

Humanities and social sciences translation in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s

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Humanities and social sciences translation in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s

Ukrainization. Translation Theory. Non-literary Prose. Russification. Marxist Ideology. Cultural Renaissance. Genre-specific Strategies.

This study explores the translation of humanities and social sciences texts in Ukraine during the 1920s–1930s, a time of cultural and political shifts. The Soviet Ukrainization policy (1923–1929) drove a surge in translations of scholarly works in pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, and Marxist theory from German, French, and English. Scholars like Oleksandr Finkel, Mykola Zerov, and Mykhailo Kaly-novych developed advanced translation theory, with Finkel’s *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* (Theory and practice of translation, 1929) emphasizing genre-specific strategies for non-literary prose. The early 1930s reversal of Ukrainization and Stalinist Russification suppressed Ukrainian linguistic autonomy, imposing Russian intermediary translations and branding translators as “nationalist saboteurs”. Despite the repression, these translations enriched Ukrainian intellectual life, even as political terror erased many works from history.

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The translation of scholarly texts in the humanities and social sciences – despite its intellectual and cultural significance – has long remained marginal in comparison with literary translation and scientific-technical translation. Social science texts in particular pose distinctive challenges: unlike natural-science writing, they often contain ideological, conceptual, and terminological complexities; unlike literary works, they demand analytical precision and discipline-specific coherence. In the Soviet Union, the humanities were systematically reinterpreted as branches of the social sciences, since all disciplines were required to align with historical and dialectical materialism, which functioned as the universal scientific and ideological framework. Philosophy, especially dialectical materialism, served as the methodological authority that defined “scientificity” and imposed strict ideological regulation across both the social and humanistic fields, effectively sociologizing the humanities. As a result, the boundary between humanities and social sciences was blurred, and most disciplines were integrated into a unified science of society interpreted through Marxist-Leninist categories (Wetter 1958).

In the Russian Empire, Ukrainian was officially framed as a dialect of Russian, leading to repressive measures such as the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Decree (1876), which banned Ukrainian publications, translations, and cultural activity. Although the Ukrainian People’s Republic ultimately lost the War of Independence (1917–1921), its brief existence compelled the Bolsheviks to recognize Ukrainians as a distinct nation. During this period, an independent Ukrainian state briefly emerged before most of its territory was absorbed into the Ukrainian SSR and the rest divided among Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. On 30 December 1922, the Communists proclaimed the formation of the USSR as a federation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Transcaucasia. Crucially, the institutional foundations for Ukrainian scholarship – including the Academy of Sciences (1918) and school programs in Ukrainian studies – were established before Soviet rule. Seeking to secure political authority while recognizing national aspirations, Soviet leaders initiated the Ukrainization policy in 1923, expanding the use of Ukrainian in education, administration, and publishing. This policy catalyzed a cultural renaissance during the 1920s: Ukrainian-language schooling grew, book production increased, and translations from numerous languages flourished. The reversal of Ukrainization in 1929, however, brought intensified censorship and the repression of hundreds of Ukrainian scholars, writers, and translators (Pauly 2014).

Between 1917 and 1932, Ukraine experienced a dramatic expansion of translation activity, with hundreds of works rendered from many languages (Kolomiyets 2015, 12–121). The period also saw rapid development in translation theory and administrative, journalistic, scientific, and technical translation. From the mid-1920s to early 1930s, translations of scientific and scholarly literature increased substantially in fields such as medicine, psychology, chemistry, geology, agricultural science, and engineering – primarily from German and English – to meet the growing demand for specialized knowledge in Ukrainian. Even foundational scientific texts became accessible: Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), translated by Volodymyr Derzhavyn, appeared in Kharkiv in 1936. These efforts reflect the breadth and ambition of Ukrainian scholarly translation during this formative era.

