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COLONIAL ROUTES: HOW SOVIET LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM FRAMED UKRAINIAN LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

Abstract

Background. *Translation has long been a recognized site of power and political struggle, especially in colonial and post-imperial contexts. However, the specific impact of the Soviet Union's policy of linguistic imperialism, which used Russian as an intermediary language for dialogue with the West, has not received the critical coverage it warrants. This practice was not merely a matter of convenience; it was a deliberate strategy to filter non-Russian literatures through a hegemonic lens, effectively framing Western perceptions and serving as a tool for cultural and linguistic erasure.*

Purpose. *The present article seeks to examine the Soviet-era translational mediation of Ukrainian literature into English via Russian, arguing that this practice reproduced colonial hierarchies and perpetuated linguistic imperialism.*

Contribution to the research field. The presented combination of findings provides support for the conceptual premise that indirect translation via an imperial language is a key mechanism for perpetuating linguistic violence. By interrogating the structural invisibility of Ukrainian language and identity in global literary circuits of 1950s–1970s and analyzing English translations via Russian, this paper contributes to the fields of linguistics, Ukrainian and

translation studies by demonstrating how the perception of Russian as a neutral conduit in fact obscured the Soviet linguicism and rendered it unaccountable.

Methods. *This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the ideological shaping of Ukrainian literary narratives for an Anglophone audience. The research follows a two-part process. First, a corpus is compiled, after which the research proceeds with a deconstructive analysis. This analysis applies a framework of decolonial analytics and editorial studies of translation, which was developed elsewhere by the author, along with a comparative close reading of the source, intermediary, and target texts. This method is used to identify the linguistic manipulations that occur in the process of translation.*

Results. *The article posits that indirect translation through Russian, which served as an imperial lingua franca and colonial intermediary in Soviet times, functioned as a tool of appropriation. This process "sanitized" Ukrainian texts for an Anglophone audience by filtering them through a Moscow-centered epistemic lens. In other words, by using Russian as the intermediary, the Soviet system controlled what was translated, how it was translated, and, most importantly, how Ukrainian literature was perceived internationally. The very act of forcing texts through the filter of an imperial language marginalized Ukraine's literary identity and enforced Russian as the dominant cultural and linguistic authority. This demonstrates a form of linguistic imperialism where the translational practice itself becomes a tool for imperial erasure.*

Discussion. *Soviet-era mediation of Ukrainian literature through Russian was a well-crafted instrument of linguistic imperialism, systematically erasing Ukrainian cultural and linguistic distinctiveness for Western audiences. In light of this, it is an academic and ethical imperative to adopt a new framework of linguistic accountability, which demands that translators, publishers, and scholars critically acknowledge and transparently account for the historical and political processes of mediation that have skewed cultural representation in post-imperial contexts. By doing so, the framework directly confronts "colonialingualism", which entrenches colonial legacies, imperial mindsets and inequitable practices in the current discourse.*

Keywords: linguistic imperialism, colonial appropriation, indirect translation, Ukrainian language, Ukrainian literature, Soviet cultural policy, translation studies.

Historically, it has always been the powerful
who have spoken or been spoken of. Colonial discourse
and postcolonial studies have not been good with languages.
The areas [Eastern Europe – I. O.] you study can turn
this around. Your field can offer spectacular opportunities
for history to join hands with literary criticism
in search of the ethical as it interrupts the epistemological.
G. Ch. Spivak (2006, p. 829)

The language others consider
whimsical, obstinate,
intentional, eccentric –
as if you grabbed a kitchen knife
when everyone politely reached for a fork,
and you chop with it the shared topic
until blood spurts from it…
O. Slyvynsky (2023, p. 21)

1. Introduction

In February 2014, as Russia's annexation of Crimea unfolded, *The Guardian* published a piece "Short on knowledge of Ukrainian literature? Read on."[1] The article's sincere motive – to shed light on Ukraine's literary tradition – was undermined by a profound irony. The recommended reading list, intended as a "guide to books by authors from Ukrainian territory," featured not a single Ukrainian-language writer. Instead, to help readers "get the handle" on the situation, the list included works like Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, Babel's *Maria*, or Bulgakov's *The White Guard*, all of which are defined as having been written by authors "born in places in present-day Ukraine."[2] This selection, while well-intentioned, inadvertently underscored the very problem it sought to address: the persistent invisibility of Ukrainian-language literature and the dominance of an imperial (Russified) episteme in Western knowledge production.

