing poor comprehension results in isolation. However, interestingly, there is no statistically significant difference among the Croatian and Russian respondents when it comes to the comprehension of these words in context.