

## CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND FEMINIST AGENCY IN THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA

**Anastasiia Romanchuk**

*PhD in Translation Studies,*

*Prosecutor`s Training Center of Ukraine*

*ORCID ID 0009-0004-2895-6693*

*anastasiiaromanchuk11@gmail.com*

**Key words:** *cultural translation, Ukrainian diaspora, feminist translation studies, gender, translator agency.*

This article examines the intersection of cultural translation and feminist agency within the intellectual landscape of the Ukrainian diaspora. The study conceptualizes translation as a form of cultural mediation that facilitates the transnational circulation of Ukrainian literature, ideas, and historical narratives. The theoretical framework draws on feminist translation studies developed by Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow, as well as the concept of “diaspora space” articulated by Avtar Brah. Within this perspective, translation is approached not merely as a linguistic practice but as a complex cultural process in which issues of gender, ethnic identity, and collective memory intersect.

Particular attention is given to the role of women translators, editors, and scholars in shaping transnational intellectual networks within Ukrainian diasporic communities. The article argues that translation practices in the diaspora have served not only as mechanisms of cultural representation but also as tools for revising literary canon formation, especially through the recovery and promotion of women’s writing and the introduction of feminist theoretical perspectives into Ukrainian literary studies. In this context, translation emerges as a powerful instrument of cultural interpretation and symbolic representation of Ukrainian culture within global intellectual discourse.

The analysis demonstrates that diasporic translation functions as an important mechanism for preserving cultural memory while simultaneously generating new interpretations of national identity. Ukrainian diasporic translation practices thus represent a dynamic process of cultural transmission in which gender perspectives play a crucial role in shaping contemporary understandings of Ukrainian literature and culture within transnational contexts.

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## КУЛЬТУРНИЙ ПЕРЕКЛАД І ФЕМІНІСТИЧНА АГЕНТНІСТЬ В УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ ДІАСПОРІ

**Анастасія Романчук,**  
кандидат філологічних наук,  
Тренінговий центр прокурорів України

**Ключові слова:** культурний переклад, українська діаспора, феміністичний переклад, гендер, перекладацька агентність.

Стаття присвячена аналізу взаємодії культурного перекладу та феміністичної агентності в інтелектуальному просторі української діаспори. У центрі дослідження перебуває переклад як форма культурного посередництва, що забезпечує міжнаціональну циркуляцію української літератури, ідей та історичних наративів. Теоретичною основою роботи слугують підходи феміністичного перекладознавства, сформульовані Шеррі Саймон та Луїзою фон Флотов, а також концепція «діаспорного простору», запропонована Автар Бра. У статті переклад розглядається не лише як мовна операція, а як складний культурний процес, у якому поєднуються питання гендеру, етнічної ідентичності та колективної пам'яті.

Особлива увага приділяється ролі жінок-перекладачок, редакторок і дослідниць у формуванні міжкультурних інтелектуальних мереж української діаспори. Показано, що перекладацька діяльність у діаспорному середовищі виконувала не лише функцію культурної репрезентації, але й сприяла переосмисленню літературного канону, зокрема через актуалізацію жіночого письма та введення феміністичних теоретичних підходів у дослідження української літератури. У цьому контексті переклад виступає інструментом культурної інтерпретації та символічної репрезентації української культури у світовому інтелектуальному просторі.

Дослідження демонструє, що переклад у діаспорі є важливим механізмом збереження культурної пам'яті та водночас простором формування нових інтерпретацій національної ідентичності. Таким чином, перекладацькі практики української діаспори постають як динамічний процес культурної трансляції, у якому гендерна перспектива відіграє ключову роль у формуванні сучасних інтерпретацій української літератури та культури в глобальному контексті. Таким чином, перекладацькі практики української діаспори постають як динамічний процес культурної трансляції, у якому гендерна перспектива відіграє ключову роль у формуванні сучасних інтерпретацій української літератури та культури в глобальному контексті.