This paradoxical framing in Western media was not an isolated incident; rather, it was a symptom of a deeper, historically rooted issue: the long-standing practice of mediating Ukrainian literature through Russian. This process has systematically shaped an understanding of Ukrainian identity that is fil-

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/28/ukraine-literature-writers-fiction-guide
[2] Ibid.

tered through a Russian narrative, perpetuating a dependent relationship in the dominant knowledge systems.

At times, Ukrainian literature has been entirely silenced from scholarly discourse. For instance, the renowned two-volume *Routledge Encyclopedia of literary translation into English* (see Classe, 2000) includes articles on nearly all Slavic-language literatures (Russian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and Serbo-Croat) but pointedly excludes Ukrainian, which underscores its discursive absence.

Indeed, the last decade of Russia's invasion and the full-scale Russo-Ukrainian war has led to a notable increase in the translation, discussion and media presence of Ukrainian literature. To illustrate, a stark contrast is visible in the 2024 article "Discovering Ukrainian Literature: what to read."[3] While sharing the same aim as *The Guardian*'s 2014 piece, this recent publication already signals a significant shift in the discourse:

> "Why exactly was the literature of one of Europe's largest countries so unfamiliar? Ukrainian literature is, after all, pretty much as old as any other in Europe – it has its medieval texts, its impressive baroque tradition; its Romantics fit the broader European nationalist patterns; it has its realists and its avant-garde, its modernists and postmodernists. And yet it has barely penetrated the broader world literary consciousness. Well, the reason is simple: Russia. […] Russia has had an obsession with controlling Ukraine and an obsessive fear of losing it. […] While Russian literature has been widely translated, supported by the powerful resources of the Russian state in its various guises, Ukrainian literature has been suppressed by that same state – translation from and into Ukrainian has been carefully policed, at times banned entirely, by Tsarist or Soviet authorities" (Blacker, 2024).

In fact, numerous mid-20th-century English publications of Ukrainian literary works were produced via "carefully policed" Russian intermediaries, and they continue to be referenced mostly uncritically in academia. As a result, their inherent biases and linguistic manipulations persist in contemporary discourse, as they have not been sufficiently interrogated. Ultimately, deconstructive approach is necessary to not only restore Ukrainian linguistic agency but also to challenge the very foundations of imperial erasure that have long marginalized Ukraine's literary and cultural identity.

The present article thus aims to examine the Soviet-era translational mediation of Ukrainian literature into English via Russian, arguing that this practice reproduced colonial hierarchies and perpetuated linguistic imperial-

[3] https://platformraam.nl/artikelen/2624-discovering-ukrainian-literature-what-to-read

ism. As part of the author's ongoing initiative (Odrekhivska, 2024a, 2024b) to trace how Ukrainian literature has been perceived and discursively presented in the Anglophone sphere, this study will revolve around the following research question: In what ways do these translational practices, which were shaped by a controlled Soviet apparatus, function as a form of linguistic imperialism?

2. Theoretical Background

The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, situated at the intersection of linguistics, translation studies, and literary history, to explore how the mediation of Ukrainian literature through Russian to the Anglophone readership during the Soviet era functioned as a tool of linguistic imperialism and to uncover the colonial aesthetics embedded in these translation practices. Surprisingly, as observed by I. Popa (2018, p. 425), scholarship on communism and Eastern Europe has, for the most part, overlooked translation issues.

R. Phillipson (2010, p. 1) underscores that language is "one of the most durable legacies of colonial and imperial expansion." From this perspective, *linguistic imperialism* is a central mechanism by which one language is privileged and actively used to marginalize or eradicate others in an overarching structure of asymmetrical, unequal exchange – where linguistic dominance is inextricably linked to broader forms of economic and political power (Phillipson, 2010, p. 2). In fact, linguistic imperialism is "a sub-type of linguicism" (Phillipson, 2010, p. 75).

The theoretical lens of linguistic imperialism is particularly useful for understanding Soviet translation practices. In her study of this period, S. Witt (2017, p. 167) concludes that the "literatures of the peoples of the USSR" – an administrative label for non-Russian literatures – were almost "exclusively translated into other European languages via Russian editions." This large-scale strategy of indirect translation was a deliberate effort to create a controlled and monolithic image of a unified Soviet literature for an international audience, thus assert Russian's central, hegemonic role.

