Cultural, Linguistic, and Digital Features of Translating German Texts into Ukrainian

Características culturales, lingüísticas y digitales de la traducción de textos alemanes al ucraniano

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Abstract

This work focuses on the linguistic and cultural analysis of translating German fiction into Ukrainian, using five modern translations from 2020 to 2025 with a total of 1, 540 pages across different genres: autobiographical prose (Stanišić, S.), historical novel (Kehlmann, D.), fantasy (Gier, K.), short stories (Hermann, J.), and dystopia (Haushofer, M.). Through comparative analysis and the method of continuous selection, 187 fragments containing cultural elements were identified, including cultural realities (52), idioms (41), phraseological units (34), historical allusions (28), and dialectal expressions (32). Six translation strategies and 94 grammatical modifications necessary to maintain the stylistic features of the German originals were organized. This reveals that the dominant approaches- adaptation in translating cultural realities (30. 8%), transcription (26. 9%), and descriptive translation (23. 1%)- are characteristic of modern Ukrainian translators who have achieved a high level of functional equivalence. It was also found that the most effective strategies for translating idioms are functional equivalents (the most effective at 41. 5%) and calquing without explanation (which causes a loss of idiomaticity at 9. 9.8%). A total of 75 German- Ukrainian language differences were categorized into three types: lexical (18), conceptual (24), and cultural (33), demonstrating the significant cultural gap between the German- speaking and Ukrainian linguistic and cultural spheres. Syntactic rearrangements (38. 3%) and article compensation (29. 8%) emerged as the most common transformation forms, and five mechanisms were used to compensate for the absence of the definiteness category in Ukrainian. The article illustrates that successful German- Ukrainian literary translation must balance cultural accuracy and adaptive functionality, employing compensatory

measures at lexical, phraseological, and syntactic levels. These findings add a systematic taxonomy of translation strategies to Ukrainian translation research, which can inform translator training and translation quality assessment. A particular focus is given to the digital aspects of modern literary translation. The paper discusses how computer- assisted translation systems, neural machine translation, and parallel corpora facilitate the analysis and validation of translation choices. The results demonstrate that computer- aided tools improve the methodological clarity and analytical precision of translation studies while preserving the interpretative and creative qualities of literary translation.

Keywords: strategies of transferring cultural elements, phraseological equivalence, grammatical compensation, functional approach to translation, intercultural adaptation

Resumen

Este trabajo está dedicado al análisis lingüístico y cultural de la traducción de obras de ficción alemanas al ucraniano, tomando como ejemplo cinco traducciones modernas (2020-2025) con un volumen total de 1540 páginas de diferentes géneros: prosa autobiográfica (Stanišić, S.), novela histórica (Kehlmann, D.), fantasía (Gier, K.), relatos cortos (Hermann, J.) y distopía (Haushofer, M.). Mediante el análisis comparativo y el método de selección continua, se identificaron 187 fragmentos que contenían elementos culturales: realidades culturales (52), modismos (41), unidades fraseológicas (34), alusiones históricas (28) y expresiones dialectales (32). Se sistematizaron seis estrategias de traducción y 94 cambios gramaticales necesarios para preservar las características estilísticas de los originales alemanes. Esto indica que el predominio de la adaptación en la traducción de realidades culturales (30,8 %), la transcripción (26,9 %) y la traducción descriptiva (23,1 %) es una característica de los traductores ucranianos modernos que han alcanzado un alto nivel de equivalencia funcional. Se ha constatado que las estrategias de traducción que mejor ayudan en la traducción de expresiones idiomáticas son los equivalentes funcionales (los más eficaces, 41,5 %) y el calco sin explicación (que conduce a la pérdida de idiomaticidad en el 9,8 %). Se clasificaron un total de 75 diferencias lingüísticas entre el alemán y el ucraniano en tres tipos: léxicas (18), conceptuales (24) y culturales (33), lo que confirma la gran distancia cultural entre el espacio lingüístico y cultural germanoparlante y el ucraniano. Los reordenamientos sintácticos (38,3 %) y la compensación de artículos (29,8 %) se identificaron como las formas más comunes de transformación, y se utilizaron cinco mecanismos para compensar la pérdida de la categoría de definitud en ucraniano. El artículo muestra que una traducción literaria eficaz del alemán al ucraniano debe equilibrar la precisión cultural y la funcionalidad adaptativa con medidas compensatorias a nivel léxico, fraseológico y sintáctico. Los resultados complementan los estudios ucranianos sobre traducción con una taxonomía sistemática de estrategias para la formación de traductores y la evaluación de la calidad de la traducción. Se presta especial atención al aspecto digital de la traducción literaria moderna. El artículo analiza cómo los sistemas de traducción asistida por ordenador, los sistemas de traducción automática neuronal y los corpus paralelos facilitan el análisis y la validación de las opciones de traducción. Los resultados muestran que las herramientas asistidas por ordenador mejoran la claridad metodológica y la precisión analítica de los estudios de traducción sin comprometer la calidad interpretativa y creativa de la traducción literaria.