**Introduction.** Translation has long served as a crucial mechanism of cultural mediation in diasporic communities. For displaced or migrant cultures, translation does not merely facilitate linguistic communication but performs the broader function of negotiating cultural identity across national and linguistic boundaries. In diasporic contexts, translation frequently becomes intertwined with processes of cultural preservation, identity formation, and intellectual exchange. As contemporary scholarship in translation studies increasingly demonstrates, translation cannot be understood as a purely technical or linguistic operation but must instead be examined as a

culturally situated practice shaped by historical, ideological, and institutional forces.

In the case of the Ukrainian diaspora, translation has played a particularly significant role in maintaining cultural continuity while simultaneously introducing Ukrainian literature and intellectual traditions to global audiences. Throughout the twentieth century, Ukrainian diasporic communities in North America and Western Europe established extensive networks of cultural institutions, academic organizations, and publishing initiatives that actively promoted the translation of Ukrainian literary works into English and other European languages. These activities were not merely literary or scholarly

undertakings but also forms of cultural advocacy that aimed to ensure the international visibility of Ukrainian culture during periods when cultural production in Soviet Ukraine was constrained by political censorship.

**Materials and Methods.** This study employs an interdisciplinary approach combining translation studies, feminist literary criticism, and diaspora studies. The research is based on qualitative textual and contextual analysis of selected translation projects produced within the Ukrainian diaspora. Particular attention is given to translations of works by Oksana Zabuzhko and to the role of diaspora translators and editors in mediating Ukrainian literature for international audiences.

The concept of cultural translation has gained increasing prominence in contemporary humanities scholarship. Rather than viewing translation as a purely linguistic operation, scholars emphasize its broader role in transferring and transforming cultural meanings across contexts. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi argue that translation should be understood as a process deeply embedded in cultural exchange and ideological negotiation (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha conceptualizes cultural translation as a process through which identities are rearticulated within hybrid cultural spaces created by migration, colonial histories, and globalization (Bhabha, 1994). In such spaces, cultural meanings are constantly renegotiated and transformed, highlighting the dynamic and performative nature of translation in diasporic contexts.

Within these broader theoretical frameworks, feminist translation studies have drawn attention to the gendered dimensions of translational practice. Translation has historically been associated with gendered metaphors that position translation as derivative or secondary to the original text. Feminist scholars have challenged these hierarchies by emphasizing the translator's interpretive agency and the political dimensions of translation as a form of cultural intervention.

In the Ukrainian diaspora, translation has frequently served as a site where questions of gender, national identity, and cultural memory intersect. Women translators, editors, and scholars have played a crucial role in mediating Ukrainian literature for international audiences while simultaneously reshaping internal narratives of literary history and canon formation.

**Results and Discussion.** This article explores the relationship between cultural translation and feminist agency in the Ukrainian diaspora. It argues that translation within diasporic intellectual networks functions not only as linguistic transfer but also as a form of feminist cultural

intervention that reshapes literary canon formation, historiography, and transnational cultural exchange.

#### *Feminist Translation Studies*

Feminist translation studies emerged in the late twentieth century as an interdisciplinary field connecting translation studies with feminist theory. Early foundational work by Sherry Simon emphasized that translation is deeply implicated in the politics of cultural representation and gender relations. In her influential monograph "Gender in Translation" (1996), Simon argues that translation historically reflected patriarchal cultural hierarchies in which the "original" text was privileged while translation was viewed as secondary or derivative.

These hierarchical metaphors mirror broader gendered assumptions embedded within Western literary traditions. As Simon notes, translation has often been associated with femininity through metaphors of fidelity and betrayal, reinforcing the perception that translators occupy a subordinate position within literary production.

Building on this framework, Luise von Flotow identified several strategies associated with feminist translation practices, including textual supplementation, translator's prefaces, and the strategic use of footnotes that foreground interpretive choices (L. von Flotow, 1997). Such strategies challenge the traditional ideal of translator invisibility and highlight the translator's role as an active cultural mediator who participates in shaping the reception and interpretation of literary texts.