Methodologically, this study adopts Anthony Pym's (1998) concept of translation archaeology, which integrates bibliographic reconstruction with case studies to identify long-term trends, translation frequency, and periods of intensity or decline. Translation archaeology allows translation to be understood as a cultural and historical process, simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, revealing structural patterns that cannot be detected through isolated analysis of individual texts. Existing bibliographies are incomplete: Ukrainian translations of fiction from 1917–1941 are catalogued (Kolomiyets 2015), while scholarly translations are systematically listed only up to 1923 in the *Drukovanyi zvednyi katalog ukrainomovnoi knyhy derzhavnykh bibliotek ta muzeiv Ukrainy. 1798–1923. Vypusk 5: 1920–1923* (Printed consolidated catalogue of Ukrainian language books of the state libraries and museums of Ukraine, 1798–1923; Nehreichuk and Kononenko 2015). No comprehensive listings exist for scholarly translations after 1923. Therefore, the present corpus was manually reconstructed using the catalogs of the following institutions: the Central Scientific Library of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University; the M. Maksymovych Scientific Library of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine; and the manuscript collections of the T. H. Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Additional materials were sourced from the Hryhoriy Kochur Literary Museum in Irpin and the National Museum of Literature of Ukraine.

This article examines the emergence and development of humanities and social-science translation in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s–1930s, situating these processes within wider political and linguistic change. It outlines the ideological and institutional conditions shaped by Ukrainization and its reversal, highlights Finkel's 1929 theoretical contribution, and surveys translation across pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, history, political science, Marxism, literary studies, linguistics, and religious or atheistic literature. By considering source languages, mediation practices, and terminology formation, this analysis shows how censorship, ideological regulation, and language planning redefined both the scope and epistemic orientation of Ukrainian scholarly translation.

THEORIZING TRANSLATION OF NON-LITERARY PROSE

The Soviet Union played a pioneering role in developing a theory of scholarly translation, driven in part by the need to render foundational works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin into the many languages of its population. A major milestone in this development was Oleksandr Finkel's 1929 monograph *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* (Theory and practice of translation; Baer and Hofeneder 2025, 319). As Brian J. Baer notes, "Finkel may have been the first to extend translation theory beyond literary and sacred texts to include the category of non-literary prose" (2024, 17).

Finkel drew a sharp line between literary and non-literary genres and insisted on the importance of the latter. He argued that the study of non-literary prose translation is "just as important and reveals equally interesting problems as literary translation, not to mention that at certain times it holds exceptional social significance"¹

(1929, 45). In Chapter 2, “The Translation of Non-literary Prose”, he classifies such texts into scholarly and administrative types – drawing on Charles Bally’s typology – and journalistic texts (*publitsystyka*), thus establishing one of the earliest genre-based translation models (47–48).

Rejecting the assumption that conveying basic content suffices in prose translation, Finkel emphasized that accuracy requires sensitivity to genre-specific linguistic and stylistic features (51). For scientific translation in particular, he warned that imitating foreign syntactic structures produces awkward results and advocated instead for clarity and idiomatic target-language syntax (61, 63). While national linguistic traits should be removed, the author’s individual style must remain visible, allowing the translation to read naturally in the target language while preserving the logic of argumentation. These principles, he insisted, apply equally to administrative and journalistic prose, making their translation no less demanding than that of poetry (76).

Finkel’s monograph appeared during Stalin’s first five-year plan (1928–1932), when industrialization and collectivization created a demand for technical and scientific materials in Ukrainian, requiring translators trained in specialized terminology. Translation also served ideological goals, enabling the regime to disseminate Marxist-Leninist doctrine in non-Russian languages. At the same time, the 1920s marked a cultural revival in Ukraine. Intellectuals such as Mykola Zerov, Maksym Rylsky, Oswald Burghardt, Valerian Pidmohylny, Mykhailo Kalynovych, and Oleksandr Biletsky promoted translation as a means of enriching Ukrainian literature and linking it to global intellectual movements.

These converging needs led to the founding of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistic Education in Kyiv in 1930, with a branch in Kharkiv, creating an early institutional base for translation studies. Soon after, university-level translation programs appeared (Kalnychenko 2025), and Finkel’s typology entered instruction through methodology syllabi by Mykhailo Kalynovych (Dzhuhastrianska and Strikha 2015) and Mykola Zerov (Kolomiyets 2021), the latter covering non-literary prose, literary prose, verse, technical terminology, and business correspondence (Kolomiyets 2023a). In the 1930s, Soviet scholars such as Dmitrii Usov, Andrei Fedorov, and Yakov Retsker expanded Finkel’s insights, anticipating later Western developments (Baer 2024).

