

## STUDENT TRANSLATION COMPETITIONS AS A FORM OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

### СТУДЕНТСЬКІ ПЕРЕКЛАДАЦЬКІ КОНКУРСИ ЯК ФОРМА МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

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This article examines the International Student Competition "Translation as a Key to Cultural and Linguistic Worldviews" as a form of intercultural communication realized through translation practice and translator training. The competition is approached as a Translation Studies object in which intercultural exchange is mediated by concrete translational decisions, evaluative criteria, and public circulation of translated texts. Drawing on the 2023–2025 editions, the paper analyzes the competition design, including its bidirectional English–Ukrainian orientation, the combination of poetic and song-lyrics translation, its organizational logic, jury composition, assessment criteria, and the publication of selected student translations in cultural media. The assessment criteria are shown to operationalize core dimensions of translation quality and competence that are central to intercultural mediation: semantic accuracy, stylistic adequacy, sensitivity to culturally marked elements (realia, proper names, historical and cultural allusions), the reproduction of poetic form (rhythm, rhyme, meter), and creative decision-making within the communicative and aesthetic "spirit" of the source text. The study focuses on the way these criteria structure students' awareness of translation as a culturally responsible act. A focused case illustration – the culture-specific item "biscuits" in an American context – demonstrates how competition tasks reveal students' ability to recognize intra-English variation, identify implicit cultural meanings, and justify their translational choices when rendering culturally embedded realia for another linguistic community. The analysis shows that even individual lexical decisions can become sites of intercultural negotiation and learning. The study argues that student translation competitions function as (1) spaces of intercultural communication mediated by translation, (2) motivational mechanisms within written translation training, and (3) formative environments for the development of translator agency, reflexivity, and responsibility for textual decisions. The article concludes by proposing student translation competitions as a scalable pedagogical format that integrates intercultural communication, assessment of translation competence, and early professionalization within translator education.

**Key words:** intercultural communication, translator training, translation competence, translation quality assessment, poetry translation, song-lyrics translation, English–Ukrainian translation.

У статті розглянуто Міжнародний студентський конкурс «Переклад як засіб актуалізації етноМовних картин світу» як форму міжкультурної комунікації, реалізовану через перекладацьку діяльність і навчання перекладу. Конкурс осмислюється як перекладознавчий феномен, у межах якого міжкультурний діалог здійснюється через конкретні перекладацькі рішення, критерії оцінювання та публічну презентацію перекладів. На матеріалі результатів конкурсу 2023–2025 років проаналізовано модель змагання, що передбачає двосторонній напрям перекладу (англійська–українська), поєднання жанрів (поезія та пісенний текст), організаційну логіку заходу, склад журі, критерії оцінювання та публікацію кращих перекладів у культурних медіа. Показано, що критерії оцінювання фактично операціоналізують ключові компоненти перекладацької майстерності, важливі для міжкультурного посередництва: смислову точність, стилістичну адекватність, відтворення культурно маркованих одиниць (реалій, власних назв, культурних алюзій), поетичну форму (ритм, риму, метр) і креативні рішення в межах авторського задуму. Такі критерії сприяють формуванню у студентів розуміння перекладу як відповідальної культурної практики. На прикладі перекладу культурно специфічної одиниці *biscuits* (американський варіант) продемонстровано, як конкурсне завдання виявляє здатність студентів розпізнавати міжваріантні відмінності англійської мови, інтерпретувати приховані культурні значення та ухвалювати аргументовані рішення щодо передачі реалій іншомовному читачеві. Аналіз засвідчує, що навіть вибір окремих лексем може ставати нагодою для міжкультурної взаємодії та навчання. Обґрунтовано, що проведення конкурсу виконує одночасно кілька функцій: (1) простору для міжкультурної комунікації, опосередкованої перекладом, (2) мотивувального механізму в навчанні письмового перекладу; (3) середовища формування перекладацької суб'єктності, рефлексії та відповідальності за текст. У перспективі студентські перекладацькі конкурси запропоновано розглядати як формат педагогічного дизайну, що інтегрує міжкультурну комунікацію, оцінювання перекладацької компетентності та професійний розвиток майбутніх перекладачів.

