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COVERING THE WAR IN UKRAINE: TRANSLATION, CULTURE AND POLITICS

Background. *The paper presents the results of the comparative analysis of BBC news reports on the war in Ukraine and their translations into Ukrainian published at BBC NEWS Ukraine. In our study, we focus on the foregrounded parts of the text, i.e., headlines and photos with captions. The main function of these salient text components is to attract readers' attention making some information eye-catching and memorable.*

Methods. *The research offers a comprehensive approach to translation studies by integrating a translation-oriented comparative stylistic analysis, a multimodal analysis, and the principles of cognitive semantics. This multifaceted methodology allowed us to establish the distinct features of language use in the source and target texts, identify the cultural specificity of depicting the war for the Ukrainians and international audience, elucidate the correlation between their verbal and visual narratives, and explore the differences between the cognitive scenarios underlying the English articles and their Ukrainian translations.*

Results. *The results of the comparative analysis reveal that the original articles and their translations highlight dissimilar aspects of the developments in Ukraine, shaping thus different perceptions of the war. The main reasons for the discrepancy are as follows: 1) a profound difference between English and Ukrainian language systems; 2) the change of the reporter's position from describing the events from the sidelines to giving an inside look; 3) significant cultural differences in the range and intensity of verbal and non-verbal emotional reactions; 4) divergent cognitive scenarios underlying the models of evaluating and interpreting events and their possible outcomes.*

Conclusions. *The research made it possible to draw the following conclusions: 1) lexical transformations found in the translations under analysis are aimed at conveying proper messages rather than being close to the original; 2) visual narration, i.e. photos illustrating the events, is used to adapt the target text to a necessary political narrative; 3) cognitive scenarios underlying the source and the target texts differ in the roles attributed to Ukrainians and external actors as well as the view of the possible war outcome. Thus, journalistic translation may be defined as a special translation type striving for the closest adaptation of the original text to the audience's cultural specificity and political reality rather than rendering the subtleties and nuances of the original text.*

Keywords: *the discourse on the war in Ukraine, comparative stylistics, cross-cultural communication, political and cultural aspects of translation, journalistic translation, social and political news.*

"Translation creates an image of the original, particularly for those who have no access to the reality of that original. This image can undoubtedly be very different from the truth, insofar as the translator can distort and manipulate reality, because he is under the pressure of a series of constraints [...]."
(Román Alvarez and M. Carmen-África Vidal)

Background

The paper presents a novel approach to translation studies addressing the issue of the fidelity of political news translation, i.e., how accurately a translated article conforms with the source text in terms of its content, stylistics, and emotional engagement. The study on translating current news on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly reporting from the front lines, seems relevant as this type of discourse is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it may raise public awareness about this war and thereby promote Ukraine's interests on the international stage by offering a well-rounded and impartial insight into the ongoing warfare. On the other hand, it may give rise to misconceptions by seeding and spreading false and misleading narratives.

Faithful translation of international news reports, which requires rendering contextual meaning and stylistic nuances, is consequential nowadays since numerous Ukrainian politicians and opinion leaders refer to leading media to substantiate their assessment of the level of international support to Ukraine. It generates another type of discourse on the war based on interpreting and rethinking the ways foreign media covers the ongoing events in Ukraine. In the majority of cases, these interpretations are framed through Ukrainian translation, which may lead to erroneous conclusions and a distorted view of the perception of our country abroad.

The paper aims to contribute to translation studies by offering a case study of the BBC news reports on the war in

Ukraine in English and Ukrainian. A special emphasis is placed on the foregrounded text components including headlines, photos and captions with a view to exploring the correlation between the highlighted verbal and non-verbal elements in English news reports and their Ukrainian translations. The eventual research goal is to identify and elucidate the factors affecting the discrepancy in stylistic, cultural and ideological specificity of the source and the target texts. The accomplishment of this goal implies a multidisciplinary approach involving translation and cultural studies, comparative stylistics, and political science.