Significantly, from the mid-1930s onward, Ukrainian translation scholarship faced dual marginalization (Hostová et al. 2024, 116). Within the USSR, Stalinist directives curtailed non-Russian intellectual activity by labeling it “nationalist deviation”, hindering institutional development. In Western academia, Cold War epistemologies and Russocentric frameworks limited access to and recognition of Ukrainian work. Together, these forces obscured Ukrainian contributions to the history of translation theory.

PRACTICE OF TRANSLATING NON-LITERARY PROSE

Translation practices of the period transcended the domain of belles-lettres, extending into a broad array of disciplines across the humanities and the social sciences.

1. Translated literature in the field of pedagogy and psychology

In the 1920s and early 1930s, numerous translations of key works in psychology and pedagogy were published, reflecting the growing interest in educational theory and practice.² These included Maria Montessori's *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* (Method of scientific pedagogy and its practice in children's houses, trans. from Italian by Dmytro Shcherbanenko, 1921); Paul Barth's *Geschichte der Erziehung* (History of education, trans. by M. Hordiyevsky, 1923); Ernest A. Bernhard's *Die seelischen Vorgänge als Bewegungen* (Psychic processes as movements, trans. from German by M. M. Vasylykivsky, 1925, with an accompanying dictionary of psychological terminology); *Educational Tests and Measurements* by Will Seymour Monroe (trans. from English by I. Maistrenko, edited by O. Zaluzhny, 1927); a collection of selected works by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (edited by M. I. Gordievsky, A. G. Gotalov-Gotlib, and V. O. Chudnovtsev, 1928); Jean Piaget's *Le jugement et le raisonnement chez l'enfant* (Judgment and reasoning in the child, trans. from French by A. Myliashkevych and V. Sapizhuk, 1930); Ludwig Langstein's *Das Vorschul- und Schulkind. Seine Ernährung und Pflege* (The preschool and school-age children: Their nutrition and care, trans. from German, ed. by I. A. Lieberman, 1930), and Claude-Adrien Helvétius's *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation* (A treatise on man: His intellectual faculties and his education, trans. from French by Valerian Pidmohylny, 1932). Other works translated in this period include Pavel Blonsky's *Pedagogika* (trans. from Russian by V. Doha, 1924), and William James's *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (trans. from a Russian intermediary by a group of teachers under M. Bernatsky, 1924). Such cases are notable because Ukrainian educators generally read Russian fluently, making translations from Russian rare. The James volume is especially striking as a collaborative, non-professional translation from an intermediary text, involving atypical, multilayered mediation.

In the 1930s, Ukraine's pedagogical and scholarly sphere was rapidly subordinated to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, replacing earlier methodological diversity with strict ideological uniformity. As a result, translations of psychological literature into Ukrainian ceased entirely from this period onward. At the same time, the few pedagogical classics that continued to appear in Ukrainian – such as a collection of the selected works by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1938) and Jan Amos Comenius's selected pedagogical works in three volumes (1940) – were produced not from the original languages but through Russian intermediary translations. This shift, together with a general decline in humanities translations, reflects the broader Soviet policy of consolidating ideological control and centralizing intellectual production (Kolomiyets 2023b).

2. Translated literature in the field of classic philosophy and history

Interwar Ukrainian translation culture developed along markedly divergent regional and thematic lines, and the following facts are introduced specifically to illustrate how selection of texts to be translated differed across territories. In the western regions incorporated into the Second Polish Republic after the 1921 Treaty of Riga,

translators gravitated toward ancient literature, especially philosophical texts. This tendency stemmed from the continued presence of Latin and Ancient Greek in secondary-school curricula, in contrast to Soviet Ukraine, where classical languages had largely vanished from education. Despite this educational foundation, Ukrainian renderings of Greek and Latin philosophical works remained rare due to the absence of a sustained tradition of translating ancient thought. Even so, several significant Lviv editions appeared, including Tacitus's *Annales* (Annals, 1935) and Herodotus's *Γένεσις Σκυθῶν* (Description of Scythia, 1937). Mykhailo Ostroverkh's Lviv Ukrainian translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1934) likewise exemplifies these selective patterns. Many further initiatives never materialized as they were interrupted by repression, war, emigration, or the loss of translators.

