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CONVEYING THE SYMBOLS OF LYUBA YAKIM- CHUK'S POETRY, 'APRICOTS OF DONBAS', IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Abstract

ВІДТВОРЕННЯ СИМВОЛІВ ПОЕЗІЇ ЛЮБОВІ ЯКИМЧУК В АНГЛІЙСЬКОМУ ПЕРЕКЛАДІ (на прикладі збірки «Абрикоси Донбасу»)

Background. *Although the translation of modern Ukrainian poetry has been widely studied, the specific challenge of conveying symbols in Lyuba Yakimchuk's expressionistic poems has yet to be explored.*

Contribution to the research field. *The present study raises intriguing questions about the possibility of translating symbols in poetry, especially those deeply culturally rooted.*

Purpose. *To analyse how the author uses various symbols in her poetry, decipher their meaning and compare them with how they have been conveyed in English with some conclusions about the equivalency of the chosen options.*

Methods. *This research applies descriptive-analytical and comparative methods, with original Ukrainian poems selected using a sampling technique.*

Results. *The poems in Lyuba Yakimchuk's collection "Apricots of Donbas" are written in blank verse. However, this fact does not solve the problem of conveying the form and meaning in the English translation since symbolism in her works is sometimes expressed through graphic means, such as split words and lines or phonological means (e.g., alliteration). The main peculiarity is the contextual nature of symbols, as some are related to a particular place (the author's hometown, Pervomaisk of Luhansk Oblast) or the tragic historical events that began in the east of Ukraine in 2014. All these peculiarities make conveying such symbols in English quite challenging and allow us to conclude about partial untranslatability in some cases.*

Discussion. *This research has shown that poems in the collection "Apricots of Donbas" by Lyuba Yakimchuk are full of vivid and memorable symbols representing her hometown Pervomaisk and her native Luhansk Oblast (apricots, coal mines, earth, water, terricones, ashtray), war (caterpillar, Yum), family and relations with them (blood, phone, cup), and symbolic colours (black, red, white). Though many symbols used in the poems are deeply related to a specific cultural and historical context, the translators mostly managed to convey their meaning in English by using such translation strategies as domestication and foreignization. Symbols tied to the phonological and morphological features of the Ukrainian language presented significant challenges, resulting in a partial loss of semantic load.*

Future research will explore how symbols in contemporary Ukrainian poetry written after February 24, 2022, reflect the current events in Ukraine.

Keywords: symbol, expressionism, translation of poetry, Lyuba Yakimchuk, the collection "Apricots of Donbas".

У статті проаналізовано особливості англomовного перекладу символів, представлених у поезіях збірки Любові Якимчук «Абрикоси Донбасу». З'ясовано, що переважна більшість символів є контекстуально-обумовленими, тобто пов'язаними або з географічними, або з історичними, або з культурними особливостями, що значно ускладнило процес їх перекладу. Окремі труднощі викликали символи, що базуються на фонографічних особливостях української мови, що зробило їх майже неперекладними з погляду форми і призвело до часткової втрати смислу.

Ключові слова: символ, експресіонізм, переклад поезії, Любов Якимчук, збірка «Абрикоси Донбасу».

1. Introduction

Interest in Ukrainian history and culture has dramatically increased over the past two and a half years. Though the events that have led to this interest are more than tragic and disastrous, we cannot ignore that now Ukrainians have more opportunities to promote their culture worldwide. One of the most potent sources of telling the world about our history, worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, and values is literature, particularly poetry. Being a concentration of bright images, influential stylistic means, and vivid symbols, poetry can effectively convey the author's deep feelings and emotions and how they perceive and speculate about the world, people, and events surrounding them. Speaking about one of the biggest challenges in conveying these inner senses and ideas behind symbols to people all around the globe, it is worth mentioning translation problems. As most present-day prose and poetry are translated into English as the language of international communication, it can be extremely challenging to interpret and present the sense using English without distorting it. Therefore, the present research focuses on studying the ways and means used to convey the symbols and their meanings in the collection of poems "Apricots of Donbas" by a prominent modern Ukrainian writer Lyuba Yakimchuk.

2. Theoretical Background

Outstanding linguists (Ch. Peirce, E. Sapir, O. Potebnia, O. Selivanova) and philosophers (E. Cassirer, C. Jung, A. Schopenhauer, H.-G. Gadamer) have used the concept of "symbol" in their studies.

For this study, we consider a symbol a linguistic sign with a deeper meaning than its literal interpretation. It is a crucial element for revealing the subject matter of a piece of art, reflecting the culture and history with which it is connected. As Carl Jung notes, "a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning" (Jung, 1964, p. 55). Symbols in Lyuba Yakimchuk's poetry perform not just a literary function; they reflect the political and social realities in the text. Symbols in the "Apricots of Donbas" include such lexemes as coal, water, earth, apricots, blood, earth, white, black, red, and metal. Due to their contextual load, they verbalise the direct meaning and convey deeper symbolic connotations, particularly the themes of war, death, loss, and family. In his turn, E. Cassirer believed that the ability to symbolise is a distinguishing characteristic of a human being, and they perceive reality

through specific symbolic meaning; therefore, symbols are both sensuous and intellectual (The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. I, 1953, pp. 107–111), and H.-G. Gadamer stated that “symbol connotes (explicitly) what we recognise implicitly” (Gadamer, 1986, p. 31).