Theoretical Background. The Ukrainian war discourse has recently been a central issue in a multitude of linguistic studies (Azniuk, 2024; Izotova, & Potapenko, 2024), obviously because of the relevance of this issue for every Ukrainian. Having defined the Ukrainian war discourse as a special discourse type (Yavorska, 2024, p. 217) that differs from the broader notion of "the discourse of war" due to its specific manifestation in language and social interaction, the researchers further study the variety of its genres and styles (Izotova & Potapenko, 2024) as well as its discursive, linguistic and rhetorical features (Potapenko, 2023; Shevchenko, 2022; Ushchyna, 2022).

Another aspect related to studies of linguistic representation of Russia's war in Ukraine is the textual dimension of its depiction in English and Ukrainian mass media, including headlines (El Houssine, 2022; Potapenko, 2021) and photos that enhance the verbal message of a

newspaper article (Iosifidis, 2023). In his book (Potapenko, 2009), Serhii Potapenko gives a detailed account of the structure of media texts based on the addressee's visual orientation. In this respect, headlines are viewed through figure-ground perception (Potapenko, 2009, p. 210), which implies a possibility to spotlight as well as put out of sight some information in order to guide readers' attention. Therefore, these structural parts of journalistic articles can be relevant for the comparative analysis of English newspaper articles and their Ukrainian translations.

Furthermore, the term "translation" being applied to mass media deserves closer scrutiny (Bielsa, 2020; Kamyranets, 2024; Valdeon, 2018) on account of the multifaceted nature of this type of discourse, which is aimed both at spreading information and at "representation of societies to foreign readers, i.e., cultural representation" (Riggs, 2020, p. 6). Therefore, journalistic translation is nowadays regarded as "not the production of one text equivalent to another text, but rather a complex process of **rewriting**" (Álvarez, & Vidal, 1996, p. 4), "**transformation**" (Valdeon, 2018, p. 263), "**transediting**" (Valdeon, 2018, p. 256), and even creating a "**competing discourse**" (Kamyranets, 2024, p. 25).

Serhii Potapenko argues that media discourse meets the demands of the target audience (Potapenko, 2009, pp. 210–265), which means that translators are to take into account the change of the addressee and to bear in mind that their new target audience may have a different set of expectations and demands from those encapsulated in the source text. This entails the need for the analysis of "discursive stance" (Ushchyna, 2021) through the lens of journalistic translation. Valentyna Ushchyna argues that stance is "a dynamic, situationally-bound discursive construct, in which individual (personal) and interactive (interpersonal) planes of linguistic realization are distinguished" (Ushchyna, 2021, p. 129). Translation implies a change of a situational identity resulting in a shift in "cognitive, pragmatic, and interactional dynamics of stancetaking" (Ushchyna, 2020, p. 73), which is reflected in the translator's linguistic and stylistic choices.

In line with this, the adaptation of the translated text to the local audience puts on the table the subject of ideological constraints in translation (Álvarez, & Vidal, 1996; Valdeón, & Calafat, 2020) since translators are restricted "by what the dominant institutions and ideology expect of them; by the public for whom the translation is intended" (Álvarez, & Vidal, 1996, p. 6). Translation scholars and professional translators have traced the discrepancy between political articles and their translations in shaping perceptions and evaluation of the depicted political events (Kamyranets, 2024; Shtohrin, 2019; Valdeón, & Calafat, 2020, p. 2). The entrenched strategies for grasping and describing political reality are traditionally defined in the humanities and political sciences as narratives that are "a reflection of current political affairs" (Zhabotynska, 2024, p. 87) and "have always shaped the way humans

understand the world around them" (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2014, p. 74) possessing the following components: actors, setting, conflict, and suggested resolutions (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2014, pp. 75–76). Thus, one of the reasons that may account for the divide between the original article and its translation is the difference in political narratives implied in them.