Another important contribution comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose essay "The Politics of Translation" emphasizes the ethical responsibilities involved in translating marginalized literatures. Spivak argues that translation requires deep attentiveness to the cultural and rhetorical structures embedded in language and warns against reductive translation practices that erase linguistic difference (Spivak, 1993).

More recent scholarship has further expanded feminist translation studies by examining the relationship between translation and power structures. Mona Baker has demonstrated how translation participates in the construction of narratives that shape political and cultural discourse (Baker, 2006). From this perspective, translation can reinforce dominant ideological frameworks or challenge them by introducing alternative perspectives into global cultural circulation.

These theoretical perspectives highlight the importance of considering translation as an interpretive and ideological practice rather than a neutral linguistic transfer.

### *Cultural Translation and Diaspora*

The concept of cultural translation has become central to contemporary discussions of diaspora and transnational identity. According to Homi K. Bhabha, cultural translation occurs in the “third space” of cultural interaction where meanings are renegotiated and identities are rearticulated (Bhabha, 1994). This concept emphasizes that diasporic identities are not fixed but continuously shaped through processes of cultural interaction and reinterpretation.

Similarly, Avtar Brah introduced the concept of “diaspora space,” which refers to the social and cultural environments in which diasporic identities emerge through the intersection of migration histories, collective memory, and power relations (Brah, 1996). Within such spaces, translation becomes an essential mechanism for negotiating belonging and cultural representation.

Diasporic communities often rely on translation to sustain intellectual and cultural exchange across linguistic boundaries. In such contexts, translation performs several interconnected functions: mediating cultural memory, enabling intellectual exchange, constructing narratives of national identity, facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Within Ukrainian diaspora studies, scholars such as Marko Pavlyshyn and George G. Grabowicz have explored the role of diasporic intellectual institutions in shaping Ukrainian literary scholarship. However, the gendered dimensions of translation within these contexts remain relatively underexplored.

It is important to highlight that Ukrainian diaspora developed a complex network of cultural and academic institutions throughout the twentieth century, particularly in North America and Western Europe. These institutions played a crucial role in preserving Ukrainian cultural heritage during periods when cultural production in Soviet Ukraine was constrained by ideological censorship.

One of the most influential institutions in this regard is the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. Established in 1976, the institute has played a central role in promoting Ukrainian studies internationally through scholarly publications, translation initiatives, and academic conferences.

CIUS has supported numerous translation projects that introduced Ukrainian literature to Anglophone audiences. These projects have included translations of classical Ukrainian authors as well as modern and contemporary literary works, thereby helping to integrate Ukrainian literature into broader discussions of European literary modernism and postcolonial cultural history.

Importantly, many of these translation initiatives have involved women scholars and editors

whose contributions have been central to shaping the international reception of Ukrainian literature.

### *Feminist Agency and Canon Formation*

One of the most significant ways in which feminist agency manifests within diasporic translation is through the reshaping of literary canon formation. Canon formation is inherently selective: decisions regarding which authors are translated and published influence how literary traditions are represented globally. Translators and editors therefore function as cultural gatekeepers who shape the international perception of national literature.

An illustrative example is the anthology “Women’s Prose in Ukrainian”, edited and translated by Roma Franko (1996). This volume introduced Anglophone readers to a wide range of Ukrainian women writers whose works had often been marginalized in traditional literary histories.

By foregrounding women’s writing, the anthology challenged the male-dominated narrative of Ukrainian literary development and demonstrated how translation can function as a tool of feminist historiographic revision. Such translation projects illustrate how diasporic scholars actively participate in reconstructing literary history through editorial and translational decisions.

Translation has also facilitated the development of transnational feminist intellectual networks connecting Ukrainian scholars with global feminist theory.

A key figure in this context is Solomiia Pavlychko, whose scholarship played a pivotal role in introducing feminist literary criticism to Ukrainian academic discourse. Pavlychko’s work on modernism and gender in Ukrainian literature significantly contributed to the integration of feminist theory into Ukrainian literary studies.

Through translation and scholarly interpretation, diasporic intellectuals have connected Ukrainian literary scholarship with broader debates in feminist theory and cultural studies. This transnational exchange demonstrates how translation can function as a catalyst for intellectual transformation and theoretical innovation.

