

Problems of Young People in Ukraine: Linguo-Cultural Approach to Teaching English Philology and Translation Students

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Abstract. The article addresses teaching through a linguo-cultural lens, with particular attention to the discourse of Ukrainian youth as shaped by their lived experience of war. The research is based on various materials. And these materials include interviews, personal blogs, and social media texts. All these sources together illustrate the social, psychological, and cultural challenges that young Ukrainians are currently facing. Among the collected materials there are interruptions in education, economic challenges, psychological burdens, civic engagement, and the evolving understanding of individual and collective identity. First-year students often produce translations that remain too close to the surface of the text, failing to render the underlying cultural resonances. The article offers pedagogical strategies which are designed to strengthen linguistic proficiency, heighten sensitivity to cultural specificity, and cultivate reflective approaches to translating texts that deal with complex social realities.

Keywords: intercultural competence, cultural specificity, pedagogical strategies, first-year students, thematic analysis.

Проблеми молоді в Україні: лінгвокультурний підхід до навчання студентів англійської філології та перекладу

Анотація. У статті представлено лінгвокультурний підхід до навчання перекладу в англійській філології та підготовки майбутніх перекладачів, зосереджений на аналізі дискурсу української молоді в умовах війни. Дослідження базується на якісному аналізі інтерв'ю, блогів, публікацій у соціальних мережах, що відображають соціальні, психологічні та культурні виклики, з якими стикаються молоді українці. Тематичний аналіз виявив п'ять ключових проблемних напрямів: освітні втрати та перерви, економічну нестабільність і безробіття, психологічне напруження та тривожність, активну громадянську позицію й волонтерство, переосмислення ідентичності та культурних цінностей. Окрему увагу приділено перекладацьким викликам, що

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виникають під час роботи з культурно маркованими одиницями, метафорами та емоційно насиченими смислами, притаманними дискурсу, сформованому в контексті війни. Автори акцентують на труднощах, які відчують студенти першого курсу, що лише формують міжкультурну компетентність, і часто припускаються буквальних перекладів чи втрати культурного змісту. Запропоновано педагогічні стратегії, серед яких — робота з автентичними текстами, вправи на засвоєння сучасного сленгу та метафор, а також культурно-інтерпретаційні семінари. Ці підходи спрямовані на розвиток мовних, культурних та міжкультурних компетентностей студентів, необхідних для адекватного перекладу текстів, що репрезентують соціальні та психологічні реалії воєнного часу. Стаття також підкреслює важливість рефлексивних практик у навчанні перекладу, які дозволяють краще розуміти емоційний та ідеологічний зміст оригінальних текстів, а також формувати перекладацьку етику у роботі з травматичними нарративами. Okремо наголошено на значенні розвитку емпатії як складової перекладацької підготовки, що сприяє більш точному відтворенню досвіду іншого. Крім того, автори пропонують систематично інтегрувати аналіз дискурсу української молоді у навчальні програми, що дозволить студентам краще орієнтуватися в актуальних соціокультурних контекстах. Подальші дослідження у цій галузі можуть сприяти створенню методичних рекомендацій для роботи з текстами, що відображають досвід покоління, травмованого війною.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна компетентність, культурна специфіка, педагогічні стратегії, студенти першого курсу, тематичний аналіз.

Introduction

Since the Russian invasion in 2022, life for young Ukrainians has not been the same. Their routines, ambitions, and education have all been shaken or shattered. For some, there's no more school to attend; for others, studying goes on under the constant threat of sirens and missiles. Dreams of careers abroad or at home are replaced by the need to survive, to help family, or to volunteer. Uncertainty looms large, and with it, the feeling that the future has slipped out of reach.

These lived experiences are more than just news headlines, they shape how young people talk about their world. For students learning translation, especially in Philology programs, it means grappling not just with words, but with the weight those words carry. Translation is no longer a neutral exercise when the source texts are steeped in loss, defiance, or hope.

The topic "Problems of Young People in Ukraine," especially when compared with youth experiences in English-speaking countries, fits well into the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum. It helps students to observe how social conditions are verbalized, how culture influences linguistic choices, and how discourse reflects psychological and social realities [1; 2]. Involving this topic in translation training enables students to expand their vocabulary, become familiar with discourse patterns related to social problems, and develop translation strategies that account for cultural specificity.

