# Attitude and Intervention:
## *A Clockwork Orange* and *Arancia meccanica*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Italian translation of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, focusing in particular on the language of narration, 'Nadsat'. This invented argot, based on English but including a good deal of Russian vocabulary, contributes to the novel's grotesque humour and to the narrator's manipulation of the readers. In Floriana Bossi's Italian translation, the Russian influence on Nadsat is almost completely missing; she draws instead on Italian and dialectal vocabulary. This results in a considerable change to what in the source text is a very foreign-sounding argot. I investigate the effect that Bossi's approach has on the humour of the narration and on the audience's potential involvement with the main character. Notions of violent language and the violence of translation are discussed, as is the extent to which Bossi's approach is shaped by linguistic incompatibility, target-culture poetics, and ideologies about the role of the translator.

KEYWORDS: literary translation, humour, domestication/foreignization, translation of dialect, translation and violence, Anthony Burgess.

Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, is a text of considerable linguistic creativity that demands a rather special kind of linguistic intervention on the part of the translator. The text uses the new – in both sounds and meanings – to shock and manipulate, and to express criticism of society and a warning about the future. It is written in 'Nadsat', a partially invented language that the reader must work hard to decode. My analysis focuses on the role of Nadsat in shaping the reader's attitude towards the violent protagonist and in creating humour on various levels, and compares, in these respects, the source text and Floriana Bossi's Italian translation. After outlining the novel's plot and narrative style, I give a general description of Bossi's translation strategies, focusing in particular on the way she renders the text's unusual vocabulary and its mix of archaic, formal and informal discourse styles. I use the concepts of 'violent' language and the 'violence' of translation to illuminate the analysis, and I consider the extent to which Bossi's approach might have been shaped by questions of linguistic incompatibility, target-culture poetics and the role of the translator.

## The novel and its language

Set in the not-too-distant future, *A Clockwork Orange* is narrated by the fifteen-year-old Alex, leader of a gang of four youths. They spend their evenings drinking milk spiked with drugs and perpetrating violent crimes, including muggings, hold-ups, burglaries and rape. In his spare time, Alex listens ecstatically to classical music, especially Beethoven. He is arrested and sent to prison when his fellow gang members betray him by tipping off the police during a robbery. After he kills one of his cellmates, Alex is subjected to 'Reclamation Treatment' involving 'Ludovico's Technique', a radical new conditioning procedure designed to make him physically ill at the very thought of any kind of violence and thus to prevent him from ever committing a violent act again. This new method of crime prevention and punishment, involving a combination of graphically violent films and nausea-inducing drugs, is part of the government's effort to free up cells for political prisoners. When he is 'cured' and released from prison, Alex's overpowering aversion to violence is such that he is completely unable to

defend himself and is even attacked by some of his former victims. Members of a political party opposed to the Government appear to befriend Alex, but then betray him to score political points, and he eventually attempts suicide. As a result of opposition to Reclamation Treatment and its denial of free will, the Government reverses the procedure and Alex is able to return to his life of 'ultra-violence' unhampered by any physical ill effects. In the book's final chapter, which until 1987 was omitted from US editions, Alex begins to mature and to feel the need to leave behind his violent ways and settle down to have a family. His violent period is thus seen as a natural phase in his life cycle, and he realizes that he, too, may one day have a son who goes through a similar teenage phase.

Nadsat, the fictional speech variety Alex uses to tell his story, is central to the novel. It is an argot spoken by youths of Alex's age; adults use a more standard variety of English, while younger, pre-teen children have their own argot. It is built upon English foundations, but includes some two hundred made-up words, most of which come from Russian; *-nadsat* is the Russian equivalent of the English *-teen*, as in *thirteen*, *fourteen*, etc. Although Burgess' main reasons for drawing his Nadsat vocabulary from Russian were that language's unfamiliarity to English speakers and its appealing sounds, he was not unaware of the "fine irony in the notion of a teenage race untouched by politics, using totalitarian brutality as an end in itself, equipped with a dialect which drew on the two chief political languages of the age" (Burgess 1991:38). In addition to its unique lexicon, Nadsat is characterized by unusual sentence structures, grammatical and lexical archaisms, a jarring mix of formal and informal elements, and the extensive use of *like* as a discourse particle. Within the context of the novel, this unusual argot mirrors the alternative world in which Alex lives – the novel's language, like its setting, is somewhat familiar to the reader, but at the same time frequently strange and shocking. In this way, the very language of the novel reflects central elements of its plot.

Nadsat plays an essential part in character development: it is introduced at the very beginning of the text and features throughout Alex's narration. The following example is from the opening pages:

> Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop and go smecking off with the till's guts. But, as they say, money isn't everything. (Burgess 2000:3)

While the sentences are basically in English, the meanings of a number of unfamiliar words have to be guessed if one is to understand the passage fully. Nadsat's Russian 'loanwords' are never italicized, nor are they transliterated exactly; they take on English morphology and are re-spelled, making them easier for English readers to remember and pronounce. Burgess' creative re-spelling of the Russian words often results in a kind of over-coding, as the spelling of an unfamiliar word creates associations with existing English words. These associations will not necessarily give any clue to the new word's meaning but they do enrich the reading experience and the process of decoding Nadsat, and sometimes the double meanings are quite significant, as I discuss in more detail below.