However, the symbol in fiction can be confused with the similar concept of an image. They are quite similar in structure and connect private and general, as well as a concrete subject and an abstract idea. They are both context-related, and the attempt to consider them outside the given cultural context will lead to the loss of their meaning. Louis Cazamian says that “a symbol is an indirect representation of a thing; not an image of the thing itself, but some other image, whose power is such that when we see it, we do — or may think — of the object... the recognition of a symbol is an intuitive inference” (Cazamian, 1936, p. 520).

Symbols in Yakymchuk’s poetry have a stable, multilevel meaning that goes beyond the limits of one text and represents cultural and historical processes. Metaphors and images can be temporary and contextual means of artistic expression. Symbols, by contrast, are stable markers of culture that should retain their meaning even when translated.

Oleksandr Potebnia pioneered linguistic anthropology, investigating the interconnections between language, cognition, and symbolism. His work emphasises the function of symbols as intermediaries between reality and its apprehension by a linguistic subject. Oleksandr Potebnia posited that symbols are not merely elements of language but also an indispensable component of cognitive processes. They act as a conduit between the external and internal realms of a linguistic personality, enabling them to interpret their surrounding reality through the lens of cultural connotations and emotional associations (Potebnya, 1993, p. 45). This concept is exemplified by the use of symbols in Lyuba Yakymchuk’s poetry, where the imagery of apricots and terricones not only evoke the landscape of Donbas but also serve to symbolise fundamental aspects of human experiences, such as life, death, and heritage.

In his work, Arthur Schopenhauer emphasised the role of volition and perception in shaping the world. Schopenhauer’s concept of “will” as a driving force can be employed to analyse the symbols in the poems. War and death are depicted as elements of will that exert influence over individuals and their destinies. Schopenhauer observed that the world can be regarded as a product of our perception and volition, which inform our perception of the surrounding reality (Schopenhauer, 1969, p. 78). In light of this concept, an analysis of the

symbols in Yakymchuk's poems is conducted not merely as representations of external occurrences but also as manifestations of an intrinsic determination to live, fight, and survive.

When discussing successful translation, we usually use the terms adequacy and equivalency. However, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida introduced one more concept, encompassing a broader spectrum of features characterising a successful translation. It is the modifier "relevant". He states that "a relevant translation would therefore be, quite simply, a good translation, a translation that does what one expects of it, in short, a version that performs its mission, honours its debt and does its job or its duty while inscribing in the receiving language the most relevant equivalent for an original, the language that is the most right, appropriate, pertinent, adequate, opportune, pointed, univocal, idiomatic, and so on" (Derrida, 2001, p. 177). If we are talking about how symbols are conveyed in the other language, the concept of relevance would be more appropriate since it is about the most accurate equivalent of an original.

In addition to the traditional concepts of defining a symbol, contemporary translation studies emphasise the importance of selecting appropriate translation strategies for culturally specific elements, namely symbols. Ž. Gavrilović and O. Kurteš posit that when translating literary texts, it is imperative to utilise strategies that consider the cultural load of symbols, particularly subjecting the text to the procedures of "domestication" and "foreignisation" (Gavrilović & Kurteš, 2022, p. 23). M. Jurewicz states that while dealing with symbols in translation, "the translator's task is to guess the meaning of a given symbol in a particular context in which the symbol acquires its meaning. This is obviously connected with the need for interpretation, and thus there is always the problem of whether the assumed interpretation corresponds not only to the translator himself but also to other people who are the receivers of the symbol in a given situation" (Jurewicz, 2016, p. 142). In the context of translating Lyuba Yakymchuk's poetry, this approach is of paramount importance, as lexemes such as "coal", "apricots", and "terricones" are integral to the cultural identity of Donbas and must be conveyed accurately in translation.

Speaking about Ukrainian war poetry as a new genre of Ukrainian literature, the translators Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky say that "poets shift our attention to the domain of the Self that survives, and the cost of its survival. One mode of survival involves the reconstitution of identity in response to symbolic changes" (Maksymchuk & Rosochinsky, 2022). The most

challenging task in conveying the meaning of symbols is that their meaning is usually contextual. It refers not only to the linguistic but also to the metalinguistic context. For instance, a chestnut tree may mean nothing to a foreigner, but most Ukrainians associate it with the capital city of Kyiv. The writer's task is to ensure that the setting, characters, and circumstances help them make their symbols "speak" about the desired meaning. However, the reader may find their associations depending on their experience and worldview, so the meaning invested in the symbol by the poet may be misinterpreted.

Therefore, translators should be careful while dealing with symbols in poetry to avoid misleading the target audience. In this way, "the meaning of a symbol cannot be deciphered as a simple effort of the mind; it exists in the collective consciousness of a certain cultural group, including ethnic groups, in a ready-made form and is withdrawn when needed" (Selivanova, 2010, p. 646). The researcher states that a symbol is a stable, functional category of culture and that its semiotic nature is quite complicated because it combines different conceptual areas based on the underlying associations and holds culture in itself (Selivanova, 2010, p. 646).