Also referred to as intermediate (Toury, 1988, p. 139), mediated (Linder, 2014, p. 58), or second-hand translation (Popovič, 1976, p. 19), *indirect translation* is defined as "a translation of a translation" (in our case: *Ukrainian text* → *Russian translation* → *English translation*), a practice often rooted in the power dynamics between languages and cultures in the world linguistic and translation system (Rosa, Pięta and Maia, 2017, p. 114). Moreover, scholar-

ship has long attached a strong negative stigma to indirect translation (see Davier, Marin-Lacarta, Pöchhacker, Gambier, Ivaska, and Pięta, 2023), often treating such texts as inferior or inherently distorted. To their political advantage, Soviet publishers deliberately concealed the fact that these were indirect translations, presenting them as if the Russian versions were the original texts. Thus, Russian, as the dominant language, mediated and shaped the representation of "others", a practice that directly contributed to cultural appropriation.

Further underscoring this centralized control, S. Witt highlights the January 1940 resolution "On the Regulation of Literary Translations from the Languages of the Peoples of the USSR," which – among other things – required the Gorky Institute of World Literature to create an "all-Union scholarly archive" to collect "all materials relating to the literary translation" from non-Russian languages (Witt, 2017, p. 177). By demanding copies of "all intermediate" versions (ibid.), this archive was designed to function as a "central control instance" (ibid.), effectively institutionalizing state oversight of the interlingual translation process. S. Witt posits: "Apart from giving a hint about the quality of a particular work, they offered the editor an opportunity to reject politically unacceptable texts at an early stage, before wasting money on the final translation" (ibid.). On the other hand, *Inootdel*, the foreign section of *Glavlit* – the main arm of the Soviet censorship apparatus – was specifically responsible for the preventative censorship of all publications in foreign languages intended for export, including literature sent abroad for sale or book-exchange (Sherry, 2015, p. 49). This editorial gatekeeping emphasizes the nexus between translation and ideological control.

In this context, linguistic imperialism emerges as "a primary component of cultural imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 53), given that "linguistic domination is strongly tied to cultural hegemony" (Baumgarten, 2021, p. 1581). The strategic dimension of this dynamic is further illuminated by V. Korablyova (2024, p. 12), who argues that "the importance of Ukraine to Russia's self-identity exceeds that of an internal colony... It also represents an "internal West" that must be subjugated, controlled, and incorporated to prove both the empire's grandeur and its Europeanness." Approached from this angle, mediating Ukrainian literature through Russian was a calculated act aimed at appropriating Ukraine's "Europeanness," and, by filtering Ukrainian works, the Soviet Union could project a curated, "Europeanized" version of its literature, asserting cultural sophistication and global relevance while simultaneously colonizing Ukraine from within.

In other words, linguistic imperialism was a foundational and well-thought-out strategy of the Soviets to control cultural flows. In their recent work, both I. Pustovoit and V. Panov posit that the Russian language still functions as an instrument of imperialism, arguing that a modern empire operates through multiple, interconnected axes of power, with language being a significant one (Pustovoit, 2024; Panov, 2025).

As a result, Ukraine has often been perceived in the Anglophone West primarily through a Soviet Russian lens, frequently relegated to the status of "a derivative region" within Russia's sphere of influence. This dynamic can be analyzed through the concept of *inter-imperiality*, a term introduced L. Doyle (2020, p. 1–2) to describe how competing empires interact and shape global power relations and literature. As I. Popa (2018, p. 424) notes, the international circulation of literary works was a key tool in the intellectual Cold War, which was utilized by both rival geopolitical camps. In this light, M.E. Jarlhøj and R-V. Valijärvi aptly state that "Russian and English are dominant imperial languages which yield cultural and financial power even after the fall of the respective empires" (Jarlhøj and Valijärvi, 2023, p. 11). This interconnectedness of imperial knowledge systems produces a common reservoir, or "imperial cloud," from which is difficult to later disengage (Kamissek and Kreienbaum, 2016, p. 164). Indeed, hegemonic relationships tend to "firmly remain in place even after their power base has been removed" (Baumgarten, 2021, p. 1580).

This resonates with M. L. Pratt's concept of *imperial afterlives*, where inter-imperiality and the longue durée intersect, and in which language is one of the most enduring manifestations (Pratt, 2015, p. 355). In this line of reasoning, S. Baumgarten (2021, p. 1580) argues that "linguistic domination leaps into *linguistic hegemony* when people internalize the power and ideology of a prevailing discourse to such an extent that they forget their own subjection to its manipulative force." (emphasis – I.O.)