## Nadsat Italian-style
*A Clockwork Orange* brings with it some notable translation problems, as linguistic creativity and transgressive styles are always difficult to recreate in translation. Burgess was well aware

of the challenges posed to the translator by his style of writing, and included himself among what he called "Class 2 writers, who are given to poetic effects, word play and linguistic ambiguity [and whose] translator must be himself a committed writer" (Burgess 1991:12). Floriana Bossi's Italian translation of the novel was first published in 1969 as *Un'arancia a orologeria* (a literal translation of 'a clockwork orange'), though in later editions this was changed to *Arancia meccanica* (literally, 'mechanical orange'), the title by which Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film adaptation was known in Italy. The translation's most striking feature is the omission of almost all Russian influences from Alex's narration; instead his lexicon is predominantly made up of variations of Italian regional or dialectal words. In addition, Alex's sentence structure and discourse style are often normalized.

Although Burgess took an active interest in the translation of his work, he was not consulted about the Italian translation of *A Clockwork Orange* and, in fact, only learned of its existence upon seeing it in a bookshop. In his autobiography, he writes that this "was my first but far from last experience of meeting a book of mine in public whose appearance had not been announced to me in private" (1991:175), which suggests that publishers and perhaps, in some cases, translators themselves, may not always see consultation with the author as particularly important in the translation process. Burgess considered Bossi's reliance on Italian dialectal vocabulary for the translation of Nadsat "ill-advised" (1991:175); he does not say why but the nature of his contribution to the Spanish translation, which I discuss very briefly below, would seem to indicate that he would have preferred an Italian translation that preserved Nadsat's Russian sounds and influences.

My analysis begins with a close comparison of source and target texts at the lexical level. Following the methodology suggested by Gideon Toury (1995:87-9), I have selected units of translation and examined 'replacing' and 'replaced' segments. These 'coupled pairs' are listed in two tables. The segments were selected on the basis of the source text's use of non-standard vocabulary, which generally also corresponds to non-standard vocabulary (though of a different kind) in the translated text. This method helps in establishing the main strategies Bossi applies in dealing with these kinds of lexical items.

In Bossi's version of Nadsat, only four words share the Russian origins of their source text counterparts. Indeed, the word *Nadsat* does not appear in the translation, in which Alex's argot is called "il gergame moschetto" (Burgess 1996a:128); *gergame* is derived from *gergo*, meaning 'slang' or 'argot', and *moschetto* is used in the translation as the word for 'teenager', although in standard Italian, *Moschetto* means 'musket', and is perhaps a reference to the boys' violent tendencies; there may also be an association with *Mosca* ('Moscow'). Instances of the retention of Russian appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Translations that retain Russian origins

| **Nadsat word** | **Russian word** | **Meaning** | **Bossi's translation** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *deng* | деньги (den'gi) | money | *denghi* |
| *malchick* | малчик (malchik) | young man, guy | *malcico* |
| *baboochka* | бабушка (babushka) | old woman | *babusca* |
| *sabog* | сапог (sapog) | shoe | *saboga* |

Bossi's translation choices in Table 1 are all meaningless in Italian, just like their source text counterparts are in English. The only exception is *malcico* – although it, too, is an invented word, many Italian readers would link it with *male* (meaning 'bad') (an association

Anglophone readers might also make with *malchick*), and possibly *chico*, the Spanish for 'teenage boy/young man'. The examples in Table 1 show that it is possible to insert Russian-derived words into Italian in much the same way Burgess did for English, performing only some basic Italian-specific changes such as ending nouns with a vowel marking number and gender, e.g. the plural form of *malcico* is *malcichi*.

However, most of the time, Bossi avoids this strategy, opting instead to use Italian vocabulary, be it regional, dialectal, literary or specialized. Sometimes she uses existing words to evoke closely related meanings, and at other times she gives words entirely new meanings; there is no clearly apparent logic behind her decisions in this regard. Only very occasionally does she use completely invented forms, and when she does, these are based closely on Italian morphological and phonological rules. Table 2 provides some examples of Russian-derived Nadsat words that have been replaced in the target text either by Italian words or by made-up words very similar to Italian words. The table also summarizes the relevant meanings or associations attached to Bossi's choices.

Table 2: Translations that draw on Italian vocabulary

| Nadsat word | Meaning | Bossi's translation | Meaning / associations |
|---|---|---|---|
| *slovo* | word | *mottata* | *motto* – phrase, word |
| *britva* | razor | *lisca* | knife (tuscan), fish bone; *liscio* – smooth |
| *devotchka* | young woman, girl, 'chick' | *mammola* | virgin, girl (lit. ital.); *mamma* – mum(my); *mammella* – breast |
| *yahzick* | tongue | *slappa* | *slappare* – to lap (e.g. of a dog) |
| *gromky* | loud | *altisuono* | *alto* – loud, high; *suono* – sound; *altisonante* – resounding, sonorous |
| *on one's oddy knocky* | on one's own, alone | *solicello* | diminutive of *solo* – alone |
| *krovvy* | blood | *salsa* | sauce |
| *lomtick* | slice, piece | *trincia* | *trinciare* – to cut up |
| *malenky bit* | a little | *piccolopoco* | *piccolo* – small; *poco* – a little |
| *bolshy* | big | *tamagno* | big |
| *gloopy* | stupid | *stronzo* | shit, piece of shit (as an epithet) |
| *oomny* | clever, smart | *falco* | hawk; *occhi falchi* – sharp eyes |
| *bezoomny* | crazy, mad | *scardinato* | unhinged (of a door) |
| *platties* | clothes | *palandre* | *palandrana* – overcoat, or other very long article of clothing |
| *nagoy* | naked | *spalandrato* | formed from the negative prefix *s-* and an invented past participle form based on *palandre* (above) |