In Soviet Ukraine, translations of ancient and Renaissance works were even rarer. Nevertheless, the Neoclassicist milieu undertook several exemplary initiatives aimed at maintaining cultural continuity despite intensifying ideological pressure. Mykola Zerov published fragments of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and works by Marc Antoine Muret in the monthly *Chervony Shliakh* (Red pathway), while Maksym Rylsky produced a 1931 anthology of French classics that included Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique*.

Contemporary Western historiography rarely reached Ukrainian readers directly. A notable exception – though still mediated through another language – was the Kharkiv Knyhospilka edition of Sven Hedin's essays, *Zavoyovnyky Ameryky* (1926), which Yuri Klen (Oswald Burghardt) translated from the German version *Amerika im Kampf der Kontinente*, not the Swedish original.

Institutional planning expanded in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In March 1930, under the auspices of the Taras Shevchenko Institute's Cabinet of Comparative Studies of Literature, Zerov compiled a priority list of foreign works for the LiM (Literature and Art) Publishing House within the State Publishing Association of Ukraine (Kolomiyets 2023b). His program emphasized Greek and Latin classics, literature of the feudal and early modern periods, and modern French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Scandinavian authors. A full translation of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* was planned by Zerov and V. Petrovsky, although ancient philosophy itself was not prioritized.

Ambitious projects to translate Enlightenment thought accompanied these initiatives. A four-volume Jean-Jacques Rousseau edition was planned, combining abridged versions of his major works with a translation by Khrystyna Alchevska, while a two-volume Denis Diderot set was also envisioned. Ultimately, only the Diderot edition appeared in 1933, translated by Valerian Pidmohylny, though even it was issued in a reduced form without the planned theoretical writings on theater. Pidmohylny (1901–1937) was among the most accomplished translators of the period. Beyond Balzac and Maupassant, he produced Ukrainian versions of Voltaire's *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (1927), Diderot's works, and Helvétius's *De l'Homme* (1932).

Marxist and socialist historiography formed another major axis of translation. Anton Kharchenko translated Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky's *Sovremennyy sotsializm v svoem istoricheskom razvitii* (Modern socialism in its historical development,

1920). The All-Ukrainian State Publishing House issued Dutch communist theorist Herman Gorter's *Het historisch materialisme* (Historical materialism), translated from the German edition *Der historische Materialismus*, in 1921. Meanwhile, Gorter's *Die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale* (The Communist Workers' International, 1922) appeared in Vienna in a Ukrainian translation issued by the Publishing House of the Ukrainian Section of the Communist Party of Austria, with a dedication to Lenin. Numerous history textbooks were translations, including Robert Vipper's works and Wilhelm Bölsche's *Der Mensch der Vorzeit* (Prehistoric man, 1923).

Soviet class-centric historiography dominated the field, with Mikhail Pokrovsky's *Russkaya istoriya v samom szhatom ocherke* (Russian history: A concise outline, trans. by Maria Iltychna, ed. by Yevhen Kasianenko, 1922) – the only official history textbook in the Soviet state – serving as its primary exemplar. Together with *Ekonomicheskii materializm* (Economic materialism, trans. by Yevhen Hryhoruk, 1923), these works epitomized this paradigm. Even non-Marxist works were framed through Marxist commentary, as seen in the translation from German of Julius Lipfert's *Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit in ihrem organischen Aufbau* (The history of culture in its organic development, 1922).

3. Translated literature in the field of political science and Marxist theory

In the early 1920s, the social sciences in the Ukrainian SSR were shaped by ideological concerns and by Russian prerevolutionary Marxist debates. A notable example is the 1921 Ukrainian edition of *Nauka o obshchestvennom soznanii: Kratkiy kurs ideologicheskoy nauki v voprosakh i otvetakh* (The science of social consciousness: A short course in ideological science in questions and answers), where Mykola Tryrog (M. V. Semenko) translated and introduced Alexander Bogdanov's ideas. Bogdanov's *Nachalny kurs politicheskoy ekonomii* (Elementary course in political economy) likewise appeared in 1922.

By the mid-1920s, translations in political science and Marxist theory expanded significantly. Foundational texts by Marx and Engels were published, including *Der 18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon* (The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, trans. from German by M. and I. Stepanov, ed. by V. Shcherbanenko, 1925); *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich* (The civil war in France, trans. from German by S. Buda, 1925); *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* (The critique of the Gotha program, trans. from German by S. Vikul, 1929); and *Das Kapital* (Capital, trans. from German by M. Porsch, 1929). These translations marked the consolidation of Marxist thought within Ukrainian scholarship, even as key materials – such as Marx's correspondence with Serhii Podolynsky – remained unpublished in Ukrainian.