Taken together, these concepts underscore the critical importance of analyzing English translations of Ukrainian literary works mediated through Russian: they represent a key site in which this "imperial cloud" was produced, making their deconstruction essential to disentangle the imperial afterlives that continue to shape Western knowledge about Ukraine.

3. The Research Data

For this study, I collected a representative corpus of Ukrainian literary works published in English translation via Russian by the Soviet press *Prog-*

ress Publishers between the 1950s and 1970s, a period defined by severely centralized and controlled translation practices. This timeframe was selected because, from the mid-1950s onward, translation policy in the Soviet Union was redirected to "establish Russian as *the* language of the Soviet Union" (Grenoble, 2003, p. 57), which decisively shaped the circulation of Ukrainian literature abroad. The corpus was compiled using the extensive resources of the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) Library, which houses one of the world's largest collections of translated Soviet-era editions of Ukrainian classics, developed through the foundational efforts of the late W. Swoboda.

The selection principle for the corpus was twofold: (1) only those works of Ukrainian authors that were published in English via Russian mediation by Progress Publishers were included, and (2) within this set, priority was given to editions that were explicitly presented to Anglophone readers as "representative" of Ukrainian culture. This resulted in a sample of 17 titles, sufficient to demonstrate recurring editorial and translational strategies while remaining manageable for detailed textual comparison.

The information about Progress Publishers is crucial for the methodology because the institutional context is not merely background: it conditioned every stage of textual production, from translation choices to paratextual framing. Established in 1931, the Moscow-based Progress Publishers became particularly notable in 1963 when it assumed the role of the Foreign Languages Publishing House, a state-run entity responsible for producing "Soviet literature", propaganda and other themed books in numerous foreign languages. Drawing on Yuri Pankov's 2011 article "Literatura spetsialnogo naznacheniia" ("Special Purpose Literature"), the special editorial department of Progress Publishers operated under strict state control, as its activities were monitored by the First Department (KGB), and all work had to be conducted within secure, dedicated facilities with safes. Ironically, this centralized control was paradoxically framed for a global audience as an open dialogue: each book included a "request to readers," which, while inviting feedback on translation and design, also served to reinforce a state-guided approach to literary output. It was not until 1982 that the publisher's organizational structure was altered, with the literary fiction division being separated and renamed Raduga Publishers, whereas Progress began to focus exclusively on scientific and political literature. Yet, as will be demonstrated, the linguistic and translation policy established by Progress was not abandoned but continued by its successor,

Raduga Publishers. Such circumstances demonstrate that the translation process was not neutral but ideologically mediated – hence why the publisher's institutional profile must be considered part of the methodological framework rather than extraneous history.

Progress Publishers translated and published numerous texts from Ukrainian classics – including works by Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi – and anthologies of Ukrainian fiction into English, all of which passed through Russian as an intermediary language. Since English-language publishers specializing in world classics have largely ignored Ukrainian literature (Blacker, 2024), these obscure Soviet-era editions of Ukrainian classics still persist in being used in university programs.

After the corpus was established, I applied a qualitative research design structured around three interrelated steps. First, I conducted a deconstructive editorial analysis, drawing on the decolonial analytics of translation and publishing practices I have elaborated elsewhere (Odrekhivska, 2017, 2024a). This included paratextual materials such as prefaces, series titles, and "requests to readers." Second, I engaged in comparative close reading of source texts (Ukrainian), intermediary texts (Russian), and target texts (English). By "close reading," I mean a slow, detailed textual analysis attentive to lexical choices, orthographic shifts, omissions, and semantic reframings. Comparative close reading was applied systematically to the entire corpus, although with greater focus on passages where semantic, cultural, or ideological distortion was most evident. Third, I synthesized these findings to identify patterns of what I term appropriative manipulations, i.e. linguistic and editorial practices that reframed Ukrainian literature for an Anglophone readership in ways consistent with Soviet ideological objectives.

Such a stepwise approach makes it possible to move from macro-level institutional context (the role of Progress Publishers) to micro-level textual detail (manipulations), thereby revealing how the Soviet translation apparatus enacted epistemic violence against Ukrainian cultural expression while presenting itself as global literary mediation.

4. Linguistic Violence in Practice: A Case of Filtering Ukrainian Literature through the Imperial Lens

The practice of indirect translation identified in the preceding sections takes on concrete form when examined through specific editorial and linguistic interventions. Selected from the compiled corpus, the following cases re-

veal how practices of linguistic appropriation in Soviet-era translated volumes structured both the representation of Ukrainian literature and the epistemic frames through which it was mediated to Anglophone audiences.