As indicated in the last column of the table, some of these lexical choices are existing words while others are closely based on existing words. Most importantly, the meaning the words are given in *Arancia meccanica* is either immediately evident to Italian readers or can be easily deduced thanks to a clear metaphorical or semantic link. In contrast, most of the 'English' Nadsat words in Table 2 sound strange or funny to the average English speaker, and their meanings cannot easily be guessed out of context. To take just two examples, *salsa* for 'blood' is more recognizable than *krovvy*, and *scardinato* (literally 'unhinged', with a

metaphorical extension of the meaning to 'broken up' or 'dismantled') makes sense as a word for 'crazy'.

In other instances, Bossi gives existing Italian words completely new meanings. Some examples include *truglio* (an archaic Neapolitan legal procedure) for 'mouth', *snicchiare* (a rare word, meaning 'to take something from its place or context') for 'listen', *sgroppare* ('to buck', or 'to wear someone out') to mean 'to work', and *festare* ('to celebrate') to mean 'to hit' or 'punch'. The original Nadsat words are *rot*, *slooshy*, *rabbit* and *tolchock* respectively. Although the dictionary meanings of these four Italian words are not related to the meanings they are given in the context of the novel, they are nevertheless, like the words in Table 2, likely to sound familiar to the Italian reader, and are therefore easier to recognize and remember than words like *slooshy* or *tolchock* are for the Anglophone reader.

Because some of the words Bossi utilizes to translate Nadsat vocabulary are somewhat uncommon or little-known in Italy, they do require a degree of interpretative commitment from the reader. Nevertheless, hers is overall a less challenging and less alienating text for the average Italian reader than is the case with the source text. The fact that Bossi also normalizes much of the syntax, as I discuss in a later section, also makes comprehension easier for her readers. Bossi's translation strategies have a number of important consequences, two of which are explored in detail below. One relates to the reader's attitude as they journey through the book, gradually learning its language, and the second relates to the humour of the novel that comes from the unfamiliar and often comical sounds and structures of Nadsat.

## Nadsat and the reader's attitude

Through his use of unfamiliar, often jarring elements inspired by Russian, Burgess challenges and resists the reader's expectations about writing and about language. The reader's struggle with Nadsat was part of Burgess' vision and he was always adamant that his novel should not include a glossary, though until recently, US editions generally did include one, much to his dismay.[1] Nevertheless, together with his editor at Heinemann, he devoted considerable attention to ensuring that the novel remained comprehensible (Biswell 2004). He was careful to gloss or contextualize new words in such a way as to enable the attentive reader to decipher them and learn their meanings, gradually becoming a 'fluent' reader of this hitherto unfamiliar argot.

Throughout the novel, Alex uses the phrase 'O my brothers' to address his readers; the sense of intimacy between narrator and readers is further enhanced by the fact that he speaks to them in the argot he uses with his peers. Nadsat is Alex's main way of expressing his identity and his attitude to the world, and it remains with him even when his free will is taken away through Reclamation Treatment. To begin with, readers are likely to find the language alienating and strange; however, as they are slowly initiated into it, they may come to appreciate that it also creates an atmosphere of intimacy and (sub)cultural belonging. As is the case with any non-standard language variety, it excludes the out-group and reinforces group identity for members of the in-group (Marrone 2005:39). An important aspect of the book's effect is that, as they are coaxed into understanding this new language, readers may start to develop some sympathy for Alex – one begins to see situations from his point of view, and one comes to appreciate his black humour, lively intelligence and quirky and colourful turns of phrase, perhaps even becoming complicit, through this enjoyment, in the violence Alex recounts (Booker 1994:98; Sisk 1997:60). Alex remains a reprehensible individual, but as

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[1] The Italian translation includes no glossary.

Kevin Windle (1995:174) points out, his creative use of language sets him apart from the 'common thug' and makes him charming enough for readers to be willing to hear his tale, violent and self-indulgent though it is. This was precisely the effect Burgess was aiming for – he wanted the reader to undergo a kind of 'brainwashing' through language, recalling the conditioning to which Alex himself is subjected (Burgess 1991:38).

The vast majority of the two hundred or so Nadsat words in Burgess' source text (including all those listed in Table 2) are completely strange and unfamiliar to the average English speaker. Like the average English reader, the average Italian reader could be expected to have little or no familiarity with Russian, so the use of Russian-inspired words in an Italian translation could have been quite effective in replicating the alienating effect described above, and thereby bringing about Burgess' 'brainwashing', that crucial change in the reader's attitude as the book progresses.[2] However, Bossi's lexical choices not only *sound* like plausible Italian words, most of them actually *are* (or resemble) Italian or dialectal words, whose real meanings are closely related to the meanings given them in the novel. Through its overall preference for Italian words over invented words constructed on Russian foundations, Bossi's translation results in a considerable disruption of the transition from a feeling of alienation to some degree of empathetic identification with Alex and his world. From the very beginning, the target text is less alienating, so the potential change in the reader's attitude as the book goes on is less dramatic. As a result, the reader's collusion with Alex and his violence is less absorbing and ultimately less compromising.