This study employs a combination of descriptive and analytical, as well as comparative approaches. The principal aim of this study is to examine the symbols present in Lyuba Yakimchuk's "Apricots of Donbas", and to analyse the methods through which they are conveyed in the English language. The symbols for analysis were selected using a sampling method that involved the identification of the most representative symbols, which were deemed to have cultural, historical, and linguistic relevance in terms of the conceptual load of the collection.

The following methods were employed to analyse the symbols in the source texts and their English translations:

- a descriptive-analytical approach was applied to describe each symbol in the original text's context and to study its semantic load and cultural significance;
- a comparative analysis determined the correlation between the original Ukrainian symbols and their English equivalents.

3. Data

The research materials included 47 poems from the "Apricots of Donbas" collection, published in 2021 and translated into English by Oksana Maksymchuk, Max Rosochinsky, and Svetlana Lavochnikina. In total, 29 key symbols

were selected for analysis, conceptualising themes and motifs of the collection, such as war, native land, family ties, and colours (black, white, red). The selection was made using the criteria of frequency, relevance of meaning, and difficulty in conveying meaning in the translated text.

4. Lyuba Yakimchuk's expressionistic poetry

Olena Kytsan states that the poems of Lyuba Yakimchuk are bright representatives of expressionism (Kytsan, 2017, pp. 36–37). She names such features of expressionist poetry at the content level as expression equated with 'explosion'; tragedy (loss and collapse of life); deformation and deconstruction of the world (the effect of chaos, ruin, apocalypses); poetics of screaming, agony; dominance of the motifs of death, war and loneliness; symbolism; irrationality, interest in mystical experiences, the inner world of man and the painful manifestations of their psyche; aesthetics of the ugly; contrast of dark and light colours, light and shadow (Kytsan, 2017, p. 38). These can be found in Lyuba Yakimchuk's poetry, represented in symbols with a unique emotional significance.

Symbols of hometown and native land

The first part of Lyuba Yakimchuk's "Apricots of Donbas" deals with the descriptions of her hometown of Pervomaïsk in Luhansk Oblast and the fate and hard work of miners. The first poem, «Вугілля обличчя», contains the symbol of a hard miner's work imprinted in the face and character of the author's father. In English, the title of this poem is "the coalface". The definite article here emphasises that the long poem (as the author calls it) will describe a particular person. The tough work of miners is reflected in the form of marks left on the face of the character's father (1):

- (1) *«його обличчя як вугілля — / із відтиском / польового хвоща допотопного / роками розтоптане», «а щоки його рівчакми / порубала шахта»* (Yakimchuk, 2021, p. 36) — *"his face, like coal — / with a print / of an antediluvian field horsetail / trampled by years", "his cheeks are trenches / chopped up by the mine"* (Yakimchuk, 2021, p. 37).

The translators have chosen such expressive verbs as "trampled" for «розтоптане», which means to step heavily on something or someone, causing damage, and "chopped up" for «порубала» which is unlike a typical "cut" has the meaning of dividing into pieces, i.e., damaging, destroying like hard labour destroys not only a person's health but also life. These

verbs may be used to describe the processes of coal emergence and coal mining.

Another powerful symbol in this poem is a terricone (a slag heap). It is one of Donbas' symbols that can be easily recognised and seen from a distance. Though the word “terricone” is absent in English dictionaries, in the poem, it is a lacuna that has deep cultural meaning for the character. Besides, this word is used to preserve alliteration of the sound [p] — [r] used by the author to emphasise the might and danger (2):

- (2) *адесь там високо / стоїть терикон / гарчить терикон / як дракон* — “and somewhere high up / there stands a terricone / the terricone snarling / like a dragon” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 36–37).

The translators found appropriate words with [r] to keep this stylistic device, though this sound is more distinct in English than in Ukrainian. It is important to note, however, that while the lexeme “terricone” is retained, its symbolic resonance associated with Donbas and the identity of miners may be less impactful for English readers unfamiliar with the cultural significance of slag heaps. This example demonstrates the partial loss of symbolism due to cultural barriers.

The terricone as a symbol of Donbas is also present in the following poem called «Терикони грудей» — “The Terricones of Breasts”. The earth represented in the form of mine symbolises several existential notions such as death, love, and motherhood. The descent into the mine is associated with the inversion of time, a return to the mother's womb, and deeper into the archaeological layer of memory. The earth in “Apricots of Donbas” does not symbolise the birth of new life but rather a cruel underground creature that can “swallow” those who venture to disturb it. However, it is not only about the earth; it is about underground and all the possible connotations of this word, i.e., hell, the otherworld of dead ancestors, in which the memory of the earth becomes a fern imprint on a piece of coal (3):

- (3) *«якщо залізи на терикон / і провалитись йому під ковдру / точніше — в пряму кишку»* — “climb up the terricone / and tumble under its blanket / namely, down its colon” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 42–43).

The translation has a very bright opposition, “up” and “down”, that is not directly used in the original but adds up to the meaning in the translation.

In the other poem called «казка моєї бабусі» — “my grandmother's fairytale”, we can see the mine as a symbol of motherhood and a lover at the same time (4):

- (4) *«ця шахта ковтне тебе / ця красуня з темною шкірою / кам'яна...», «вона народить тобі мертве море / її талія не шістдесят / а груди обвисли до пояса / не заходь у неї / можеш не повернутися / мов дитина в матері / яка не хоче народжувати» — “this coal mine will swallow you / this ebony beauty / of stone...”*, “she’ll give birth to a dead sea / her waist is not sixty / her breasts droop to her midriff / don’t come inside / you might not return / like a child of a mother / who doesn’t want to give birth” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 48–49).