Translations on the lives and work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin circulated widely in early Soviet Ukraine, helping the formation of a new propagandistic genre for Ukrainian readership – political biography. Yurii Steklov's *Karl Marks: Ego zhizn i deyatelnost* (Karl Marx: His life and work) appeared in Ukrainian in 1922 thanks to the transnational “Kosmos” publishing association, which also issued Leon Trotsky's *Terrorizm i kommunizm* (Terrorism and communism, 1923). Early translations of Engels and other Marxist theorists were often made directly from

originals – such as Engels’s *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft* (Socialism: utopian and scientific, 1923) – though this was not always indicated. By the early 1930s, translators increasingly relied on Russian mediating editions.

Philosophical translation was fully aligned with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Priority was given to works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, including Stalin’s *O Lenine i leninizme* (On Lenin and Leninism, trans. by Andrii Richytskyi, 1924). Many translations used Russian editions or commentaries, such as Boris Gorev’s *Materializm – filosofiya proletariata* (Materialism – the philosophy of the proletariat, 1925), Pavlo Rokhnin’s *Fejrbah i Marks* (1925), and Boris Fingert and Maxim Shirvindt’s *Kratkij uchebnik istoricheskogo materializma* (A short textbook of historical materialism, 1928). Ukrainian editions of works by Bolshevik leaders also appeared, including Nikolai Bukharin’s *Krizis kapitalizma i kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie* (The crisis of capitalism and the communist movement, 1924), Trotsky’s *O Lenine: materialy dlya biografy* (On Lenin: Materials for a biographer, 1924), and Lev Kamenev’s *Istoriya Partii kommunistov v Rossii i V. I. Lenin* (The history of the communist party in Russia and V. I. Lenin, 1923). The 1919 Ukrainian translation of Peter Kropotkin’s *Kommunizm i anarkhiia* (Communism and anarchy) by Serhiy Pylypenko reflects the Ukrainian People’s Republic’s openness to diverse socialist ideas; Pylypenko’s later execution underscores the vulnerability of Ukraine’s revolutionary generation.

An overview of 1920s translations shows that most social-science works were rendered from Russian, with few exceptions such as Karl August Wittfogel’s *Die Wissenschaft der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (The science of bourgeois society), which was translated from German, and Ernest Unterman’s *Science and Revolution*, translated from English. By contrast, psychology and pedagogy relied primarily on German, French, and English sources.

The first collected Ukrainian edition of Lenin’s works (1928–1933, 18 volumes) sought to affirm linguistic independence but was denounced by Naum Kahanovych as “nationalist sabotage” (Kalnychenko and Kolomiyets 2022), prompting campaigns against “nationalist translators-saboteurs” (Kalnychenko and Kalnychenko 2020). Lenin’s works in Ukrainian circulated extensively, with more than 800 editions and 24 million copies issued between 1918 and 1965. These publications served ideological and linguistic functions; they were used, for example, in compiling Ivan Bilodid’s *Slovyk ukrainskoi movy* (Dictionary of the Ukrainian language, 1970–1980), together with translations of Marx and Engels (Hofeneder 2010). Party directives required that all translations of Lenin’s works – and any other political or ideological texts – be produced only with authorization and oversight from party institutions.

4. Translations in literary studies, linguistics, and the arts

Translations in literary studies and linguistics were relatively scarce and mostly originated in the pre-Soviet or early Soviet period. Important examples include Gustave Lanson’s *Méthode de l’histoire littéraire* (The method of literary history, 1919), translated from French by Okhrim Sobolev, and Leonid Bulakhovsky’s outline of the origin and development of language (1925), translated from Russian by

V. Shcherbanenko. The Danish linguist Kristian Sandfeld-Jensen's introductory *Die Sprachwissenschaft* (Linguistics) was translated from German by Yevhen Tymchenko and published in Katerynoslav in 1920.