Although cultural competence has long been emphasized in language education [1; 2], there is still a lack of methods that integrate current social issues into the training of Philology and Translation students. Studies on intercultural competence development through academic mobility [3] highlight the importance of cultural awareness, but do not focus on teaching translation that reflects ongoing socio-cultural challenges.

The aim of the article is to present a linguo-cultural approach to teaching the topic "Problems of Young People in Ukraine" to first-year students of English Philology and Translation. The objectives of the study are:

- to identify social, psychological, and cultural problems Ukrainian youth face today;
- to evaluate the potential of this topic for developing linguistic, translation, and intercultural competence;

- to offer classroom activities and translation tasks based on authentic discourse of Ukrainian youth;
- to outline translation challenges related to culturally marked language and suggest strategies to address them.

Literature overview

Language and culture are deeply connected, and this connection matters enormously for both language teaching and translation work. Language is not just a collection of grammar rules and vocabulary. Instead, language carries cultural meaning; it's how people share, challenge, and reshape what matters to them culturally.

Michael Byram developed a model for intercultural communicative competence that really gets at this point. He argued that knowing a language is not enough; one must also understand and work with cultural meanings. His framework lays out what knowledge, skills, and attitudes people need to engage meaningfully with cultural differences: *Intercultural communicative competence requires not only knowledge of the grammar of a language, but also knowledge of the social context in which that language is used: the values, beliefs, and behaviours of the interlocutors. The learner needs the skills to interpret and relate cultural meanings, and the attitudes of openness and curiosity about the other* [1, p.57]. This is especially important for translators, who constantly move between different languages and ways of seeing the world.

Claire Kramersch [2] picked up on these ideas when she introduced "symbolic competence", basically how language learners create and understand meanings wrapped up in cultural symbols and stories. What both scholars are saying is that translation training needs to go beyond just finding equivalent words and phrases. It needs to tackle the messy, complicated work of bridging cultures.

The big challenge for teachers is figuring out how to give students the tools they need to spot cultural references, understand social norms, and grasp the historical background that shapes how people communicate.

Translation scholars have been wrestling with these same issues. Lawrence Venuti [4] pointed out that translation is never neutral; it is always political. When translators work, they have to decide whether to make the source text feel familiar to readers in the target culture (domestication) or keep its foreign elements intact (foreignization). Juliane House [5] made a similar argument, saying one cannot judge translation quality by looking at language accuracy. Translation quality goes beyond simple linguistic accuracy. Good translation assessment demands that translators recognize the cultural forces behind the original text and stay true to what the author wanted to communicate. This matters most when dealing with writing from war zones, traumatic situations, or places where politics have turned violent, contexts where the very language bears the marks of pain, defiance, or mourning. Here, words carry the burden of lived experience each term embodies personal and shared histories that resist straightforward conversion into another language.

Despite this theoretical understanding, translation education has been slow to catch up. Traditional training focuses heavily on formal structures, technical skills, and standard text types. Students get little guidance on handling emotionally charged, politically sensitive, or culturally complex discourse. This gap is particularly obvious in Ukraine right now, where the ongoing war has changed not just how people live, but how young people express their identities, fears, and hopes.

The war's psychological and social impact on Ukrainian youth is well-documented [6]. More recent studies from the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research and UNICEF [7] confirm that psychological distress among young people has increased dramatically. Displacement, family separation, and the constant threat of violence have made things worse.

Education has been severely disrupted, too. Many students face lengthy school interruptions, poor online learning conditions, or complete disengagement from formal

education. These experiences inevitably shape how young Ukrainians use language, filling their stories with trauma, resistance, and a reimagined sense of what it means to be Ukrainian.

These linguistic and cultural shifts mean translation educators need to rethink how they teach. Some recent research reveals firsthand experiences of teaching English in wartime Ukraine, highlighting the resilience of educators, the creative methods they employ, and the forms of emotional support offered to students under extraordinary circumstances [8]. These observations can be correlated with Darla Deardorff's [3] model of intercultural competence, which offers a relevant framework for understanding how such strategies develop in response to social and cultural challenges. It outlines how people develop cultural self-awareness, knowledge, and interpretive skills. While it was initially designed for international mobility contexts, it works equally well for domestic situations where cultural encounters are shaped by internal diversity and crisis.