An unusual word is chosen for the Ukrainian «красуня з темною шкірою» as it is represented in the text by the word “ebony” that has not only the meaning of a dark skin but also the meaning of a tough dark wood of a tropical tree. Since coal is hardened plants, including trees, this word seems to represent the main idea of a mine quite well.

Water, unlike earth, also becomes a visible and recognisable symbol in this cycle. At the deepest depths of this underworld lies the sea, which hardens to salt and tears and concentrates in lumps of coal, being both itself and the memory of itself because underground time lies in layers. The quintessence of the earth — coal — contains the fluid memory of water (Borysiuk, 2015, pp. 35–36). In the poem «книга ангелів» — “the book of angels”, the sea sends us back to prehistoric times, to the origins of coal, when there were no humans, only angles (5):

- (5) *«колись тут було море / росла гігантична трава / на ній колихалися ангели / трава слухала їхні розмови / запам’ятовувала слова / і пресувалася в торф / він витискав з себе воду / ставав суттю всього» — “once, here was a sea / here grew gigantic grass / on it, angels swayed / the grass listened to their talk / committed the words to memory / and pressed itself into turf / the turf squeezed out its water / became the essence of the universe”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 52–53).

In the translation, we can see the specification of the word «всього» as “universe” that is more comprehensive and specific in meaning.

In the poem “The Terricones of Breast” we can see that water is poisonous (6):

- (6) *«якщо спуститися в шахти / або скупатися в отруйних водах відстійників» — “if you go down into the mine / or bathe in the poisoned waters / of the sumps”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 42–43).

The past participle form of the word «отруйний» — “poisoned” is used to emphasise that it is not poisonous by its nature; it was poisoned by people who work in mines. We can also see the dead sea («мертве море»), and the underground sea («підземне море») in the poem “My Grandmother’s Fairytale”.

Both these seas symbolise death where no living being can survive. Still, miners go down these seas, risking their lives with the possibility of no return.

In Lyuba Yakimchuk's poem «Абрикоси у Касках» — “Apricots in Hard Hats”, dead miners become apricots; their yellow hard hats resemble apricots so much. She writes about 20 young miners who tragically died in the mine. The wilted apricot blossom symbolises their life that quickly ended (7):

- (7) *«відцвіли абрикоси Донбасу / відтінками неба усіма / абрикоси вдягнули каски / минула весна» — “the apricot blossoms of the Donbas / wilted in all hues of the sky / the apricots put on hard hats / the spring already passed by”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 44–45), *their death — “like uprooted apricot trees” — «як абрикосові дерева / вирвані з корінням»* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 44–45).

Their afterlife is embodied in apricot fruits and tales told by grandmothers to their grandchildren (8):

- (8) *«і тепер бабусі онукам / розказують казку / про абрикоси / у касках» — “and now grannies tell / their grandkids a tale / of apricots wearing hard hats”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 46–47).

While the significance of apricots as a symbol of miners' lives is accurately conveyed, the socio-cultural context in which apricots are associated with life and death is not as pertinent to English-speaking readers, resulting in a partial loss of symbolic depth.

In one more poem of the cycle “Decomposition” called «Повертання» — “The Return” we will reencounter apricots as a symbol of hometown (9):

- (9) *«ми підємо й ніжки, хоч би були босими / як не знайдемо дому там, де ми залишили / побудуєм дім понад абрикосами / з неба синього, із хмар пишних» — “we will walk back, even with bare feet / if we don't find our home in the place where we left it / we will build another one in an apricot tree / out of luscious clouds, out of azure ether”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 114–115).

The words used in the translation denote the sky and clouds, which are poetic and elevated. They show high respect and appreciation for the home and are willing to return in any case. The same apricots appear in the poem «Танець еміграції» — “Asylum, a Dance” from the cycle «Небілі вірші» — “Unfree Verses”. Here the apricot tree becomes a symbol of resilience and a tight connection with the home where the character just tries to survive (10):

- (10) *«абрикоса / стоїть сама-одна під териконом / а коли прилітає вітер / танцює з цим пройдисвітлом так / що ось-ось відірветься від землі / її еміграція — це танець / відчайдушний і ризикований / такий же довгий / як абрикосове*

коріння / як абрикосове життя» — “she stands all alone by a slag heap / and when the wind comes / she does her wild moves / as if she’s ready to uproot herself, to fly / away — to a better place/asylum, a dance / desperate and risky / as long as an apricot tree root / as long as the apricot tree’s / very life” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 130–131).

The translators choose not the simple international word, “immigration”, but “asylum”, which, except for escaping the country because of danger, also means a hospital for people with a mental illness. Staying in a dangerous place and unwilling to leave may seem mad for some people. But still, the apricot does not want to leave the place where her roots belong. The epithet used for the wind (пройдисвітом) is absent in translation, though it is not the keyword in terms of sense. The word “terricone” translated like this in the previous poems has become just “a slag heap” in this work. This happens because it is about neither coalmines nor miners in this poem, so the word “terricone” loses its symbolic meaning.