In 1970, Progress Publishers in Moscow released the anthology *Stories of the Soviet Ukraine* with a print run of 4800 copies. Immediately following the table of contents, the book explicitly states that all texts by the 18 featured authors were translated from the Russian. Afterwards, a statement – presented only in Russian – positions the edition under the series "Ukraina rasskazyvaet. Rasskazy pisatelei sovetskoi Ukrainy" ("Ukraine tells. Stories of writers of Soviet Ukraine"), which creates the illusion that these stories were originally written in Russian. Nowhere in the edition it is indicated about intermediary translations from Ukrainian into Russian before being rendered into English. The fact that these are indirect translations is also concealed by the complete absence of any mention of the translators – both for the English versions and for the intermediary Russian ones. This strategic framing effectively erased the Ukrainian origin of the works, presenting them as derivatives of Soviet Russian-language literature.

This approach has been a consistent pattern. For example, it is evident in the 1957 collection of Ivan Franko's work, *Boa Constrictor and Other Stories*, or in the 1958 edition of Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi's *Chrysalis and Other Stories*, both released by the Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House and translated into English from Russian by Fainna Solasko and Jacob Guralsky, respectively. These editions include Russian prefatory material and alternative Russian titles – *Udav i drugie rasskazy* and *Kukolka i drugie rasskazy* – which reinforce the illusion that the original texts were Russian compositions.

For instance, the English translation of O. Dovzhenko's "The Enchanted Desna" for the anthology *Stories of the Soviet Ukraine* was based on a Russian-language excerpt from the 1964 Russian edition of his works published by Sovetskii pisatel. This 1964 volume indicated in the preface that "A. Dovzhenko wrote in Russian and Ukrainian," and that works originally in Ukrainian are presented therein in translation. However, while other translated stories in the contents are credited to their Russian translators, "*Zacharovannaia Desna"* is left with no such indication. This deliberate omission strategically masks the original language of Dovzhenko's masterpiece, leaving the reader to assume it was written in Russian. In other words, an invisible translation of Dovzhenko's magnum opus into Russian preserved this "blind framing" in English, completely obscuring the work's Ukrainian-language origin.

A critical re-examination of the 1970 anthology's contents also reveals that the names of all contributing writers were transliterated from Russian, not their original Ukrainian, e.g. Alexander Dovzhenko, Andrei Golovko, Mikhail Stelmakh, Grigor Tiutiunnik, Ostap Vishnya and others, effectively erasing the authors' Ukrainian identities and anchoring them in the Russian linguistic and cultural context. This ideological framing is further amplified in the introduction by V. Korotych: he opens with a claim that "two out of every three Ukrainian writers left for active service in the very first days of the Great Patriotic War" (Stories of the Soviet Ukraine, 1970, p. 7), ostensibly to honour Ukrainian sacrifice, yet this rhetorical gesture simultaneously subsumes Ukrainian literary history into the Soviet *patria.* The erasure deepens in his treatment of the 1930s – a decade violently marked by the Stalinist purges of a generation of Ukrainian artists and writers, symbolically termed the "Executed Renaissance" by Jerzy Giedroyc. V. Korotych portrays the period as one of vibrant literary production, mentioning only three authors (each listed under the Russified form of their names): "In speaking of the 20s and 30s we refer again and again to the works of Pyotr Panch, Ivan Lye and Mikhail Stelmakh, while the years of the Patriotic War have been immortalized by Alexander Dovzhenko, Oles Gonchar and Semyon Zbanatsky" (Stories of the Soviet Ukraine, 1970, pp. 8–9). This selective remembrance whitewashes the catastrophic silencing of Ukrainian voices, entrenching the anthology's overarching agenda of linguistic and cultural colonization.