In Ukraine, where traditional academic exchange opportunities are limited, alternative teaching strategies become particularly valuable. Virtual exchanges, digital storytelling, and using authentic texts all gain special relevance, as scholars like Robert O'Dowd [9], Alvino Fantini and Tirmizi [10] have shown.

Looking at post-conflict societies provides additional insights. Studies of young people in the Balkans following the conflicts of the 1990s show enduring psychological and social difficulties [11]: interrupted schooling, questions about identity, and fewer employment opportunities. Yet this research also demonstrates how resilient these young people can be. Many become involved in civic movements and create cultural works to regain agency in their circumstances.

Translating such discourse requires careful attention to these aspects in order to convey not only the message but also the social and cultural context embedded in the text.

The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework offers valuable teaching tools. Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters [12] and Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie St John [13] promoted ESP as a learner-centered approach tailored to the specific communication needs of particular professions. For translation programs, this approach requires building courses around authentic texts that reflect current social and political realities. Personal blogs, social media content, public health materials, and accounts from displaced people offer more than just language practice; they represent cultural spaces where meaning gets constructed, spaces that future translators need to understand.

Mona Baker [14] argues that narrative should play a central role in training translators. Her research shows that when students work with personal stories, memoirs, and recorded testimonies, they develop ethical awareness and empathy, which becomes crucial when encountering texts about human pain and survival. When translation students work with stories from Ukrainian youth, they gain more than language skills, they develop an understanding of their profession's moral responsibilities.

Research Methods and Materials

The research is based a linguo-cultural approach. The material comprises texts produced after 2022, including interviews, personal reflections, blog entries, and social media content gathered from open platforms. The material reflects different areas of life: studies, employment, emotional well-being, participation in social initiatives, migration experiences, and reflections on personal and national futures.

The material was examined through discourse analysis: specific problems framed in language, personal stories, lexemes and phrases appropriate for 1 year students. In parallel, content analysis was used to classify the most recurring issues and themes found in these narratives. In addition, content analysis was applied to systematize the most frequent problems mentioned across the collected texts.

The findings formed the basis for creating teaching materials aimed at students of English Philology and Translation.

Results

Thematic analysis of discourse produced by Ukrainian youth amidst the ongoing war and social instability offers valuable insights into their lived experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies. Based on a wide range of qualitative data, including interviews, focus group discussions, social media exchanges, and personal narratives, the study uncovers recurring patterns that capture the shifting worldviews, aspirations, and concerns of this generation.

In the Ukrainian context, two main themes emerge: resilience and uncertainty. Resilience is a certain ability of young people to adapt to hardships, to find coping strategies, to unite with others, and to strengthen their national identity under war conditions. And this ability is deliberately formed, developed, maintained. So we may say that resilience is not only an internal trait but also a social mechanism that helps to preserve stability and continuity in crisis situations. Uncertainty, in its turn, is connected with disrupted education, precarious employment opportunities, and constant anxiety about the future. Uncertainty is not just an abstract feeling but a real social condition that affects life planning, professional aspirations, and personal choices of young people.

Both resilience and uncertainty have been identified as the main themes through a specific analytical process. This process included familiarization with the material, coding, identification of recurrent patterns, and further refinement of the results. Each stage of analysis was necessary to make the collected material more concrete, to see the key tendencies in the experiences of Ukrainian youth. The insights received can be used for developing policies aimed at supporting youth, for designing educational innovations, and for providing psychosocial assistance. It is essential to take into account that the situation of war requires new approaches to education, employment, and psychological support that would correspond to the specific needs of this demographic group.

Education. Education is a certain sphere that becomes a central concern for young Ukrainians. And this concern is caused by profound disruptions that the war has brought to their educational experience. Many young people have faced interrupted schooling, displacement, or sudden transition to unstable online learning. And this transition has revealed disparities in access to reliable internet, availability of digital devices, and sufficient level of digital literacy both among students and teachers. As a result, such conditions have inevitably influenced engagement in learning and the overall outcomes of education.