The hometown and the home itself are represented by an ashtray in the poem of the same name («попільничка» in Ukrainian), the symbolic meaning of which is disclosed in the appearance of the city destroyed by war (11):

- (11) *«тепер це не будинок / тепер це не дім... це тільки велика / чорна / кінтява / попільничка» — “no longer a building / no longer a home... now — a big / sooty / ashtray” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 126–127).*

Two adjectives from the original become one comprising both meanings “sooty”. The translators also emphasised at the poem’s beginning that the words “no longer” show the changes and how the house used to be.

Symbols of war

One of the most striking symbols can be found in the cycle «Ням і війна» — “Yum and War”. Yum, as a symbol of war, has several meanings. First, it resembles a toddler’s sound while learning to speak. In fact, in the poems of this cycle, Yum is presented as a small child playing his horrifying game of war. The second meaning of this exclamation is to express pleasure at eating or at the prospect of eating a particular food. As an insatiable creature, the war tries to “gobble” everything around. As I. Borysiuk states, a strange “Yum” is a mythological childish figure creating a new reality. The childhood represented by Yam manifests itself in his games with ‘tanks’ and guns and in his search for his mother. Yum is the one who invents enemies, the one who is afraid, the one who drops bombs on the city, and who hides

under the covers. The ontological orphanhood in the Yum cycle is fundamentally insurmountable, as it means a person's self-lockedness in childhood fears, adult confusion, pain, and transferred guilt, a schizophrenic illusion of The Other Self, responsible for the collapse of the world (Borysiuk, 2015, pp. 35–36).

In the poem «З'являється Ням» — “Yum Appears”, the author describes him as follows (12):

- (12) *«він не вмів розмовляти / не вмів писати-читати та все інше властиве людині»* (Yakimchuk, 2021, p. 58) — “*he didn't know how to talk/read or write or anything else typical of a human being*” (Yakimchuk, 2021, p. 59).

This description presents Yum as a creature with nothing to do with human beings. The TV and dreams used in this poem also symbolise the new reality that war brings and the attributes of Yum. Now he decides what a person will see (13):

- (13) *«– тепер ти будеш дивитися сни / а вони без реклами / а пульти я залишу собі / буду бавитись»* — “*from now on you'll be watching dreams / free of commercials / I'm keeping the remote for myself / to play with*” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 58–59).

The translation emphasises the duration of the process of watching dreams or nightmares of war broadcast by Yum with the help of the preposition “on”. The phrase “free of commercials” may hint at the word “freedom”, but it has an entirely different meaning in this very context. Commercials on TV give viewers some pause. There are no pauses, breaks, or time to catch your breath at war. “Free” does not mean something positive here; it is a non-stop horror.

In the poem «починається війна» — “war starts”, a game played by Yum symbolises the war. The contrast between a child's game and a frightening game of war is striking. Some kids play ‘wars’, and at first glance, it may seem that such a childish innocent game is depicted here. But the reality is different (14):

- (14) *«ламає лялькає руки-ноги / кидає солдатиків до комина / і вони горять синім полум'ям / танчики виставляє посеред кімнати / спрямовує гармати на всі сторони світу»* — “*he breaks arms and legs on the dolls / throws soldiers up the chimney / basking in their blue glow / he lines up tanks in the middle of the room / and points their guns at all parts of the world*” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 60–61).

In reality, dolls symbolise civilians who become casualties during combats; soldiers are “thrown” in the flame of war that is depicted as a chimney in the poem. The translators add one more detail — the word “bask”, which

means to lie or sit and enjoy the warmth. So, Yum destroys soldiers and enjoys the process and the warmth of the flame of war.

The state of a complete loss of ordinary people who are adults but still cannot figure out what is going on around them is symbolised by the game of hide-and-seek mentioned in the poem «Вигадування ворога» — “Making up the Enemy” (15):

- (15) *«а дорослі шукають його видумку / зазираючи під ліжко і в шафи / ніби довго не були вдома і там щось змінилося / ніби грають у піжмурки / і ніколи не настає їхня черга ховатися»* — “grown-up search for his invention / under their beds, in their wardrobes / as if they’d been away from home for a long time / and something changed while they were gone / as if they’re playing hide-and-seek / and their turn to hide never comes” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 62–63).

Yum makes up the enemy, creating chaos all around, but people fail to find at least any sense or reason behind the war that suddenly came and changed their traditional world and lifestyle.

One more poem where the state of anxiety and fear of a person is described is called «Листи не приходять» — “Letters Don’t Come” (16):

- (16) *«а серце гримає-гримає як дзигар цілий / а полужетарик-місяць, розгорнутий чашею / із зірками рук простягнутих / просять збутися / просять бути / згадують мою бабцю Марію»* — “but a heart thumps like a clock / the half-clock of the new moon / with stretched-out hands of stars / pleads with me to remember / my grandmother Maria” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 72–73).

The torture of waiting for letters, at least for some information about the close people separated from each other by war, is represented in the symbol of a clock and the night as the process of waiting is going on. However, in the English translation, two lines from the original poem have been lost, namely «просять збутися / просять бути» (literally “ask to come true, ask to be”). In the translated version, we have a perfectly matching verb, “pleads”, as it intensifies the stressful, long-awaited time and corresponds to the stretched-out hands that are usually raised when a person is praying. However, these two lines omitted in translation have a beautiful alliteration [б] («збутися-бути») that might be translated as “pleads to come true, pleads to be true” in order not to lose this parallelism.