**Ключові слова:** міжкультурна комунікація, навчання перекладу, перекладацька компетентність, оцінювання якості перекладу, художній/поетичний переклад, переклад пісенних текстів, англійсько-український переклад.

**Problem statement.** At specialized departments of Ukrainian higher education institutions, student competitions in literary translation are held regularly,

bringing together aspiring translators from different regions of the country and, occasionally, from abroad. Such events are designed to encourage students to

engage in translation practice while also shaping the professional development of young specialists – a process that calls for scholarly reflection. The issue of student poetry translation is therefore particularly relevant: although these competitions have gained popularity among both teachers and students, their impact on Ukrainian culture and on intercultural dialogue, as a form of intercultural communication mediated through translation, has not yet been sufficiently examined.

Literary translation competitions in Ukraine are organized both for university students and school pupils. While the latter have a clear pragmatic purpose – career orientation and the recruitment of prospective applicants – the practical function of student-level competitions is far less obvious, since their participants are already enrolled in higher education. For this reason, organizers of university competitions need to be aware of the broader cultural implications of such events. There is a risk of an overly simplified approach, whereby a competition is used merely to promote one's own students or to support colleagues from partner institutions, which may give rise to conflicts of interest. To avoid bias, it is important to understand the potential cultural impact of a competition and to orient its organization towards the genuine development of translation culture. Another problematic aspect is the formalization of participation, when the event is treated merely as a line on a CV or as a requirement for academic assessment. The formation of appropriate motivation presupposes an awareness of the artistic significance of translation activity. For this reason, the study of the intercultural communicative impact of Ukrainian student translation competitions is timely and necessary.

#### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

The impact of translation on Ukrainian culture has been a central focus of numerous studies in Translation Studies. However, the contribution of student work – particularly translations produced for participation in university competitions – has rarely been examined as a distinct object of research. This article builds on earlier descriptive work, which focused on the competition's cultural impact [5]; the present study offers an analytical Translation Studies perspective. In the broader scholarly context, special mention should be made of Andriy Danylenko's comprehensive study *From the Bible to Shakespeare: Panteleimon Kulish and the Formation of the Ukrainian Literary Language* (2023), which analyses how Panteleimon Kulish's translation activity shaped the development of the Ukrainian literary language [1]. First published in English in 2016 [4], this work became a notable event in its Ukrainian translation: in the preface, the

author explicitly acknowledges that the Ukrainian-language version is no less authoritative or informative than the original.

Equally significant is Maksym Strikha's monograph *Ukrainian Literary Translation: Between Literature and Nation-Building* (2006), one of the earliest systematic studies of the role of literary translation in the formation of modern Ukrainian culture and national identity [2]. The importance of this work is underscored by its republication in 2020 under the title *Ukrainian Translation and Translators: Between Literature and Nation-Building* [3], as well as by the ongoing and lively discussions surrounding the cultural impact of translation. The present study, by contrast, focuses on a specific aspect of this broader problem area: the intercultural communicative impact of student poetic translations (from English into Ukrainian and vice versa) produced for participation in a particular competition.

**Unresolved aspects of the problem.** Student translation competitions have rarely been examined as a tool for translator training or as a form of authentic assessment of translation competence within the broader framework of intercultural communication mediated by translation. Insufficient attention has been paid to the specific competences assessed by different competition categories, as well as to how jury criteria relate to established categories of translation quality (accuracy/acceptability/poetic form/culturally marked units) and to their role in developing intercultural communicative awareness, alongside the pedagogical effects of publishing translations (public outcomes as a source of learning motivation and responsibility).