## Humour in sounds and meanings

Another important effect of Nadsat on the reader is its humorous effect. Although the novel's content is in many ways very grim, there are also moments of grotesque black humour, and there are a number of ways in which Nadsat contributes to this effect. The changes to Nadsat in the target text significantly alter this humorous aspect of the text.

Firstly, there are certain humorous characteristics of the language itself, especially its lexicon. Many Nadsat words simply sound funny (both humorous and peculiar) to an English speaker's ear, for example, *poogly* (meaning 'scared'), *gloopy* ('stupid'), *tolchock* ('to hit') and *on my oddy knocky* ('on my own'). These words are all derived from standard Russian, but the way Burgess spells them makes them look, and sound, amusing in English. Other words sound comical because of their unexpected, non-English phonetic sequences: *veshch* ('thing'), *prestoopnick* ('criminal'), *ptitsa* ('woman'), and *slovo* ('word'), for example. However, as was shown in Table 2, very few of the words in Bossi's argot violate the phonological structure of Italian, so that even when she uses made-up words, they *sound* as though they could be real Italian words. None of her choices elicits a smile because it sounds silly or strange, and the fact that her argot's sounds and meanings are relatively familiar means there are few instances of onomatopoeia or evocative sound symbolism such as are found in the source text.

Burgess' orthographical choices also produce humorous double associations (see Aggeler 1979:171; Gregori 2004:10-11; Petix 1976:43). For example, the word for 'people' is spelt *lewdies*, conveying a sense of some kind of coarse, illicit and unrestrained behaviour, while the word for 'mouth' is *rot*, which immediately creates associations with rottenness, including rotten food, and uncouth or meaningless language ('talking rot'), as well as – for some readers

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[2] It should be noted that the translation of the novel into a Slavic language, and particularly Russian, poses an extra challenge (cf. Wierzbińska 2004; Windle 1995).

– the German *rot* ('red'). To *rabbit* means 'to work', "like timid animals who run in circles and live in hutches" (Stinson 1991:53), giving an image of citizens as countless identical creatures mechanically focused on a single, repetitive task; this is essentially Alex's teenage view of adult working life. In all these cases, puns revolve around the double meanings created by the similar sound of two different words, one English and one Russian. Throughout the novel, Nadsat engages in an ironic, teasing dialogue with standard English.

The translator's dilemma here is comparable to that of the translator of puns, who often has to choose between preserving the sound of a made-up word and preserving its associations. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this choice is the word *horrorshow*, the Nadsat word for 'good', which comes from the Russian word for 'good': *хорошо* (*khorosho*). Though it changes the pronunciation of the word only slightly, Burgess' new spelling adds some very important associations. By most people's standards, Alex's idea of what is good ('horrorshow') is horrific and violent; moreover, his perception of violence is very visual. His acts of violence (as described by Alex himself) come across as tour-de-force performances, so what gives him great pleasure is indeed a 'show of horrors' for the (non-psychopath) reader. Furthermore, when the State conditions Alex to make him 'good' ('horrorshow'), it is by showing him horrifically violent films (Burgess 1996b:187). Bossi chooses to prioritize meaning over the word's Russian origins, creating an effective and memorable word based around similar meanings to *horror* and *show* – *cinebrivido* (*cine* from *cinema*, and *brivido* meaning 'shiver' or 'thrill').[3] In contrast, in the Italian translation of Kubrick's film version of *A Clockwork Orange*, the word *karasciò* is used to translate *horrorshow* (Gregori 2004:65). While it retains the Russian origin and has a slightly strange sound to the Italian ear, it is perhaps not as meaningful and dramatic as *cinebrivido* and *horrorshow*. This is one case in which Bossi's choice of a non-Russian equivalent has allowed her to retain much of the semantic power present in the source text.

In her case study of translations of the *Harry Potter* books, Carmen Valero Garcés (2003) favours an approach to the translation of invented words that preserves semantic associations rather than sounds in translating invented words and names.[4] However, in translating *A Clockwork Orange*, a text in which both sound and meaning are extremely important to what Guido Mariani (1994) calls the "intenzionalità testuale" ('textual intentionality'), the sounds of Nadsat need *also* to be retained where possible. As I have shown, Bossi's translation choices only very rarely retain the foreign sounds of Nadsat; furthermore, as the discussion below illustrates, apart from very few exceptions (e.g. *cinebrivido*), important semantic associations and double meanings are also often absent from Bossi's translation.

It is possible, however, to suggest some alternative translations for Nadsat vocabulary. In those instances where Nadsat words have disjunctive double meanings, the translator might choose, as Bossi did with *horrorshow/cinebrivido*, to use an evocative Italian word rather than a word of Russian origin. For example, *rabbit*, meaning 'to work' could be translated as *conigliare*, an invented verb formed from the Italian word for *rabbit* (instead of Bossi's choice of *sgroppare*, a standard Italian word meaning 'to buck'). Elsewhere, the translator might seek to exploit the alienating sounds of Russian in order to recreate other aspects of the novel such as Burgess' 'brainwashing' and the comedy of the language. So, returning to some of the words in Table 2, the strange-sounding *lomtick* ('slice') could become *lomticco* rather