Hans Gál's *Anleitung zum Partiturlernen* (Guide to score reading), translated from German by Dmytro Zahul in 1925, served as a practical handbook for the analysis of orchestral and ensemble scores.

5. Translations of religious and atheistic literature

In the early 1920s, the Ukrainian church played a central role in cultural nation-building, with the translation of liturgical texts from Church Slavonic into the vernacular emerging as a major priority of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Vasyl Lypkivsky led these efforts, producing a Ukrainian version of the *Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (1920; reprinted 1922) and translations of the *Book of Hours*, *Trebnik*, and *Prayer Book*, often without attribution. A translation commission under Archbishop Nestor Sharaivsky completed a Ukrainian *Psalter* translated by Archpriest Fedot Khoroshiy, published in 1926. Many additional works remained unpublished, and printed liturgical books were destroyed after the Church's liquidation in 1930.

During this period, translations of atheistic literature from Russian expanded, including brochures such as *Obman popov* (Priestly fraud, 1920), *Za skol'ko serebryanikov popy i monakhi predali narod?* (For how many pieces of silver did priests and monks betray the people?, 1921), *O dushe, o zagrobnoi zhizni, o boge i o bessmertii* (On the soul, the afterlife, god, and immortality, 1923), and *Kak nauka podryvaet veru v boga* (How science undermines faith in god, 1924). Heinrich Cunow's *Ursprung der Religion und des Gottesglaubens* (The origin of religion and the belief in god, 1922) and Sergei Minin's *Religiia i kommunizm* (Religion and communism, 1920) promoted Marxist critiques, as did Anton Pannekoek's *Marxismus und Darwinismus* (1920) for émigré audiences.

STATE INTERVENTION IN TRANSLATION METHODS

In the early 1930s, the Bolsheviks decisively abandoned Ukrainization, restricting the use of Ukrainian – especially in scientific and technical fields. The campaign against alleged “nationalist translator-saboteurs” and the broader Russification policies had devastating consequences for Ukrainian cultural life. Many translators, linguists, and scholars who had promoted Ukrainian linguistic autonomy were dismissed, denounced, arrested, or executed during Stalin's purges. From 1932 to the mid-1950s, translation output declined sharply, and many works were translated or adapted using Russian as the intermediary. Ukrainian translations were increasingly stripped of European linguistic influence and infused with Russian vocabulary and syntactic patterns.

During the 1920s, translations of Marx and Engels in Soviet Ukraine were typically made directly from German. By the early 1930s, however, this practice shifted markedly: translators increasingly relied on Russian editions, often without acknowledging the mediating language. Some works even claimed to be translated “from Ger-

man” while drawing primarily on Russian sources. The publication history of Marx’s works between 1923 and 1938 illustrates this transition. Early Ukrainian translations – *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1925), *The Civil War in France* (1925), *Misère de la philosophie* (1923), *Lohnarbeit und Kapital* (Wage labour and capital, 1925), *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (A contribution to the critique of political economy, 1926), and *Capital*, vol. I (1927) – were prepared directly from German. Into the early 1930s, *Feuerbach* (1930), *Selected Letters* (1931), and *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850* (Class struggles in France, 1932) continued this approach. Yet the 1930 translation of *The Communist Manifesto* – produced from Russian and only checked against German – symbolized the turn toward relay translations.

This period coincided with intensified repression, including the 1930 Kharkiv show trial of the Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrayiny (the Union for the Freedom of Ukraine), where 45 Ukrainian intellectuals were falsely accused of plotting independence. Soon afterward, Stalin’s regime regulated not only which texts were translated but how they were rendered. Relay translation from Russian became standard, and earlier Ukrainian versions were revised in hindsight to conform to Russian editions. The campaign peaked after Naum Kahanovych’s 1934 article accusing translators of “nationalistic distortions” and of “falsifying” Lenin’s ideas: “The first edition of the Ukrainian translation of Lenin’s works, edited by Skrypnyk, has been distorted and perverted by the nationalists [...] aimed at separating the Ukrainian language [from Russian] [...] the meaning of Lenin’s works has been falsified” (11).