**The aim of the study** is to analyze the intercultural communicative impact of translations of poetic works prepared by students for participation in the International Student Competition “Translation as a Key to Cultural and Linguistic Worldviews.” The competition was launched in 2017 by the Department of Applied Linguistics, Comparative Linguistics, and Translation at the Faculty of Foreign Philology of Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine, then headed by Nataliya Lemish. Since that time, the competition has been held annually as part of the lingocultural project *Intercultural Communication and Translation Studies: Points of Contact and Prospects for Development*. The eighth competition took place in March 2024, followed by the ninth in March 2025, attesting to the emergence of a stable academic tradition.

**The material** for the present analysis consists of the outcomes of the 2023–2025 competitions, in particular English-language poetic texts and their Ukrainian translations produced by students.

**Methods.** The study combines an analysis of the competition documentation (categories, assessment criteria, participation statistics, and publication of results) with a translation-studies analysis of representative decision-making in the submitted translations.

**Organizational aspects.** The competition is traditionally announced in the autumn (September–November), with submissions accepted until early or mid-March, and the results published at the end of March. The jury consists of lecturers from the organizing department as well as Master's students, which ensures a multifaceted approach to evaluation. Winners are determined by a majority vote of the jury members.

The event holds international status, with students from both Ukrainian higher education institutions and foreign universities invited to participate. Each participant may submit entries in several categories simultaneously. According to the competition regulations, its aims are to foster and disseminate linguistic culture, increase future professionals' interest in translation activities, and identify and stimulate individual creative potential.

**Competition categories.** The competition is held in four categories. The first, *Translation of an English-Language Poem into Ukrainian*, features a contemporary English-language poem: in 2023, this was "Poem" by the American poet and Nobel laureate Louise Glück; in 2024, "Dawn Revisited" by the American poet Rita Dove, recipient of the Gold Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; and in 2025, "Love" by the British rapper and spoken-word artist Kae Tempest.

The second category, *Translation of a Ukrainian Poem into English*, introduces contemporary Ukrainian poetry to an English-speaking audience: in 2023, "Ti, shcho liubliať" by Bohdana Matiash; in 2024, "Ars poetica" by Sviatoslav Hordynskyi; and in 2025, "Vidhomin" by Kateryna Balashova.

The third category, *Translation of a Ukrainian Song into English*, engages students in working with song lyrics: in 2023, "Vstavaimo" (music by Viacheslav Rubel, lyrics by Andrii Podyriak); in 2024, "Ne vtratymo zviazok!" by the rap artist Alyona Alyona; and in 2025, "Pid vesnianym doshchem" by the band Krykhitka.

The fourth category, *Translation of an English-Language Song into Ukrainian*, challenges participants to interpret and render into Ukrainian iconic English-language compositions: in 2023, "Your Power" performed by the American singer Billie Eilish; in 2024, "Wuthering Heights" by the British artist Kate Bush; and in 2025, "I'm Coming Out"

by the international band Gogol Bordello, led by the Ukrainian frontman Eugene Hütz.

This stable, bidirectional format – from English-language poetry and song to Ukrainian and vice versa – expands transnational dialogue, allows students to practise across different genres, and serves as a cultural bridge by introducing Ukrainian readers to landmark English-language works while simultaneously presenting Ukrainian poetry and song to the wider world.

**Assessment criteria.** The assessment criteria encompass a wide range of parameters. *Aesthetic equivalence* between the translation and the original requires a comparable emotional and aesthetic response. *Accuracy and closeness to the source text* entail preserving meaning, imagery, and detail. A *sense of language* presupposes a high level of proficiency in the languages of both cultures and the appropriate use of linguistic resources. The *adequacy of lexico-grammatical means* ensures grammatical and stylistic correctness in accordance with the norms of the target language (the language into which the translation is produced).

The *rendering of culturally marked elements* involves conveying realia, proper names, and cultural allusions in a way that is accessible to readers from another linguistic background. *Content presentation* is assessed in terms of the completeness and depth with which the theme is developed. *Stylistics* require the preservation of the author's style, tone, and rhetorical features. *Poetic form* (for poems and songs) depends on the accurate reproduction of the original's rhyme, rhythm, and meter.