Education is often re-evaluated by young people in a very pragmatic way. Education is a certain sphere that is being re-evaluated by young people in a very pragmatic way. And this re-evaluation is caused by the war. Education or professional development abroad is seen not only as a possibility to grow academically but as a certain strategy aimed at achieving personal stability in a fragmented socio-political context. And this strategy is consciously chosen. It is connected with the desire to have normal life, to get marketable skills, and to secure self-sufficiency in the future. And this is what the participants themselves say. As one of them noted in the interview: *Studying abroad is not just about getting a diploma anymore. It's about being safe, having prospects, and feeling like life is moving forward.* This answer shows that education is no longer perceived only as a formal stage in life, but as a tool that may help to adapt, survive, and build a stable future in the reality of war.

Employment and Economic Concerns. Employment is a certain topic that constantly appears in the discourse of young people. And this topic is always connected with economic insecurity which is shaped by the destruction of infrastructure, inflation, and devaluation of the national currency. Many participants voice their frustration with the lack of job opportunities and express fears about long-term financial instability. And these fears are not occasional, they are permanent. In the discourse we see references to survival strategies: informal employment, retraining, or migration for economic reasons. As one participant said: *You can't think long-term when you don't know if your job will exist next month or if your city will still be standing.* This

quotation shows the situation of economic precarity in which young people live and plan their future.

These reflections highlight the psychological burden of economic instability and the necessity of equipping young people with adaptable skills for an uncertain labor market.

Employment is a certain topic that constantly emerges in the discourse of young people. And this topic is closely connected with economic insecurity caused by the destruction of infrastructure, inflation, and currency devaluation. Many young people speak about the lack of job opportunities and express fears concerning long-term financial instability. In their discourse we often find references to survival strategies. These strategies are mostly represented by informal employment, retraining, and migration for economic reasons. And this is what the participants themselves say. As one of them noted in the interview: *You can't think long-term when you don't know if your job will exist next month or if your city will still be standing.* So we may see that economic insecurity is not only a social problem. It is also a psychological burden which young people have to carry while trying to plan their lives and think about the future. It forms a certain background against which young people plan their lives and evaluate their prospects. That is why it is important to provide them with adaptable skills that may help to survive in an unpredictable labour market.

Psychological well-being is another theme that permeates youth discourse. Expressions of stress, anxiety, and fatigue are very common. And these feelings are directly connected with the constant insecurity of war. At the same time, participants describe how they try to cope with these conditions. They seek psychological support from their families, peers, communities, and, when possible, professional services. Narratives reveal a certain duality: on the one hand, there is the cumulative burden of displacement, violence, and trauma; on the other hand, there are adaptive strategies of mental resilience. As one social media post says: *We don't have the luxury to fall apart completely. We've learned to function with the anxiety always there, like background noise.* This quotation shows that psychological well-being is being reconstructed under war conditions. And this experience is important to consider when developing psychosocial interventions that would respond to the specific needs of youth living in conflict.

Civic Engagement. Civic engagement is a certain feature that characterizes the discourse of Ukrainian youth. And this feature is represented through social activism, volunteering, participation in community support, and grassroots initiatives. Young people do not perceive such engagement as only a response to immediate needs. It is rather a form of agency, a way to assert their national identity and to contribute to the defence of the country. As one of the student activists noted: *Volunteering is not just help; it's how we fight for our country in our own way.*

So we may say that young people do not see themselves as passive victims of war. They position themselves as active social actors who contribute to the resilience and reconstruction of the country.

Identity is a certain theme that is deeply reflected upon by young people. And this reflection concerns the sense of belonging and cultural values. The war has intensified young people's engagement with their national identity, cultural heritage, and linguistic traditions. At the same time, many of them speak about a certain sense of global belonging. And this sense is being shaped by transnational experiences and digital connectivity. For some participants this re-evaluation means a stronger appreciation of national symbols and the Ukrainian language. Others, on the contrary, tend to reassess traditional norms and adapt them to the new realities. And this is what the participants themselves say. As one of them noted: *I feel more Ukrainian than ever, but I also realize how important it is to be part of the global conversation.* So, we may see that identity is not something static. It is being constantly negotiated and reconstructed under the conditions of war.