### *Cultural Memory and Postcolonial Context*

Translation within the Ukrainian diaspora must also be understood in relation to the broader historical context of cultural suppression and political domination. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ukrainian language and literature were repeatedly subjected to restrictive policies under imperial Russian and Soviet rule.

In this context, translation became an important strategy of cultural preservation and international advocacy. By translating Ukrainian literary works into English and other European languages, diasporic scholars ensured the visibility of Ukrainian

cultural heritage within global literary discourse.

As Maria Tymoczko argues in “Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators” (2007), translation often functions as a form of cultural resistance in contexts where literary traditions have been marginalized by dominant political powers. Translators working within such contexts therefore play an active role in shaping narratives of cultural identity and historical memory.

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that translation within the Ukrainian diaspora cannot be understood solely as a linguistic practice. Rather, it should be examined as a complex cultural process shaped by historical memory, institutional structures, ideological positioning, and gendered intellectual networks. In diasporic contexts, translation becomes an essential mechanism through which cultural identities are negotiated, preserved, and rearticulated in global intellectual discourse.

One of the central insights of contemporary translation theory is that translation is not merely a technical transfer of meaning but a form of cultural rewriting. Scholars such as André Lefevere have argued that translation participates in the broader process of “rewriting” literature within a target culture, shaping literary reception through ideological and institutional frameworks. Translators, editors, and publishers thus function as cultural gatekeepers whose decisions influence which texts become visible within global literary circulation.

Within the Ukrainian diaspora, these dynamics have been particularly significant because translation often served as the primary mechanism through which Ukrainian literature entered the international literary system. During much of the twentieth century, Ukrainian cultural production within Soviet Ukraine faced significant ideological constraints. As a result, diasporic scholars and translators played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating Ukrainian literary works internationally.

From this perspective, translation becomes closely connected with questions of cultural representation and intellectual authority. Lawrence Venuti has emphasized that translation practices frequently reproduce power asymmetries between dominant and minoritized cultures (Venuti, 1995). In the case of Ukrainian literature, translation into English often functioned as a strategy for challenging the marginalization of Ukrainian culture within global literary hierarchies traditionally dominated by major European languages and literary traditions.

At the same time, feminist translation theory provides an additional analytical lens for examining these processes. Feminist scholars have emphasized that translation is deeply implicated in the politics of cultural representation and gender relations. As Sherry Simon notes, translation has historically been

framed through gendered metaphors that position the translation as subordinate to the “original,” mirroring broader patriarchal assumptions about authorship and authority. Feminist translation scholars have therefore sought to foreground the agency of translators as active interpreters and cultural mediators.

Within the Ukrainian diaspora, women translators and scholars have played a particularly significant role in shaping the international reception of Ukrainian literature. Their contributions extend beyond linguistic mediation to include editorial work, scholarly interpretation, and institutional leadership within diasporic academic networks.

One important example of such translational mediation can be observed in the English translations of works by Oksana Zabuzhko, one of the most influential contemporary Ukrainian writers. Zabuzhko’s novel “Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex” (1996) has become a landmark text in Ukrainian feminist literature and has been widely translated into multiple languages. The English translation by Halyna Hryn played a crucial role in introducing Zabuzhko’s work to Anglophone readers and situating it within broader discussions of post-Soviet feminist writing.

The translation of Zabuzhko’s works illustrates several important dynamics of diasporic cultural translation. First, many translators involved in these projects possess hybrid cultural identities that allow them to navigate both Ukrainian and Anglophone literary contexts. Such translators often combine linguistic competence with cultural expertise, enabling them to mediate complex cultural references embedded within the original texts.

Second, the translation of Zabuzhko’s prose highlights the interpretive challenges associated with translating culturally specific discourses related to gender, history, and post-Soviet identity. Zabuzhko’s writing frequently incorporates intertextual references to Ukrainian cultural history, folklore, and literary traditions. Translators must therefore negotiate the tension between preserving cultural specificity and ensuring readability for international audiences.