The poem «Розкладання» — “Decomposition” is one of the most notable from a linguistic and stylistic point of view. It contains bright symbols embodied in words and syllables. Metal acts here as a symbol of death because it destroys everything around it and ‘decomposes’ people’s lives, fates, cities

and towns. Even sunflowers that have always been symbols of the sun and light become the symbols and witnesses of death, losing their light and warmth (17):

- (17) *«і поле соняхів опустило голови / вони стали чорні і сухі, як і я / вже страшенно стара / і я більше не Люба / лише ба» — “sunflowers dip their heads in the field / black and dried out, like me / I have gotten so very old / no longer Lyuba / just a ba”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 84–87).

The transformation of the author’s name, “*Lyuba*,” into the single syllable, “*ba*,” symbolises the process of ageing and the disintegration of identity. This disintegration is paralleled by the disintegration of cities like *Luhansk* and *Pervomaïsk*, as depicted in the poem (18):

- (18) *«не кажіть мені про якийсь там Луганськ / він давно лише ганськ / лу зрівняли з асфальтом червоним... і до нецька мені не дістатися» — “don’t talk to me about Luhansk / it’s long since turned into hansk / Lu had been razed to the ground / to the crimson pavement... and I can’t reach them, I can’t do netsk”; «Первомайськ розбомбили на перво і майськ» — “Pervomaïsk has been split into перво and maïsk”; «а де бальцево? / де моє бальцево?» — “and where’s my deb alts evo?”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 84–87).

The translators choose the corresponding verbs to emphasise this decomposition, such as “raze” and “split”. Italics also highlight these words because, at first glance, they may seem meaningless. However, in Ukrainian, they also have additional meanings: “do” in Donetsk has the meaning of the preposition “to”, “de” in Debaltseve means the adverb “where”, and Pervomaïsk splits into two separate but contextually related words “first” and “May”. Thus, the “decomposition” of the word turns out to be the language that most accurately reflects the reality of death and destruction.

The following poem of this cycle, «Збирання» — “Gathering”, also concerns the topic of war and death. In this poem, water, usually associated with life, simultaneously becomes the symbol of destruction — it will flood the mines and give birth to a new sea. But there will be no place for people (19):

- (19) *«і вода як любов / все поглине ковтком — / щоб уламки в одне зібрати / і народить там море / нове і живе / і народить нових / проте не людей / і вони попливуть як рибини / там, де люди уже не потрібні» — “and water like love / will swallow all in one gulp — / to gather all the shards in one / water will give birth to a sea / new and alive / the sea will give birth to new creatures / not people though / and they’ll swim like fish / to places where there is no more need of humans”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 88–89).

It can be noticed that in the original poem, each second line begins with “and”. It resembles the style of telling old tales and legends. In the translation, this peculiarity is omitted in some places, as lines mostly begin with subjects.

In the poem “Caterpillar”, the work with the literal and figurative meanings of the word allows creating an extremely accurate and true symbolic picture. This word has the same meanings in Ukrainian and English that makes it possible to use this word in its literal biological meaning as an insect destroying plants and figurative meaning of the tank caterpillar as a symbol of invasion, war, rape, and death (20):

- (20) *«та дивиться, як гусінь дожирає їхнє зелене місто» — “and watches a caterpillar devour their verdant town”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 100–101).

The combination of the literal (insect caterpillar) and metaphorical (tank caterpillar) gives rise to an eerie mythos of total, slow, and inevitable death destroying everything around.

Another poem, «Ніж» — “Knife,” has a perfect example of what some prominent scholars indicated as the untranslatability of poetry. The poem tells the story of the character’s confrontation with the enemies — both physical and moral. The character compares herself to the enemy using the comparative degree of adjectives that in Ukrainian is made with the help of the particle «ніж» (“than”). However, this word is also an absolute homonym to the word denoting weapon — “knife”. So, the double meaning of this word cannot be reflected in English, and only the weapon’s name remains. However, one line is incredibly successfully translated in a metaphorical way (21):

- (21) *«і в кожного своє ніж / і в кожного свій ніж» — “and each has their own ‘but’ / and each has their cut”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 110–111).

Symbolic colours

The next cycle, called “Decomposition”, is the most powerful from the point of view of symbols and emotions connected with war experience. In Lyuba Yakimchuk’s collection, we can see the contrasts of red and black colours, which are manifested not only in the texts themselves but also in the design of the collection. In this cycle, we can see most of these contrasts. Despite the frequent use of black (19 times) and red (12 times), white still dominates (36 times) (Yakimchuk, 2021, p. 43). It means that despite all the terrors of war that bring death, loss, grief, and destruction, there is still hope for a better future.

In the poem «Підпис» — “Signature”, we can see such an example of the contrast of black and white. White colour is a symbol of purity, happiness, and hope. However, due to the tragic events of the war, even angels, who are also usually associated with the white colour, are wearing black now. A small black dot is symbolically disclosed in several meanings, namely, ink and a bullet hole (22):

- (22) *«і на білому тлі / маленька / чорна / крапка / підпису / пробила / нанір / халат / скроню» — “on this white / a tiny / black / dot / of a signature/punctures / a sheet of paper / a robe / a temple”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 78–81).