Implications for Translator Training. These observations are important for translator training. The findings show that student translators need to engage deeply with the linguistic

and cultural dimensions of youth discourse. There are three main areas that should be included in translator education.

First, it is necessary to work with lexical items and metaphors. These are high-frequency words, neologisms, and metaphors that appear in youth discourse. For example, there are phrases like "background noise," which is used to describe constant anxiety, or "digital trench," which is used to define online solidarity spaces. And these phrases are not neutral. They have cultural and emotional resonance. That is why the translator has to preserve not only the meaning of such expressions but also their emotional colouring and cultural specificity.

Second, it is important to understand narrative structures. Young people often narrate their experiences through certain arcs: displacement, resilience, activism. A translator should know these patterns to keep the integrity and emotional rhythm of the source text.

Third, culturally marked vocabulary and idioms should be given special attention. Ukrainian discourse of war is full of such expressions that have no direct equivalents in other languages. Translators must combine linguistic competence with cultural sensitivity to avoid loss of meaning or misinterpretation. Student translators face common challenges. One of them is rendering culturally specific concepts. For instance, the word *peremoga* (victory) is not just a literal victory. It includes hopes for national recovery and personal success. Another challenge is interpreting emotional and psychological nuances. And these nuances include trauma, hope, defiance. Such things cannot be translated mechanically. They require empathy and understanding of the context. Otherwise, recurring errors appear — literal translation, wrong tone, cultural misinterpretation. These mistakes often occur when the translator does not engage sufficiently with the socio-cultural background of the text.

There are concrete examples that show how deep these challenges are. For instance, the metaphor "живемо на пороховій бочці" (*we live on a powder keg*) describes a constant threat of explosion and unpredictability. Translating it literally may lead to the loss of emotional impact. There is also the idiom "тримати стрій" ("to hold the line"). And though it comes from military language, it also means personal endurance and collective resilience. Without cultural explanation this meaning may disappear in translation.

To help students overcome these challenges, special pedagogical innovations have been introduced. These include practical translation tasks based on authentic texts: blogs, social media posts, interviews. Vocabulary exercises focus on current slang, metaphors, and culturally loaded terms. Cultural interpretation workshops are also organized. They help students to discuss socio-political and emotional contexts of texts.

These methods are not static. They are regularly improved based on systematic evaluation, feedback from students, analysis of frequent translation errors, and results of formative assessments. Preliminary data show that students become more sensitive to cultural nuances and better handle emotionally complex content. Further development of such teaching materials is necessary to prepare translators who can competently work with wartime and post-war discourse.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the potential of a linguo-cultural approach in teaching translation to first-year students of English Philology and Translation by engaging them with the discourse of Ukrainian youth and the problems they articulate in the current socio-cultural context. The findings confirmed that the social, psychological, and cultural challenges faced by young Ukrainians, such as disrupted education, economic insecurity, psychological distress, civic activism, and identity shifts, are deeply embedded in their language practices.

Thematic analysis is a method that reveals the complexity of youth discourse. And this complexity is characterised by cultural specificity, emotional depth, and symbolic meanings. So we may say that youth discourse is not neutral. It contains culturally marked expressions, metaphors, and emotionally nuanced content. And all these features present considerable

challenges for novice translators. They have to render not only the meaning but also the cultural background and emotional colouring of the text. The students' recurring difficulties, such as literalism and cultural misinterpretation, underscore the need for targeted pedagogical interventions.

The pedagogical strategies proposed in this study, working with authentic texts, focusing on vocabulary exercises related to contemporary youth language, and organizing cultural interpretation workshops, have demonstrated their value in developing linguistic, cultural, and intercultural competences. Integrating the discourse of Ukrainian youth into translator training is a certain step that not only improves students' professional translation skills. It also fosters cultural awareness and develops reflective practices. So, we may say that such integration helps future translators to work not only with language but also with culture and emotions that stand behind the text.

Further research can focus on the development of questionnaires that will capture students' perceptions of the linguistic, cultural, and emotional complexities encountered when translating texts about youth problems.

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