The translation history of Zabuzhko’s works also illustrates the collaborative nature of diasporic translation projects. For example, the English edition of the short-story collection “Your Ad Could Go Here” involved a team of translators, including Marco Carynnyk, Marta Horban, Halyna Hryn, Askold Melnyczuk, and Nina Murray. Such collaborative translation practices demonstrate how diasporic intellectual networks contribute collectively to the international dissemination of Ukrainian literature.

Beyond Zabuzhko’s prose, diaspora translators have also played an important role in translating Ukrainian poetry and philosophical texts. Publications in international literary journals and anthologies have introduced Anglophone audiences to a

wide range of Ukrainian authors through translations produced by diasporic scholars and writers. For example, translations of Zabuzhko's poetry have appeared in English-language literary journals, including translations by scholars such as Michael M. Naydan.

These translation projects demonstrate how diaspora translators often function simultaneously as scholars, editors, and cultural mediators. Their work frequently involves extensive contextualization through introductions, footnotes, and scholarly commentary that situates Ukrainian texts within broader cultural and historical frameworks.

Another important dimension of diasporic translation concerns the relationship between translation and cultural memory. Ukrainian literature often engages with historical experiences such as imperial domination, Soviet repression, and cultural marginalization. Translating such texts into English requires not only linguistic mediation but also the interpretation of complex historical narratives for readers who may have limited familiarity with Ukrainian history.

Scholars such as Maria Tymoczko have argued that translation in postcolonial contexts frequently functions as a form of cultural resistance that challenges dominant historical narratives (Tymoczko, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant for Ukrainian diasporic translation, where the act of translating Ukrainian literature into English often serves as a means of asserting cultural visibility and historical legitimacy.

Feminist translation practices further complicate these dynamics by foregrounding gender as a central analytical category. Ukrainian feminist writers such as Zabuzhko have frequently addressed questions of gender identity, national history, and cultural memory within their literary works. Translating these texts therefore involves negotiating not only linguistic and cultural differences but also ideological debates surrounding feminism, nationalism, and postcolonial identity.

Diasporic translators often approach these challenges through strategies that emphasize interpretive transparency and cultural contextualization. Translator's introductions, explanatory notes, and paratextual commentary frequently play an important role in guiding readers through unfamiliar cultural references.

In this sense, translation becomes a form of intellectual mediation that extends beyond the textual level. Translators participate in broader scholarly conversations about Ukrainian literature, history, and cultural identity. Their work contributes to the formation of transnational intellectual networks that connect Ukrainian studies with global debates in translation studies, feminist theory, and postcolonial studies.

At the same time, the growing international interest in Ukrainian literature following the political transformations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has further expanded the role of translation in shaping global perceptions of Ukrainian culture. Translation projects supported by diaspora institutions, universities, and literary foundations have played an important role in promoting Ukrainian literature within global literary markets.

These developments highlight the continuing importance of translation as a cultural practice within diasporic communities. Translation not only facilitates intercultural communication but also contributes to the construction of literary canons, intellectual networks, and historical narratives.

From this perspective, translation within the Ukrainian diaspora can be understood as a form of feminist cultural agency that operates at multiple levels simultaneously. Through their work as translators, editors, and scholars, women intellectuals have contributed significantly to the global recognition of Ukrainian literature while also reshaping internal narratives of literary history and cultural identity.

**Conclusions.** This study has examined the relationship between cultural translation and feminist agency in the Ukrainian diaspora. By integrating feminist translation theory with diaspora studies, the article demonstrates that translation functions as a key mechanism of cultural mediation and intellectual exchange.

The activities of diasporic translators and scholars illustrate how translation can serve as a form of feminist cultural intervention that reshapes literary canon formation and facilitates the global circulation of Ukrainian literature.

Future research should further explore archival translation projects and examine how digital platforms are transforming contemporary forms of diasporic cultural translation. Understanding translation as a gendered cultural practice provides valuable insight into the broader dynamics of transnational literary exchange and the ongoing evolution of Ukrainian cultural identity in the global cultural landscape.

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