Methods

Being a complicated and nuanced process, translation faithfulness assessment requires multidimensional methodological tools to make valid conclusions about meaning equivalence, cultural and contextual accuracy, and the influence of ideological and political factors on translators' language choices. Seven articles on the war in Ukraine and their translations were subjected to a multilayered and translation-oriented comparative analysis with a special focus on the foregrounded structural parts, namely headlines and photos with captions, to examine the structure of the orientational space in the source and the target texts. We hypothesised that there are some differences in the choice of highlighted information between the English articles under analysis and their Ukrainian translations.

The first stage of the study involved the comparative stylistic analysis of headlines to explore translation strategies applied for translating headlines, e.g.,

The endgame in Ukraine: How the war could come to a close in 2025. (Adams, 2025a).

Чи це вже фінал? Як може закінчитися війна в 2025 році. (Adams, 2025b).

In the given example, the translator revived the stale metaphor "the endgame" by turning the statement into a rhetorical question. Apart from creating an additional stylistic effect and enhancing emotional impact, that seemingly innocuous detail changed the meaning of the original headline by introducing the implication that the war outcome was not clear-cut. Thus, the Ukrainian headline leaves room for hope, while the original focuses on practical issues related to the war ending.

In the next stage of our analysis, we turned to multimodal aspects of translation to compare and contrast visual narratives that complete messages conveyed through language in the source and the target texts. This parallel narrative is shaped by photos accompanied by captions (a short explanation for the photo). Being an integral part of contemporary news journalism (Iosifidis, 2023), photographs are of interest to translation studies as they are intended to serve as a universal language that can help bridge cultural gaps and facilitate translation. However, the research results testify to the opposite. Let us illustrate this by comparing the photos used in the English article "*UK pledges support for Ukraine with 100-year pact*" (Rainsford, Mao, & Zeffman, 2025) and its Ukrainian version "Під тривогу і вибухи. Як пройшов візит прем'єра Стармера до Києва, де він підписав угоду на 100 років". (Rainsford, & Zeffman, 2025).



Sir Keir Starmer (centre) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (2nd left) attended a presentation of Ukrainian military drones (Rainsford, & Zeffman, 2025)



Кір Стармер і Володимир Зеленський кладуть квіти біля стіни пам'яті загиблим на війні (Rainsford, & Zeffman, 2025)

Fig. 1. The photos placed at the top of the page in the English and Ukrainian articles

The first photo in the English article illustrates a regular working trip with Sir Keir Starmer in the middle of the picture, which underlines the importance of his visit to Ukraine. At the same time, the picture in the Ukrainian article centres readers' attention on both state leaders who are respectfully paying tribute to the memory of fallen soldiers. The choice of the illustration reflects a culturally appropriate portrayal of war which implies paying respect to war victims and showing compassion. Thus, the visual narratives of the source and the target texts do not match, which allows us to conclude that the illustrations underpin the narratives of the translated text rather than ensure conformity with the original message.

The third stage of the study aimed to reveal the influence of political narratives on the choice of translation strategies and devices. Drawing on the previous research (Roselle, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2014; Zhabotynska, 2024), we approach political narratives in translation as culture-bound cognitive scenarios encapsulating public awareness about political events and their possible outcomes as well as socially accepted emotional reactions to them. In order to explore the correlation between the cognitive scenarios implied in the original and translated texts, we focused on their two main components: actors and possible war

outcomes. The examples below illustrate the difference between the original headline and its translation.

Ukraine's exhausted troops in Russia told to cling on and wait for Trump. (Adams, 2024a).

Наказали триматися до приходу Трампа. Як українські війська обороняють Курський фронт. (Adams, 2024b).

The Ukrainian headline does not match the original one. It features the bravery of the Ukrainian army and the importance of the Kursk offensive, while the English headline emphasizes the weakening of Ukraine's position on the battlefield. The original headline implies two actors: Ukrainian troops and an external force represented by Trump. The possible outcome completely depends on the external force, whereas Ukraine's soldiers are conceptualized as a powerless general group without individuality and the ability to act. At the same time, the translated headline suggests that Ukrainian soldiers form an active force. The possible outcome depends on them and the reference to the Kursk operation implies a positive result for Ukrainians.