Finally, *originality of creative solutions* encourages an innovative approach that does not conflict with the spirit of the source text. Accordingly, the jury evaluates both adherence to linguistic conventions and creative initiative – two inseparable components of translational craftsmanship.

**Results of the 2023–2025 competitions.** Over the course of the competition's existence, the number of participants has increased significantly, and the range of participating institutions has expanded to include foreign universities. In 2023, the seventh competition was attended by 51 students (47 from Ukraine, three from the United Kingdom, and one from Lithuania), who together submitted 61 entries (as participants may compete in several categories simultaneously). The participants represented 15 higher education institutions in Ukraine, as well as University College London (United Kingdom) and Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania).

In 2024, during the eighth competition, the number of participants rose to 106 (all from Ukraine), and

the number of submitted translations reached 142. A total of 27 universities from 16 regions of Ukraine (19 cities) were represented, indicating the competition's broad popularity among Ukrainian students.

In 2025, 179 students submitted entries (174 from Ukraine and five from universities in the United Kingdom, Lithuania, and Austria). The total number of competition submissions reached 229. Students represented 41 cities across five countries and 43 universities, including 40 Ukrainian institutions and three foreign ones (University College London, Kaunas University of Technology, and the University of Graz, named after Karl and Franz). This dynamic growth attests to the increasing interest in the competition and its growing international recognition.

It should also be noted that, as a result of the Russian–Ukrainian war, many Ukrainian students reside outside the country while remaining enrolled in Ukrainian universities, while others, conversely, pursue their studies abroad while residing in Ukraine; consequently, place of residence and place of study do not always coincide.

**Media support and public visibility.** An important indicator of the event's socio-cultural significance is the media coverage of its results. In particular, the journal *Krytyka* serves as the competition's information partner: announcements of the contest, lists of winners, and selected student translations are published on its website. The international cultural portal *Eksperiment* also regularly reports on the competition and publishes prize-winning texts. In 2025, the portal featured translations by the winners of the ninth competition, enabling a broader audience to become acquainted with students' creative work.

Specifically, the following translations were published: the translation of the poem "Love" by the British poet Kae Tempest (translator: Anastasiia Veremienko, Sumy State University; first prize in the category *Translation of an English-Language Poem into Ukrainian*); the translation of the song "Pid vesnianym doshchem" by the band Krykhitka (translator: Oleksandra Pavliv, Sumy State University; first prize in the category *Translation of a Ukrainian Song into English*); and the translation of the song "I'm Coming Out" by the band Gogol Bordello (translator: Yelyzaveta Semenova, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University; first prize in the category *Translation of an English-Language Song into Ukrainian*).

In 2025, *Krytyka* also highlighted the success of a student from abroad by publishing the translation of a poem by Kateryna Balashova produced by the British student Alice Lee (University College London; first prize in the category *Translation of a Ukrainian*

*Poem into English*), as well as the translation of Kae Tempest's poem by Dariia Kryvonos, a student at Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University (second prize in the category *Translation of an English-Language Poem into Ukrainian*).

Local media outlets and university platforms likewise ran active coverage campaigns. News agencies reported on students' achievements in the competition (for example, the Vinnytsia-based agency *VITA* covered Dariia Kryvonos's second-place award, while the Cherkasy media outlet *Nova doba* and the portal *Pro vse* reported on prize winners from Cherkasy National University). The official websites and social media pages of numerous universities – including Sumy State University, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, Donetsk National Technical University, Nizhyn Mykola Gogol State University, Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University, and many others – published congratulatory messages to the winners, thereby promoting the competition within the academic community.

This media support ensured that the competition's results became accessible to a broad cultural audience across different regions of Ukraine and beyond.

**Cultural impact of the competition.** An analysis of the competition materials and participants' feedback makes it possible to identify several key dimensions in which the cultural impact of the student translation competition, as a form of intercultural communication mediated through translation, becomes evident.