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[3] This word appears to have made its mark in Italian youth culture, as it is used frequently by the protagonist – another Alex – of Enrico Brizzi's novel *Jack Frusciante è uscito dal gruppo* (1995).
[4] See also Fritz Senn (1998:188-89) for a brief discussion of the question of whether sound should be given priority over sense in the translation of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

than the more obvious and familiar *trincia* (from 'cut up'); *gromky* ('loud') could become *gromchio* or *gromkio* instead of *altisuono* ('loud-sound'); and *britva* ('knife') could be retained over *lisca* ('knife', 'fishbone'), thus replicating in the Italian some of the surprising, non-native consonant clusters that occur in the source text. In some instances, the translator could exploit humorous double meanings in Italian versions of words in the Nadsat vocabulary, even if those particular words are not humorous in the source text, so that compensation would at least occur at the overall textual level when it was not possible at the individual word level. André Lefevere's (1992:52) rule of thumb is a useful one – that for every pun that is lost in translation, the translator should try to insert one somewhere else – yet Bossi almost never opts for compensation as a way of retaining Nadsat's humorous qualities in her translation, one exception being the word *malcico* ('young man', 'guy') discussed above.[5]

Because it would be impossible for a translator always to recreate all the many phonological, semantic and literary effects of Burgess' invented argot, a mixed strategy is required, one that tries wherever possible to retain the language's strangeness while also preserving meanings, including double meanings. The examples I have cited above suggest that Bossi's main priority in selecting her vocabulary lay in using words to mean something they do not normally mean; the choice of *which* words would be used appears only very rarely to have been shaped by those selected by Burgess. For this reason, there are very few instances of meaningful associations being conveyed, or of jarring, unfamiliar sounds being retained. Yet the process of giving words new meanings is only the first step in the creation of Burgess' Nadsat, in which both sound effects and complex semantics add meaning and power, changing the language from mere experimentation and play to something both more complex and more sinister.

## The grotesque as 'disjunctive poetics'

Philip Thomson (1972) characterizes the grotesque as that which provokes contradictory feelings of amusement or pleasure on the one hand, and of disgust, horror or pity on the other, a description that closely fits the effect of much of *A Clockwork Orange*'s language and content. Gareth Farmer (2003) uses the term 'disjunctive poetics' to refer to the disjunction between the words Alex uses and the behaviour he describes, as well as the disjunction between the different, and seemingly incompatible, grammatical structures he uses. The first of these, the contrast between the sounds and the content, is a source of considerable irony and dark humour, mirrored in Alex's peculiar sense of decorum and his belief that violence (true, horrorshow violence) should be beautiful and artistic. He becomes annoyed when the members of his gang behave not violently but in an uncouth manner, and the reader is likely to feel a sick shiver at the contrast between the exaggerated descriptions of violence and Alex's sense of propriety and style. During a vicious attack on a couple in their home, for example, Alex is repulsed by his fellow gang members, Georgie and Pete, as they emerge, eating, from the kitchen,

> Georgie with like a cold leg of something in one rooker and half a loaf of kleb
> with a big dollop of maslo on it in the other, and Pete with a bottle of beer frothing
> its gulliver off and a horrorshow rookerful of like plum cake. (Burgess 2000:19)

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[5] An example of compensation occurring in the Spanish translation (Burgess 2006) is the case of the drug-laced *moloko* ('milk') that Alex and his gang drink before their crazed evening rampages, which becomes *moloco* in translation, bringing in fortuitous associations with *loco* ('crazy') and thus demonstrating the exciting potential of translation to produce new meanings.

In the Italian version, the sounds are not quite as coarse and crude, and as a result the contrast described above is less apparent:

> Georgie con una coscia fredda di qualcosa in una granfia e mezza pagnotta di brombo con un cogolo di oil nell'altra, e Pete con una bottiglia di birra schiumante e una granfiata cinebrivido di una roba tipo plumcake. (Burgess 1996a: 32)

> Georgie with a cold leg of something in one talon and half a loaf of *brombo* [dialectal, can mean 'soaking wet'] with a pebble of *oil* [English word used] in the other, and Pete with a bottle of frothing beer and a *cinebrivido* talonful of plumcake type stuff. (my backtranslation)

In addition to its striking vocabulary, Nadsat's 'disjunctive poetics' is also evident in its unusual syntax, particularly its archaic grammatical forms, and this too, produces grotesque humour. As mentioned above, the Russian sounds and meanings of Nadsat are complemented by the occasional mix of formal, informal and archaic registers. This grotesque juxtaposition of linguistic varieties mirrors Alex's own paradoxical nature, which combines a passion for extreme gang violence and drug-laced milk with a love of style and beauty, particularly in music. Farmer (2003:58) points out that this combination of "incongruous idioms" is quite disturbing because of the way it is used "to focalise violence" in the novel. Readers may be simultaneously entertained and unsettled by the grotesque contrasts in Alex's way of speaking, which force them to reconcile their pity or disgust with their comic enjoyment. For example, Alex's language is peppered with words like *thou*, *dost*, *hast*, *nothing loath* and *betokeneth*, yet at the same time, many of his constructions are downright ungrammatical or highly colloquial and include frequent recourse to the very contemporary-sounding filler *like*. Turns of phrase such as "What giveth then, brother?" (2000:74) are amusing because they mix apparently incompatible registers – the street-talk tone of 'What gives?' with well and truly outdated third person singular morphology.

