

**RUSSIA'S 'WEAPONIZATION'
OF LITERARY TRANSLATION:
WW2 VS RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR**
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An integral feature of a totalitarian state is a high degree of control over media, and the sphere of literary translation is not an exception; in times of war (and preparatory periods as well) the latter becomes an important tool of propaganda.

During WW2, the Soviet policy in translation sphere depended on the Nazi-Soviet relations (from economic and political partners according to The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 to the warring states (1941–1945)), the status of each “republic” in the USSR, and the national policy of the Communist party. Besides, after the Nazi invasion, literary works selected for translation were to condemn fascism, promote patriotism, and raise martial spirits.

Before the Russo-Ukrainian war was unleashed in 2014, Russian state-controlled media were employed to impose a certain negative image of the Ukrainian society, and discussion of translations of contemporary Ukrainian literature served this end. Since 2014, Putin’s regime has been using mass media to provide public support for the military aggression, with literary translation being engaged in the campaign.

Despite public interest to contemporary Ukrainian literature and abundance of translations published in the RF at the beginning of the century, in 2014–2022 the latter were scarce, limited to lyric poetry, and published in literary journals. Besides, these translations were published mainly within the Minsk initiative, presented by the Russian side as a trilateral project, uniting creative intelligentsia of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. It is important that the Minsk initiative was broadly publicized in the RF as a trilateral project [2] although there are no documents confirming the official participation of Ukraine; at the same time, Ukrainian diplomats Serhii Borshchevskiy and Oleksandr Danylchenko referred to it as a technology to fraternize the aggressor and the victim [1].

On the other hand, Russian mass media presented “expert opinions” of critics, scholars and literati who blamed the Ukrainian side for manipulating messages of classical authors like Shevchenko and Gogol to foment nationalism and hatred towards Russia.

State-controlled media also gave voice to authors of Ukrainian origin who write in Russian and air the appropriate vision of Ukraine and the Russo-Ukrainian war; such publications were instrumental in creating in the Russian public the feeling of connection and desire to help “our own people”.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian literature has not been published in the RF. The theme of war remains popular, and the biggest publishing houses offer literature about WW2, including some translated works by European authors, and a great choice of Russian books on the war against Ukraine narrating “*atrocities of Kyiv death-squads*”, “*Russophone population genocide*”, and “*Ukro-Nazis*”.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate the use of strategies, inherited by Putin’s regime from the Soviet state, and the new approaches, predetermined mainly by the evolution of mass media, which allow the aggressor to weaponize literary translation in the war against Ukraine through contesting Ukrainian nationhood and enhancing anti-Ukrainian sentiment. The study adheres to an interdisciplinary approach and is based on a linguistic analysis of the original and translated texts, research of bibliographical data, and analysis of discourse on Ukrainian literature and translation in (pro)governmental media.

References

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