Kahanovych’s critique institutionalized a rigid translation model that demanded literal, word-for-word fidelity to Russian texts, sacrificing linguistic nuance for ideological purity. His article became a tool for suppressing Ukrainian linguistic autonomy and enforcing party-centered Marxism-Leninism. Although Communist Party materials for publication in Ukrainian newspapers and magazines had long been sent from Moscow in Russian, the 1920s still allowed direct translation from foreign languages. This openness was decisively reversed in the 1930s. The new approach reshaped translation practices and functioned as cultural control, subordinating Ukrainian intellectual life to Soviet ideological demands.

THE 1933 RESOLUTION BY THE COMMISSION OF THE PEOPLE’S COMMISSARIAT OF EDUCATION

Motivated by the Bolshevik policy of Ukrainization, numerous dictionaries were produced in the 1920s to codify and standardize Ukrainian vocabulary for use in education, administration, and scholarly work, reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian language. With the onset of Stalin-era Russification in the early 1930s, however, many of these lexicographic works were branded “nationalist”, blacklisted, destroyed, and their compilers persecuted.

In 1933, the education authorities of the Ukrainian SSR created a special commission tasked with suppressing Ukrainian linguistic independence. The 1933 Resolutions of the Commission of the People’s Commissariat of Education marked a decisive shift, aiming to realign Ukrainian with Russian norms. Dictionaries codifying indig-

enous vocabulary were condemned, and terms reflecting Polish, Czech, or broader Western influence were rejected (Rezoliutsii 1933). Native Ukrainian words were systematically replaced with Russian or Russified forms: *teplomir* became *termometr*, *mirilo* became *mashtab*, and items such as *plyn* (“fluid”) were removed for lacking Russian equivalents. Internationalisms differing from Russian usage – e.g., *folha* instead of *folija* – were censured, and borrowings unused in Russian were replaced, for example, *tinktura* was substituted with *kartón*. Polish-influenced terms were targeted with particular rigor. Russian grammatical norms were imposed on shared loanwords: feminine nouns in *-iza/-yza/-eza* were masculinized, and endings in *-alija* shifted to *-al*. Thus, *elipsa* became *elips*, and *protuberantsa* became *protuberanets* (Kocherha 2004). Other substitutions – *psychol’ohija* to *psychologija*, *samostijnist’* to *avtonomija*, *istoriosofija* to *istorija*, *kliasik* to *klasyk* – reflected the broader Soviet drive to erase Ukrainian linguistic distinctiveness.

CONCLUSION

In Ukraine, the translation of humanities and social-science texts in the 1920s–1930s developed within the Ukrainization policy (1923–1929), which initially fostered a cultural renaissance. This period saw expanded translation activity in pedagogy, psychology, political philosophy, social history, and Marxist theory, drawing on German, French, and English sources. Translation theorists such as Oleksandr Finkel, Mykola Zerov, and Mykhailo Kalynovych advanced the discipline, with Finkel’s *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* providing an early systematic model for translating non-literary prose. The founding of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistic Education in 1930 further strengthened institutional support for translation studies.

This momentum was halted by the reversal of Ukrainization and the rise of Stalinist Russification, which undermined Ukrainian linguistic autonomy. Translators were increasingly accused of “nationalist sabotage”, leading to persecution, institutional purges, and the suppression of numerous works. Nevertheless, translation activity of the time left a lasting imprint, maintaining links to global scholarship even as Soviet policies reshaped cultural identity.

A defining feature of this period, as Susanna Witt notes, was the ideologization of translation norms, which involved “tying certain approaches to translation to ideologically reprehensible positions and defining the limits of translation discourse” (Darmaros 2018, 501). After private publishers were liquidated in 1930, the state monopolized publishing and required foreign works to conform to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Relay translation through Russian became obligatory in the social sciences, subordinating Ukrainian scholarship to Russian mediation. Furthermore, “initial norm”, as it was classified by Gideon Toury (1995, 56–61), was reoriented toward the “mass Soviet reader”, prioritizing ideological clarity over fidelity. Translators were compelled to simplify or distort content to ensure conformity, while literalism was promoted not for accuracy but to impose Russian grammatical and lexical patterns on Ukrainian. Linguistic richness was sacrificed to Russified structures, and resistance was condemned as “nationalistic sabotage”, reflecting broader Soviet attempts to control intellectual life.

NOTES

- ¹ All translations from Ukrainian are by the present authors.
- ² In the following discussion, the dates indicated are those of the Ukrainian translations, with informative English titles of the originals included as needed.

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