**1. Familiarization with the work of contemporary poets.** The competition introduces students and readers alike to new names and texts. Through the translation of English-language poetry, participants engage with the work of prominent foreign authors whom they may not previously have known. For example, as part of the 2024 competition, students translated the poem "Dawn Revisited" by Rita Dove, a distinguished American poet. As a result, Ukrainian readers – through the publication of the competition entries – were introduced to the poetry of Rita Dove, which had previously been scarcely represented in Ukrainian translation. In this way, the event promotes contemporary English-language poetry in Ukraine and fosters engagement with Anglophone poetic culture, functioning as a concrete instance of intercultural communication through literary translation.

Young translators, in preparing their versions of the texts, immerse themselves deeply in the poet's imaginative world, while the final product – the translation – becomes accessible to a broad readership. This enriches the Ukrainian literary landscape with new translated works. By way of illustration, we

present below the original poem by Rita Dove alongside its translation produced by the student winner of the competition, Inna Omelchenko.

### Dawn Revisited

Imagine you wake up  
with a second chance: The blue jay  
hawks his pretty wares  
and the oak still stands, spreading  
glorious shade. If you don't look back,  
the future never happens.  
How good to rise in sunlight,  
in the prodigal smell of biscuits –  
eggs and sausage on the grill.  
The whole sky is yours  
to write on, blown open  
to a blank page. Come on,  
shake a leg! You'll never know  
who's down there, frying those eggs,  
if you don't get up and see.

### Знову, на світанку

Уяви, ти прокидаєшся  
із другим шансом: блакитна сойка  
крамарює статком красивим,  
і дуб стойти, розкидаючи  
тінь рясну. Як не оглядатимешся,  
завтра може і не статись.  
Як же добре прокидатись  
на сонці яснім, в духмянні паоощ  
яєчні та ковбаски на плиті.  
Увесь небесний простір твій,  
аби писати, розкриватись  
на чистім аркуші. Гайда,  
сміливіш! Ти ніколи не дізнаєшся,  
хто там смажить яйця ті,  
якщо не наважишся хоч підійти.

The translator successfully rendered the bright, optimistic mood of the original, preserving its key images (the blue jay, the oak, the boundless sky, and others) while also adapting certain realia for a Ukrainian readership. In particular, the nuance surrounding the word *biscuits* deserves attention: in American usage, this refers to soft, unsweetened breakfast rolls, whereas in British English it denotes *cookies*. To convey the phrase “prodigal smell of biscuits – eggs and sausage on the grill,” the student placed the semantic emphasis on the rich, savory aroma of fried eggs and sausage, which effectively evokes the sense of a hearty morning meal.

Many other translations rendered *biscuits* unsuccessfully as *pechyvo* (печиво), failing to take into account the cultural specificity of the original (American English here differs from British English). Inna Omelchenko’s version does not offer a direct

equivalent for this word, yet it conveys the overall meaning of the situation with considerable success. In this way, through the translation, Ukrainian readers are introduced to the poetry of Rita Dove and gain insight into aspects of everyday American culture, while students can experience the differences between various varieties of the English language.

**2. Dissemination of knowledge about foreign cultures.** The translation of literary texts requires close attention to the realia of other countries as well as to the historical and sociocultural contexts of the works in question. In this way, students broaden their reading horizons and enrich their general knowledge. For example, when translating Kate Bush’s song *Wuthering Heights* into Ukrainian, competition participants had to take into account its allusion to English literary classics (Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights*) as well as the distinctive features of the singer’s British folkloric style.

Conversely, those translating Ukrainian songs into English (for instance, the hip-hop track “Ne vtratymo zviazok!” by Alyona Alyona) were required to convey Ukrainian wartime realities and contemporary slang to a foreign-language readership. All of this fosters mutual enlightenment: Ukrainian students gain a deeper understanding of global culture, while the results of their work introduce English-speaking audiences to the specific features of Ukrainian figurative and poetic traditions. Competition translations published online thus create two-way bridges between cultures and contexts of intercultural communication.