Results

The main findings of the study are summarized in the table below containing illustrations of the differences between the source and the target texts in stylistics, tone, stance-taking, and underlying cognitive scenarios.

Table 1

English Headlines and Their Translations

English headlines	Ukrainian headlines	Analysis
<i>UK pledges support for Ukraine with 100-year pact</i> (Rainsford, Mao, & Zeffman, 2025)	<i>Під тривогу і вибухи. Як пройшов візит прем'єра Стармера до Києва, де він підписав "угоду на 100 років"</i> (Rainsford, & Zeffman, 2025)	The English headline is laconic and precise, whereas the Ukrainian variant is more detailed and appeals to the emotional experience related to the war.
<i>Fighting Russia – and low morale – on Ukraine's 'most dangerous front line'</i> (Limaye, 2024a)	<i>"Навколо мого будинку все вигоріло. Сусіди загинули". Репортаж з Покровська.</i> (Limaye, 2024b)	The translated headline does not render the original meaning. The change of the message is ideologically bound. The concepts of disillusionment and despair are not highlighted in the translated headline. The translator focuses on the atrocities of the enemy instead.
<i>The search for Ukraine's missing – 'no one could have foreseen this nightmare'</i> (Rainsford, 2025a)	<i>"Мамо, я був у пеклі". Як українці шукають викрадених росіянами родичів в окупації.</i> (Rainsford, 2025b)	The Ukrainian translation is more emotional and focuses on accusing Russian troops of detaining civilians. The translator uses an addition to switch to the political narrative common for Ukrainians. The English headline seems more official and avoids an outright accusation of the aggressor.
<i>US election weighs on Ukraine's frontline soldiers.</i> (Waterhouse, 2024a)	<i>"Ми самі не впораємось". Що думають на передовій про вибори в США.</i> (Waterhouse, 2024b)	The English headline is more direct by suggesting that Ukraine's soldiers feel worried about the US presidential elections and presenting Ukrainians as passive participants. In contrast to this, the Ukrainian headline depicts our soldiers as an active power by giving the floor to them.
<i>It's scary – but so's giving birth': The female unit gunning down Russian drones</i> (Rainsford, 2024a)	<i>"Страшно. Але народжувати теж страшно". Як "Бучанські відьми" збивають російські шахеди.</i> (Rainsford, 2024b)	Both headlines refer to female feelings and emotions in order to underline the gap between our traditional perception of female roles and the realities of war. At the same time, the Ukrainian headline has some proper names familiar to Ukrainians making thus the headline more meaningful and appealing.

The research findings show that English and Ukrainian headlines convey different political messages mainly due to dissimilar cognitive scenarios implied in them. The Ukrainian scenario usually includes two main actors: brave Ukrainians and evil Russians. The Western world is regarded as a supporter who is supposed to show compassion for war victims. The suggested war outcome is seen as the victory of good over evil. At the same time, cognitive scenarios underlying the English headlines involve two actors: Western powers that may help Ukraine and exhausted Ukrainians that rely on external help. The possible outcome is that Ukraine may face defeat. Thus, the cognitive scenarios implied in the English articles do not match the Ukrainian patterns, which poses a challenge for translation. To address this imbalance, translators employ additions traditionally used for a more accurate depiction of the

original text. However, this translation device acquires the opposite function in the context of the translated texts under study serving as an effective instrument for conveying messages aligned with political narratives shaped by the Ukrainian mass media.

Being audience-oriented, translation involves a shift in stancetaking, which is reflected in the examples of Ukrainian headlines. The implied narrator is involved and compassionate, portraying Ukrainians as active individuals ready to share their opinions and feelings. The language includes numerous emotionally coloured words preparing readers for a poignant story about the horrors of war. At the same time, the language of the original articles is mostly formal and places primary emphasis on factual information rather than emotional experience. The implied narrator of the story gives an impartial account of the events relying on

the narrative of Ukraine's probable defeat. It testifies to the cultural difference between the Ukrainian media discourse on the ongoing war and the practice common for international news. A rational and emotionless portrayal of war would be considered cruel and heartless by the Ukrainians, whereas an external view on this subject is based on facts and practical reasoning.