Each word written with a new line and alliteration of the sound [п] — [р] symbolises extraordinary tension. Unfortunately, it was not possible to recreate these means in translation. However, one change to convey the intensive surroundings is seen in the change of the verb tense from the past in Ukrainian to the present in English. The present tense intensifies the feeling of the action happening right now.

The next cycle, called «Небілі вірші» — “Unfree Verses”, also contains very contrasting symbolic colours. The poem «Брови» — “Eyebrows” has a striking opposition of black and white as symbols of mourning and happiness (23):

- (23) *«ні-ні, не одягну чорної сукні / чорних туфель і чорної хустки / прийду до тебе в білому — якщо доведеться прийти» — “no-no, I won't put on a black dress / black shoes and a black shawl / I'll come to you all in white — if I have a chance to come”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 122–123).

The contrasts of black, white, and red colours can be found in the poem «Механізм Снігу» — “Mechanisms of Snow”, where white becomes the background on which some tragic events happen, and where black and red become the symbols of death and blood (24):

- (24) *«приїхала швидка і поліція / червоне і чорне», «сказала лікарка чорним по білому / чорним по білому сказала / лікарка із маленьким хрестиком на грудях / певно, важко нести хрест / якщо він такий червоний» — “an ambulance and a police car arrived / red and black”, “said the doctor, white on white / laying it out like it is / a tiny cross on her chest / must be hard to carry a cross / so very red”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 128–129).

It may be typed mistakenly, but the translated version has “white on white” instead of “black on white”. Besides, we can see a simile absent in the original, where words are laid out like a cross. Meanwhile, the cross is used here as a Biblical symbol of one’s fate, life challenges, and hardships.

Symbols of family ties and relations

The following symbol used in this cycle is blood. Blood has always been a powerful symbol of fight and family ties. The poem shows the character's connections with the family, broken by the war. Two first stanzas of the poem «Як я вбила» — “How I Killed” start with almost the same refrain (25):

- (25) *«усі мої родинні зв'язки тепер телефонні / усі мої родинні зв'язки прослуховуються... усі мої телефонні зв'язки кровні / уся моя кров прослуховується» — “I remain connected to my family over the phone / with all of my family connections wiretapped... all of my phone connections are blood relations / my blood is wiretapped”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 82–83).

Though the poem's first sentence has a different structure in the translation than the original, the main idea of the interconnected elements “family-connection-blood” remains the same, smoothly flowing from one to another.

In the poem of this cycle called «Сталеві прибори» — “Steelware”, we can also find a symbol of mother — a cup (26):

- (26) *«мама — не чашка, а тато — не звір / але мама надбита... мама — не чашка / але чомусь розбивається... коли вона розливається / сльозами / і розставляє ручки / як чашкові / в боки» — “mom isn't a cup / dad isn't a beast / yet she's chipped... mom isn't a cup / yet she cracks... when she breaks down — hands akimbo like cup handles / on her sides — / into tears”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 124–125).

In the English version, we notice words describing the mother's fragile and broken state, such as “to be chipped” and “cracks”. However, in the last example, we can also see the changed word order, where the translators decide to describe the appearance first and then the emotional condition.

The final cycle, «Про таких кажуть: голі» — “Such People Are Called Naked”, contains intimate primarily lyrics. Therefore, symbols are connected with love, relations between men and women, and friends. In the poem with the same name, the lexeme “naked” means more than just being without clothes. It also means being without prejudice, advice from relatives, daily troubles, past traumas, and family issues, and with naked souls (27):

- (27) *«а потім кажу: — давай роздягнемось. і я знімаю із себе по черзі: / тата / бабуся / маму / сестру / а ти знімаєш з себе по черзі: / маму / брата / бабуся / друга дитинства / тренера з пік-апу / і ми залишаємось зовсім-зовсім без нічого / про таких кажуть: голі» — “then I say: / — let's get undressed / and one by one I take off: my dad / my grandma / my mom / my sister / and you take off, one by one: / your mom / your brother / your childhood friend / your pick-up coach /*

and we're bare now, wearing nothing at all / such people are called naked" (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 138–139).

The word “bare” fits perfectly well here as it means not only being without clothes but also being empty, which conveys the meaning of the poem.

One more poem is directly related to translation issues — «Фальшиві Друзі і Кохані» — “False Friends and Beloved”. In this poem, false friends relate both to the so-called translator’s false friends and real false friends. The author compares different words from Polish, French, and Belarusian that are related to love and various shades of its meaning that sometimes fail to convey the real meaning as, in reality, words can be lying (28):

- (28) *«навіть фальшиві друзі перекладача / колись стають просто друзями» — “even the translator’s false friends / become just friends one day”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 140–141).

In the other case in this poem, the translators use the French word “faux”, which fits into the style of the poem. Besides, there is also used a feminine noun that corresponds to the Ukrainian original (29):

- (29) *«фальшивий / коханій / перекладача / тобто / поганої перекладачки» — “faux / lover / of a translator / that is / of a poor translator”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 142–143).