Only a very small number of Bossi's lexical choices for her 'gergame moschetto' are archaic or highly literary (e.g. *truglio*, a term that referred to a particular procedure in the Neapolitan legal code or *mammola*, a literary word for 'girl'), and she avoids any unusual, archaic or highly formal syntax. Disjunctive mixes of register are rare in her translation; many of the most striking source-text examples are rendered into completely idiomatic Italian. "What giveth then, brother?" (2000:74), for example, becomes simply "Che capita, fratello?" (1996a:116) ('What's happening, brother?', my back translation), and the preposterous "What, then, didst thou in thy mind have?" (2000:42) is translated as "Allora, cos'è che volevi fare?" (1996a:69) ('So what was it you wanted to do?', my back translation). Alex's fighting words to his rebellious underling - "now, Dim, let's thou and me have all this now, shall us?" (2000:41) - become "ecco, Bamba, ora son tutto tuo, ti va?" (1996a:67) (roughly, 'okay, Bamba [nickname, meaning 'stupid' or 'dim'], I'm all yours now, alright?' my back translation).

The grotesque menace of Nadsat's grammatical structures is most evident when Alex addresses an elderly woman whose house he has just broken into. He has previously tried to induce her to open the door to him with a story about needing to call a doctor for a sick friend, and when she refuses to let him in, he climbs through a window.

> Hi hi hi. At last we meet. Our brief govoreet through the letter-hole was not, shall we say, satisfactory, yes? Let us admit not, oh verily not, you stinking starry old sharp. (Burgess 2000: 46)

> Salve salve salve. Finalmente ci conosciamo. La nostra sprolatina attraverso la buca delle lettere non è stata, diciamo, molto soddisfacente, vero? Ammettiamolo, vecchia puzzona, ammettiamolo. (Burgess 1996a: 75)

> Hello hello hello. We finally meet. Our *sprolatina* [invented word, diminutive, recalling *sproloquio*, a long rambling talk] through the letter-box was not, shall we say, very satisfactory, was it? Let's admit it, you old stinker, let's admit it.(my back translation)

In the source text, Alex's words are menacing and sinister, but also rather funny because some are casual or invented ('hi', 'govoreet', 'letter-hole') while others are archaic or unusually formal ('shall we say', 'let us admit not', the Biblical 'verily') and not at all what we might expect from a young thug. The Italian rendition, by contrast, is rather bland because its syntax and vocabulary are, for the most part, fairly standard. The almost sadistically sarcastic 'oh verily not' is omitted, and the colloquial 'hi' is replaced by the semi-formal *salve*. In Alex's ensuing attack on the old woman, who later dies, the expressive effects of Nadsat become yet more evident in proportion to the escalation of violence (2000:47-48; 1996a:76-77). The drama and violence of the scene is reduced somewhat in translation, however, because the Italian Nadsat contains less grotesque vocabulary, as well as fewer contrastive styles, reducing the reader's discomfort at trying to reconcile the comedy of the language and the murder it describes.

## Violence and transgression

It has been argued that there are significant parallels between the violence Alex perpetrates in his daily life and the intervention *A Clockwork Orange* perpetrates upon the English language (Farmer 2003; Tilton 1977:26). Farmer observes that much of the novel's vocabulary sounds violent, particularly that referring to weapons, and "the reader's experience of the violence 'depicted' in the novel is actually enhanced and made more affective [*sic*] by the dialect and linguistic techniques employed which characterise the dystopic world of the text" (2003:54). New words are thrown into the mix, familiar words are given strange, often sinister, meanings, and an unsettling combination of structures and registers disrupts all our expectations. With its strange sounds and its (metaphorical) destruction of the English language, Nadsat comes from what Jean-Jacques Lecercle (1990:6) calls the "dark side" of language.

When it comes to analyzing the effect(s) of the novel's language and of Bossi's translation, Lawrence Venuti's (1995) notions of foreignization and domestication can be useful starting points. As numerous lexical examples have shown, Burgess' source text draws deliberately on foreign elements in order to create an effect of strangeness or unfamiliarity for the reader. Admittedly, this is quite different from Venuti's concept of foreignization – an approach to translation that may, among other techniques, retain features of the source language and culture in order to signal the text's cultural otherness – yet some similarities are evident in the fact that Burgess' novel uses the foreign as a way of challenging readers from another culture (i.e. a non-Nadsat culture) to become accustomed to a very unusual language and discourse style.

Although she uses non-standard vocabulary throughout her translation, Bossi's overwhelming preference is to avoid *non-Italian* vocabulary. Riccardo Aragno, who translated the (greatly reduced) Nadsat dialogue in Kubrick's film version of the novel, stressed the importance of both a playful and an "international" approach to translating Nadsat, identifying a danger in a "provincial" or "national" outlook (Greco 1998:10). One cannot say whether he intended this as a reference to Bossi's translation of the novel, but there is, arguably, a certain parochial quality to her version of Nadsat and to her refusal to allow the Russian language's aggressive appropriation of Italian into her translated text. The removal of so many foreign elements means Alex's world is familiarized (cf. 'domesticated') and the experience of the Italian reader is, in the end, somewhat less culturally and linguistically challenging than that of the source text reader. Ultimately, this reduces the 'violent' effect Farmer attributes to Alex's argot, which depends on the presence of foreign linguistic elements that 'attack' – metaphorically speaking – the standard language and, by extension, the system of values that Alex so violently rejects.