Discussion and conclusions

The comparative stylistic analysis of the foregrounded elements, namely headlines and photos with captions, taken from BBC news reports on the war in Ukraine and their translations into Ukrainian published at BBC NEWS Ukraine allowed us to draw the following conclusions.

Journalistic translation is a special translation type that is highly reader-oriented. It strives for the closest adaptation of the original text to the audience's cultural specificity and political reality rather than for rendering the subtleties and nuances of the original text. Though there were some cases of overcoming translation challenges related to language differences, in most cases, transformations were caused by the need to match the translated text to the perception of war shaped by the Ukrainian media.

Furthermore, visual narration that is realized through photos illustrating the events follows the same pattern. Pictures that are supposed to be a universal language facilitating the perception of the original text turn into a useful tool for adapting the target text to a necessary political narrative.

The conducted analysis made it possible to determine the key differences in cognitive scenarios of the war in Ukraine represented in the English and Ukrainian articles including the roles attributed to Ukrainians and external actors as well as the view of the possible war outcome.

Further research could examine the translation strategies for adapting Ukrainian news reports to the international audience.

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МЕДІЙНЕ ВИСВІТЛЕННЯ ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ: ПЕРЕКЛАД, КУЛЬТУРА ТА ПОЛІТИКА

Вступ. Ця наукова розвідка присвячена аналізу англomовних статей, що висвітлюють війну в Україні, оприлюднених на сайті британської новинної агенції BBC, і їхніх перекладів для україномовного сайту новин BBC News Україна. Предмет вивчення – значущі елементи текстів ЗМІ: заголовки, фотографії та підписи до них. Саме вони є сильними позиціями тексту, які слугують своєрідним прожектором, що спрямовує увагу на ті аспекти подій, які автор публікації прагне виділити.

Метод. Дослідження ґрунтується на комплексній методиці, яка включає стилістичний, мультимодальний і когнітивно-семантичний аналіз у контексті перекладацького зіставлення. Методика стилістичного аналізу крізь призму перекладацького зіставлення дозволила встановити стратегії та тактики перекладу, порівняти емоційне тло вихідного й цільового текстів, а також виявити лінгвокультурну специфіку оригіналу та перекладу. Мультимодальний аналіз уможливив порівняння вербального та невербального наративів в оригіналі та перекладі. За допомогою когнітивно-семантичного аналізу встановлені когнітивні сценарії, які містяться в основі зображення війни в новинних текстах для міжнародної аудиторії та для українців.

Результати. проведеного зіставного аналізу свідчать, що під час перекладу зазначених структурних компонентів статей українською мовою відбувається зміщення фокусу уваги, простежуються відмінності не лише в стилістичних засобах "підсвічення" чи "затемнення" певних ракурсів подій чи способів їхнього трактування, але й у виборі фрагментів інформації, які першими впадають в очі читача. Встановлено, що така невідповідність обумовлена насамперед розбіжностями в когнітивних сценаріях, які лежать в основі зображення суспільно-політичних подій, міжкультурними відмінностями, невідповідністю між системами англійської та української мов, а також зміною позиціонування суб'єкта розповіді, тобто переорієнтацією із зовнішньої на внутрішню аудиторію.

Висновки. проведеного дослідження полягає у визначенні специфіки журналістського перекладу новин про Україну для українців. Головною встановленою характеристикою такого перекладу є орієнтація перекладача не на повну відповідність тексту оригіналу, а на віддзеркалення культурних особливостей і політичних наративів властивих українській аудиторії.

Ключові слова: український воєнний дискурс, зіставна стилістика, міжкультурна комунікація, політичні та культурологічні аспекти перекладу, переклад текстів ЗМІ, суспільно-політичні статті.

Автори заявляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів. Спонсори не брали участі в розробленні дослідження; у зборі, аналізі чи інтерпретації даних; у написанні рукопису; в рішенні про публікацію результатів.

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