**3. Enrichment of Ukrainian culture through new translations.** Another outcome of the competition is the emergence of dozens of new translated texts that strengthen the online presence of Ukrainian-language literature. Some of the works selected for the competition had not previously been translated into Ukrainian; in such cases, students become pioneers with their translations. Prize-winning translations that have passed the jury’s selection are published in media outlets and collected volumes, where they find their readership. Ukrainian culture develops and is enriched through dialogue with world culture – one need only recall the contribution of Kulish’s or Franko’s translations to the formation of the literary language [1; 2]. Contemporary student work continues this tradition at its own level, revitalizing the Ukrainian language with new images and concepts.

For example, the poems by Louise Glück, Rita Dove, and Kae Tempest translated for the competition enable Ukrainian readers to engage with these works in their native language. Naturally, not all student translations are flawless, yet the best of them may well serve as material for future literary publica-

tions or anthologies. The competition thus functions as a kind of translation laboratory, where new artistic solutions are tested and may potentially enrich the target culture.

#### **4. Formation of a translation community.**

Student translation competitions also have a socio-cultural effect in that they bring together young people passionate about translation into a community. Representatives of different universities meet, discuss creative challenges, and compare approaches to their work. Through the public announcement of results (via online platforms and social media), a communication network emerges among novice translators, teachers, and translation professionals.

Participants often continue to interact after the competition ends, sharing their texts beyond the contest framework. Some students even go on to become members of the jury in subsequent years, ensuring continuity of experience. In addition, the official websites and pages of departments and universities, by covering the event, create an information space in which the translation achievements of young people become visible. An active translation milieu thus takes shape, extending beyond a single institution – a nationwide, and in part international, network of young professionals connected by shared experience. If purposefully supported, this environment can become a hub for further cultural initiatives, joint projects, and the exchange of expertise. In this way, the competition contributes to the consolidation of a new generation of the translation community.

#### **5. Development of students' creative subjectivity.**

Participation in the competition has an important educational and cultural dimension, closely tied to the development of intercultural communicative awareness: it helps novice translators come to see themselves as creative subjects. By producing their own literary translations, participants act as co-authors of the artistic text, articulate an individual style, and make creative decisions. This process fosters self-confidence in translators as creators. When a translation receives recognition – through awards or publication – the student experiences their translational voice as meaningful and valued.

An equally important aspect is reflection on the authorial subjectivity of the source text. When

engaging with the poetry of, for example, a young British poet, the translator must sensitively grasp the author's personality, voice, and gender identity in order to render them adequately in another language. This empathy toward the authorial voice, embodied in the translation, in turn develops the student's own critical thinking.

The competition thus becomes a school for the development of the translator's "self": young professionals learn to take responsibility for every word, to justify their interpretive choices, and to defend them before peers and audiences. The development of subjectivity is an exceptionally important cultural aspect of translation practice, for it is through this process that a new generation of translators capable of independent and creative thinking is formed.

**Conclusions.** The International Student Competition "Translation as a Key to Cultural and Linguistic Worldviews" demonstrates a tangible, multidimensional cultural impact mediated through translation practice. It engages and encourages talented young people while also functioning as a channel of intercultural communication, sustaining literary exchange between Ukraine and the wider world. Through this initiative, contemporary English-language poets and artists "speak" in Ukrainian, while Ukrainian poetry gains new life in English-language translations. This process enriches Ukrainian culture, broadens readers' horizons, and affirms the value of translation as a creative and socially meaningful practice.

At the same time, the competition fosters a community of young translators who learn from one another and collectively raise their level of professional competence. Such initiatives are of particular importance for Ukraine as it asserts its place within the global cultural space. Translation activity, operating as a form of intercultural communication, simultaneously contributes to the development of national cultural identity, since each successful translation integrates a foreign-language work into the receiving culture as a new and distinctive voice. In this lies the significant cultural and educational mission that, as the present study demonstrates, student translation competitions can fulfil.

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