In a 1990 article in the newspaper *Corriere della sera*, Bossi touches briefly upon her reason for translating Alex's argot as she did. She argues that when translated into Italian - "our language" - neither the meaning nor the sound of Russian-based Nadsat terms were acceptable ("tradotti nella nostra lingua quei termini non avevano più né un senso né un suono accettabili") (Bossi 1990:3). Yet as I have shown, this very element of 'unacceptability' is part of Nadsat's *raison d'etre* as a violent generation's reaction to the powers-that-be; it functions within the novel as an expression of an imagined but certainly not unimaginable dystopic future.[6]

The metaphor of 'violence' can be quite helpful in understanding Bossi's apparent reaction to the text. A number of scholars of translation theory have used the concept of violence as a metaphor either for what translation does to the source text, language and culture, or for what it does to the target language. Venuti famously writes of the "ethnocentric violence of translation" (1995:20), which he describes as that perpetrated on the source text when it is appropriated for the target culture. According to Adriana Pagano, Julio Cortázar, too, saw translation as "a site of violence and tension" (Pagano 2002:96). However, this need not be the only way of viewing the act of translation and, in fact, a rather different metaphorical use of the concept of violence is discussed by Antoine Berman in *The Experience of the Foreign* (1992:18). He cites Rudolf Pannwitz, who wrote approvingly of translations into German that bore traces of the source language. He considered this kind of translation as submitting the German *language* to the violence of translation (through the transformations it wrought on the language), but viewed this process positively – the translator should be willing to "submit [the target language] to the violent motion of the foreign language" (quoted in Berman 1992:18) because this enables the language to develop and transform itself. Like these different metaphors of translation as violence, the metaphorical 'violence' of Nadsat, too, can be viewed as both destructive and creative, as in Cooper-Novack's analysis, which points out how, through the 'destruction' of the lexicon and grammatical rules of both Russian and English "an entirely new way of speaking has been created" (2001). Bossi, however, seems to be unwilling to apply this kind of destructive creativity to her own native tongue. Instead, in her translation she opts for a language that is less intrusive and less aggressive, a choice that, paradoxically, could itself be construed as an aggressive act, since by holding back the

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[6] Burgess (1991:26) has noted that the violent world of *A Clockwork Orange* was, in part, inspired by the phenomenon of fashion-conscious teenage gangs in Britain in the late 1950s.

creation of a new Russian-based argot, the translation undermines the power and impact of the text on its readers.

Lefevere (1992) identifies four levels of translation – language, universe of discourse, poetics and ideology – that he considers central to the decision as to whether, and how, a text will be translated. In the 1990 newspaper article referred to above, Bossi attributes her translation strategies to the first of these considerations, namely, linguistic concerns about acceptability. However, I would argue that, while it is no doubt the case that a translator would need to make a number of complex modifications to Nadsat in order to reconstruct it upon Italian foundations, it would certainly be possible with some morphological adaptation, as examples like *malcico* and *denghi* show (see Table 1). Aníbal Leal's translation of *A Clockwork Orange* into Spanish (first published in 1976) may be instructive in this regard, given the similarity between the two Romance languages. For reasons of space a detailed analysis is not possible here; however, an examination of the Nadsat vocabulary in Leal's translation shows a much higher proportion of foreign (i.e. Russian) words and sounds than appear in Bossi's translation. His translation includes hispanicized Nadsat words such as *tolchocos*, *malenco/a*, *starria ptitsa, crichantes y dratsantes* ('dratsing creeching'), *videar* ('to viddy'), *sluchaba* ('to sloochat', imperfect tense), and the reflexive verb *spugarse* ('to get spoogy') (Burgess 2006:65). Unlike in the Italian case, Burgess was consulted during the translation process; indeed, a note to the Spanish-Nadsat glossary included at the end of the book states that he himself proposed most of the possible equivalents and some phonetic variations (2006:195). The Spanish equivalents largely follow target-language morphological rules, yet at the same time a number of them (e.g. *spugarse*, *starria*, *dratsante*, *sluchar*) include consonant clusters that do not generally occur in Spanish but are reminiscent of Russian, and would be likely to challenge readers in much the same way as Burgess' 'English' Nadsat does.

Given that a similar technique to Leal's could have been used in the Italian translation but was not, one needs to ask if Bossi might perhaps have been more constrained by Italian poetics than by strictly linguistic concerns – after all, Lefevere points out that incompatibility at the level of poetics is more likely to be problematic for a translator than linguistic complications (Lefevere 1992). Naturally, it is not always easy to separate the two, and this is particularly so in the case of a text like *A Clockwork Orange*, in which there is considerable interaction between style and content. Nevertheless, it is worth considering, in this context, the status of experimental styles of writing within Italian literature. The translator and author, Tim Parks, notes that transgressive prose writing has historically been far less common in Italian literature than it has in English (2001:7). It could, therefore, be the case that the nature of Italian literary systems at the time Bossi was translating would have made the use of experimental language 'unacceptable' at a literary level, even more than at a linguistic level. Nevertheless, I would argue that this was not so. Her translation was published in 1969, at a time of considerable experimentation and daring in Italian literature. Many prominent writers of the Gruppo 63 and the *neoavanguardia* were playing with language and narrative conventions and seeking a cultural rebirth in Italian letters, which they saw as rather parochial and inward-looking. It seems, then, that the time was right for the translation of a novel like *A Clockwork Orange*, and that Bossi – and her editors and publishers, whose intervention unfortunately cannot be established without access to detailed information about the translation and editorial process – could have been more daring in their efforts without running the risk of subverting the dominant poetics to the point of being unpublishable or unreadable. Indeed, perhaps some like-minded contemporary writers and readers would have welcomed the linguistic adventurousness of a text written in an argot created from the foreign sounds of a language like Russian.