One more “linguistic” poem is called ««У мене до тебе криза» — “I Have a Crisis for You”. The poetess uses the play on the words “crisis-war” in both direct and figurative meanings (30):

- (30) *« — наша любов зникла безвісти, — пояснюю другу / пропала на одній із воєн / що ми вели в себе на кухні / — заміни слово війна на криза, — каже він / адже кризи бувають у всіх» — “ — our love’s gone missing, I explain to a friend / it vanished in one of the wars / we waged in our kitchen / — change the word ‘war’ to ‘crisis’, he suggests / because a crisis is something everyone has from time to time”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 148–149).

Next, the author ironically starts talking about the Second World Crisis, the Cold Crisis, etc. But does this change of the word change the situation or make it not so terrifying? (31):

- (31) *«і коли наша з тобою хатня війна / перетворюється на кризу / чи стає легше / чи менше болить? — “and when our own domestic war / turns into crisis / does it get better? / does it hurt less?”* (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 150–151).

It shows that we can use euphemisms or synonyms to discuss unpleasant or horrifying events. However, it will not improve the situation itself. The word “crisis” means a time when a difficult or important decision must be made, so,

in fact, it does not have a negative meaning. But the consequences of this decision and the interpretation of a crisis can vary greatly (32):

- (32) «у мене до тебе криза, люба / давай одружимося / буде легше обом / у нас криза / краще би нам розлучитися» — “I have a crisis for you, darling / let’s get married / it’ll be easier for us both / we’ve got a crisis / we’d better split up” (Yakimchuk, 2021, pp. 150–151).

Successes and challenges in translating Lyuba Yakimchuk’s poetry

To conclude this analysis, Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of the successes and challenges encountered during the process of translating Lyuba Yakymchuk’s poetry. The majority of the symbols were successfully conveyed in the English translation; however, some were either partially lost or proved too challenging to reproduce in their entirety due to the influence of cultural and linguistic differences.

Table 1

Successes in translating Lyuba Yakimchuk’s poetry

Symbol	Original poem	Translation	Successes in translating
Apricots	«Абрикоси у касках»	“Apricots in Hard Hats”	The literal meaning of apricots as a symbol of miners has been preserved
Coal	«Вугілля обличчя»	“The Coalface”	The symbolic connection between coal and the hard work of miners has been preserved
Water	«Книга ангелів»	“The Book of Angels”	The cosmic symbolism of water, which represents the prehistoric past, has been successfully conveyed
Slag heap	«Терикони грудей»	“The Terricones of Breasts”	The use of the lexeme “terricone” for cultural specificity has been preserved
Caterpillar	«Гусень»	“Caterpillar”	The literal and metaphorical meanings of the word have been preserved in the translation
Black/White/Red	«Підпис», «Механізм снігу»	“Signature”, “Mechanisms of Snow”	The contrast between the white, black, and red symbols, representing death and blood, has been conveyed
Blood	«Як я вбила»	“How I Killed”	The symbol of blood, which binds family ties, has been successfully conveyed, although the translation has a different structure

Table 2

Challenges in translating Lyuba Yakimchuk's poetry

Symbol	Original poem	Translation	Challenges in translating
Yum	«Ням і війна»	“Yum and War”	The cultural connotations of “Yum” as a child’s exclamation and a symbol of war may not be fully understood
Terricone	«Терикони грудей»	“The Terricones of Breasts”	Although the lexeme “terricone” is retained, English-speaking audiences may not fully understand its cultural connotations
Apricots	«Абрикоси у касках»	“Apricots in Hard Hats”	Cultural differences may obscure apricots’ conceptual significance as a dualistic symbol of youth and death
Than/knife	«Ніж»	“Knife”	The double meaning of the lexeme «ніж» (as a noun “knife” and as a preposition “than”) cannot be conveyed in translation
Decomposition	«Розкладання»	“Decomposition”	The cultural context of the disintegration of city names (e.g. Luhansk — Hansk) may not fully resonate in translation
Mother as a cup	«Сталеві прибори»	“Steelware”	Although the translation accurately conveys the emotional state, the word order changes the emphasis

Source: compiled by the author

5. Conclusions

The poetry collection “Apricots of Donbas” by Lyuba Yakimchuk is replete with symbols that reflect the author’s personal experiences and encapsulate the collective trauma of war. Symbols such as apricots, terricones, coal, and water represent the experience of war, the life of miners and the connection with the native land. The study revealed that most symbols, including those about the distinctive cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Ukrainian language, were effectively conveyed in the English translation by using translation strategies, particularly the techniques of domestication and foreignization. These methods helped to preserve the cultural context of symbols such as “coal” and “terricone” without losing their semantic load. However, some symbols have suffered a partial loss of semantic load due to differences between languages and cultural barriers. For instance, symbols such as “Yum”, “apricots in hard

hats”, and the wordplay in the poem “Knife” lost some of their cultural resonance in translation due to the different perceptions of these images by English-speaking readers. Nevertheless, the translators have endeavoured to maintain the integrity of the text and cultural codes, which suggests the relative equivalence of the translation.

It is also noteworthy that symbols such as “coal”, “earth”, and “water” were reproduced without alteration, as these lexemes have direct equivalents in English. It is important to note, however, that direct translation does not necessarily guarantee complete equivalence of socio-cultural meaning; in particular, the lexeme “coal” in the English-speaking community does not evoke the same associations with miners’ lives and war as it does in the Ukrainian community.

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