V. Korotych, a prominent Soviet Ukrainian poet, exemplifies what H. Arendt termed the effect of "parvenu" – the phenomenon in which individuals from marginalized or subordinate backgrounds internalize and adopt the identity of the dominant group, as well as become "willing agents" of colonial domination, actively enforcing the imperial order that subjugates their own compatriots (Arendt, 1951, pp. 64–65). This mode of conformism, as H. Arendt notes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, is marked by a constant undercurrent of regret. (ibid.) Such ambivalence surfaces in Korotych's introduction, where, despite the overall ideological framing, he makes a rare and notable aside: "One cannot but admire the spirit of a people who as recently as fifty odd years ago was ruled by a tsarist edict that outlawed the Ukrainian language" (Stories of the Soviet Ukraine, 1970, p. 6), which is a clear allusion to the Ems Ukaz and subsequent imperial decrees aimed at banning the use of Ukrainian in print, education, and public performance. On the one hand, this remark might be read as an expression of anti-imperial solidarity, i.e., a cri-

tique of the tsarist regime's suppression of Ukrainian, especially when considered alongside Korotych's continuation that "books and literary magazines in Ukrainian are now published in printings of from 5 to 150 thousand copies" (Stories of the Soviet Ukraine, 1970, p. 7). Yet, on the other hand, a deconstructive reading reveals it as an act of masquerade: while ostensibly condemning 19th-century Russification measures, Korotych simultaneously enacts a Soviet project that replicates very similar dynamics of linguistic erasure, albeit under a different imperial banner.

The practice of Russified transliteration is not limited to the authors' names in the anthology. A closer reading of the stories unearths that the same pattern extends to the names of characters and other proper nouns: for instance, in O. Dovzhenko's texts, characters are identified as *Galya, Semyon* and *Yeryoma*, while in Ye. Hutsalo's stories, we find *Gritsko* and *Gorpina*. This systematic approach effectively displaces Ukrainian phonetic specifics, solidifying the pretense of a Russian-language "source text" at the micro-level of the narrative itself.

Worth mentioning in this context is the case of M. Tarnawsky, who, upon discovering that F. Solasko's Russian-mediated rendition of Ivan Franko's "Boa Constrictor" was the only available English version for his Ukrainian literature syllabus, "slightly edited" the text, primarily by adjusting proper and character names, to position the work within its authentic Ukrainian context (see Franko, n.d.). This instance highlights a pragmatic response to the scarcity of direct translations: when commissioning a new translation is not feasible, the practice of revising existing texts emerges as a strategy to reframe their colonial imprint. Without such intervention, these texts are read and used in their Russified versions, such as prominent Ukrainian author Vsevolod Nestaiko's masterpiece, which was published in 1983 by the Moscow-based Raduga (inheriting the legacy of Progress Publishers) under the title *Two Toreadors from Vasukovka Village*, taking a 1980 translated-into-Russian edition as its source text. This book's framing is consistent with the pattern of using Russified names (e.g., Pavlusha becomes Pavlik, Yarysha becomes Irina, and Vasukivka as Vasukovka village in the title, to name a few). Moreover, it is further exemplified by the paratextual information on the back cover, which states: "Two Russian country boys spend a night on a desert island, take a trip to a big city and have many exciting adventures" (Nestaiko, 1983). It explicitly misidentifies the protagonists as "two Russian country boys," thus erasing

their Ukrainian identity. To this day, this remains the only available English translation.

As a result, the persistence of these formats in the absence of direct translations not only normalizes the Russian-mediated version as the "original," but also institutionalizes a distorted cultural frame in which Ukrainian literature is read, taught and archived through the imperial lens.

5. Conclusions

This study has revealed how Soviet-era mediation of Ukrainian literature through Russian functioned as a tool of linguistic imperialism, shaping Western perceptions through deliberate acts of cultural and linguistic erasure. By positioning Russian as the intermediary, the Soviet system controlled what was translated, how it was translated, and, most importantly, how Ukrainian literature was framed and perceived internationally.

Historical mediation cannot be divorced from its present-day consequences. The continued absence of direct translations and the persistence of Russian-mediated versions make it imperative to revisit existing translations, interrogate inherited translation chains, dismantle inherited colonial frameworks of interpretation and develop editorial practices that foreground the linguistic and cultural integrity of the source.

In light of these findings, adopting a framework of *linguistic accountability* – a concept that underscores the ethical and political responsibility of translators, publishers, and scholars in post-imperial contexts, is vital. It calls for transparent acknowledgment and critical reflection on mediation processes that shape cultural representation, promoting more honest engagements with the legacies of imperial domination. Upholding linguistic accountability resists "colonialingualism" (Meighan, 2022, p. 146), which, covertly or overtly, sustains colonial legacies, imperial mindsets and inequitable practices. It also insists on cultivating alternative pathways: commissioning new translations, producing critical re-editions and generating contextual scholarship that reinsert the erased linguistic and cultural dimensions into public circulation.

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