Lefevere's four levels of translation culminate with the question of ideology. Thus, one might ask whether Bossi's general avoidance of the most transgressive features of Nadsat is in some way linked to 'ideological' questions rather than to concerns with language or poetics. Possible factors may have been an aversion (whether Bossi's own or that of her publishers) to linguistic experimentation, or concerns among figures within the target literary system, including readers and reviewers, about whether it is appropriate for a translator to be involved in the creation of a new 'language'. *A Clockwork Orange* is a text that transgresses language norms and, therefore, requires great input on the part of the reader, yet it can also provide a commensurately rewarding reading experience once that challenge has been met. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason note that when working with these kinds of texts, translators may be often tempted to iron out the irregularities (1997:30-35, 113). Milan Kundera, too, has observed that translators have a general tendency to let dominant conventions in the target language dictate their translation strategies when it comes to transgressive styles of writing (1995:110). Indeed, the tendency towards normalization or explicitation, or "a certain stylistic flattening that is typical of (particularly) literary translation" (Chesterman 1997:71), has often been noted by translation theorists, and it is important to acknowledge the pressure that these "translation laws", as Andrew Chesterman calls them, exert on the translator.[7]

In her discussion of translations of the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Carol O'Sullivan (2006) notes a tendency to avoid or reduce linguistic play, even though this is a fundamental aspect of the source text. She draws attention to the pressure on translators to hold back their creative potential in order not to introduce too much new meaning or humour to a text, finding evidence for this in comments by critics for whom "enrichments [in a translation] cannot offset the loss […] because the lost chords are Joyce's, and the additions are merely of the translator" (2006:182).[8] In this regard, one can certainly feel some sympathy for Bossi's position, and that of other translators of experimental or transgressive writing – the fear of adding meaning, of gain in translation, as well as the threat of critical censure, may encourage conservatism in translators. While Burgess, as a self-declared 'Class 2 Writer', might have preferred his work be translated by "a committed writer" (1991:12), pressure exerted by critics, reviewers, publishers and others probably often discourages a writerly approach to translation. In this light, it is perhaps hardly surprising to observe Bossi's overall preference for an Italianized variety of linguistic experimentation. Thus, in the case of *Arancia meccanica*, destruction and creativity – as themes and as linguistic techniques – may be less evident than in the source text in part because of a pervasive ideology that leaves little room for linguistic transgression in translation.

## Conclusions

A comparison of replacing and replaced segments of Nadsat vocabulary has provided an insight into the way Bossi translates Burgess' invented argot. By using some archaic or little-known words, and by giving familiar words somewhat different meanings, she has certainly endeavoured to retain some strangeness in Alex's speech style, yet her numerous Italianizing translation shifts at the lexical and grammatical levels, as outlined in the tables and examples above, result in significant changes to the rhetoric of the text as a whole. The language of Bossi's translation creates a world where partly familiar archaic or dialectal forms have come

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[7] See also Kenny's discussion of 'norms', 'laws' or possible 'universals' (2001:50-57).
[8] Other analyses of the translation of Joyce's linguistic play appear in articles by Parks (1998) and Klitgård (2005), both of whom find the target texts to be very restrained, and ultimately somewhat unsatisfying, in the extent of their linguistic experimentation.

back into vogue, rather than a world where momentous social changes have brought about the adoption by young people of a language that is completely radical and shockingly foreign to their elders, even as it includes some quirky old-fashioned turns of phrase.

Any translator of *A Clockwork Orange* needs to begin by considering the rhetorical purpose of the text's linguistic experimentation before embarking upon the translation. Faced with a target language that appears resistant to experimental or transgressive styles, the translator can find ways of stretching the limits of that language in order to give readers an opportunity to appreciate as fully as possible the meaning, message and effect of a linguistically experimental source text. This involves seeking out translation strategies that reproduce, on as many levels as possible, the 'intention' of the source text (see Eco 2003:56). Key to the intention of *A Clockwork Orange* is its 'brainwashing' effect on the reader's attitude, as well as its grotesque humour, which Nadsat enhances in a variety of ways. The language's grotesque disjunctions force readers to confront their own darker side and to reconcile the horror Alex inspires with the charm he exudes. The reduction of the text's humour that comes about as a result of Bossi's use of Italian vocabulary and normalized structures is significant, not simply because it might reduce readers' enjoyment of the text, but because it affects the depth of their involvement with the story and its teller, and minimizes the text's subversive 'brainwashing' effect. This latter feature depends heavily on the shock factor of the novel's language, which reinforces the text's message and shows readers, through their very own reactions to the text, the power that language exerts over us.

Examining the Italian translation of *A Clockwork Orange* is instructive because it shows some of the challenges inherent in translating linguistically experimental writing. While Bossi's justification of her translation approach cites difficulties with target language and culture acceptability, the time and the literary milieu to which Bossi's translation belongs suggest that a more trangressive and more 'Russian' approach to the language of the translation would have been possible, had the translator and her editors been willing to introduce more foreign elements into the language of the target text. It is my contention that Bossi's selection of translation strategies might well have been shaped at least as much by perceptions about the role of the translator as by any limitations of the target language or poetics. It is hoped that questions regarding the role and approaches of translators of experimental and transgressive styles of writing will be the object of further research in the field of translation studies.

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