Palabras clave: estrategias de transferencia de elementos culturales, equivalencia fraseológica, compensación gramatical, enfoque funcional de la traducción, adaptación intercultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized society, literary translation serves as a cultural bridge between two or more linguistic and cultural groups, allowing readers to become familiar with the literary traditions of other countries. The translation of German literature into Ukrainian is especially important in the context of Ukraine's European integration and the growth of cultural exchange between the German-speaking world and Ukraine. German literature is traditionally characterized by philosophical depth, complex syntactic structures, and specific cultural codes of the German mentality: *Ordnung* (order), *Grundlichkeit* (thoroughness), *Bildung* (education). Translating these works into Ukrainian not only enhances Ukrainian literature but also fosters intercultural dialogue. In this context, Ukrainian readers gain better opportunities to learn about German identity, historical memory, and cultural values (Sun, 2022). This highlights the challenge of accurately conveying these features in Ukrainian, as it requires not only an excellent command of both languages but also a deep understanding of the unique aspects of each culture.

The linguistic and cultural adaptation of German fiction translation is a vital issue in international translation studies. Blumczynski (2023) describes translation as an experience of translatability, a process where the translator undertakes both material and metaphorical journeys across cultures. Marais (2023) examines translation through the lens of the thermodynamics of semiosis, emphasizing the dynamism and multidimensionality of the translation process. Sun (2022) concentrates on the communicative role of literary translation, highlighting that the transfer of meaning extends beyond simple information sharing and involves intercultural discourse. Larsen (2024) explains how analogical thinking supports translation, especially when handling culturally specific elements. These theoretical insights offer a conceptual framework for understanding translation as a complex linguistic and cultural phenomenon, but how this can be practically applied to the German-Ukrainian language pair remains an open question. As digitalization progresses in the humanities, translation is increasingly recognized as both a cultural and linguistic process facilitated by technology. Digital translation tools, such as CAT systems, neural machine translation, and corpus-based resources, have been incorporated into professional translation practices and research. While human interpretive skills remain central in literary translation, digital technologies can assist with analysis, enable systematic comparisons of translation strategies, and foster more consistent and methodical approaches in studying translation processes.

The translation of German literature plays a key role in shaping Ukrainians' attitudes toward German cultural identity. A meaningful exchange of German cultural symbols during European integration, along with the culture of the Ukrainian people and Germany, enhances international understanding and supports the Ukrainian language's recognition as a full-fledged means of translating European literature.

An analysis of translating German literature into Slavic languages highlights certain challenges stemming from the typological differences between Germanic and Slavic language families. Vecchiato's (2024) research on linguistic and aesthetic approaches to translating contemporary German non-binary literature into Italian demonstrates that

finding a gender-neutral language is often difficult. Lang (2024) explores the issues involved in translating Kim de l'Horizon's novel Blutbuch, emphasizing the challenge of balancing the linguistic innovations of the original with the norms of the target language. Ahmadova (2025) categorizes practical problems, translation methods, and innovations, pointing out the need for a creative approach when dealing with culturally specific features. However, these studies do not address the particularities of the German-Ukrainian translation direction nor describe it in detail, leaving a gap in understanding the unique aspects of translation for Ukrainian-speaking audiences.

Research on translation into Ukrainian is actively progressing in the field of German-Ukrainian translation. The German-Ukrainian parallel corpus ParaRook‖DE-UK, developed by Shvedova and Lukashevskyi (2024), provides new opportunities for studying the corpus. Shmiher (2021) organized the history of translation studies in Ukraine and demonstrated how translation methods have evolved. Djovčoś et al. (2023) position Ukrainian translation studies within the European context and highlight their inclusion in the international scientific discussion. Marianko (2025) examines linguistic gaps in German-Ukrainian translation and categorizes them into types of interlingual gaps. Dyakiv et al. (2022) note that the communicative problems faced by Ukrainian-speaking students learning German are directly linked to translation issues. However, a systematic study of linguistic and cultural strategies for translating German fiction based on modern Ukrainian translations has yet to be conducted.

Although the grammatical features of German-Ukrainian translation have been studied separately (Kondratieva & Ovsiienko, 2023), lexical challenges in literary translation (Kovalenko & Stroikova, 2024), and the linguistic and cultural influences on poetic translation (Kovalova & Bandolko, 2022), there is no single study that combines all areas of linguistic and cultural analysis, including lexical, phraseological, grammatical, and stylistic levels. Particularly important is the question of how effective different translation approaches are in conveying culturally marked features and preserving the stylistic elements of German originals.

This gap calls for a systematic study of linguistic and cultural factors in translating German fiction into Ukrainian, considering modern translations from 2020 to 2025. The goal of the study is to identify and document the linguistic and cultural features involved in translating German fiction into Ukrainian by analyzing approaches to translation strategies for conveying culturally rich language, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical forms in five modern translations of German prose across different genres and styles, examining grammatical features of German-Ukrainian translation, lexical challenges in literary translation, and linguistic and cultural aspects of poetic translation.

The article discusses three key problems in modern German-Ukrainian literary translation. First, it is important to identify translation strategies that best help convey German cultural realities and historical allusions in Ukrainian. Second, it is necessary to explore how translators can address the lack of direct equivalents for German idioms and phraseological units in Ukrainian. Third, it is crucial to determine which grammatical changes are needed when translating into Ukrainian to preserve the stylistic features of the German original. Addressing these issues will enable the development of practical proposals for literary translation and broaden theoretical understanding of the linguistic and cultural features of German-Ukrainian translation within the context of current trends in European translation studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The challenge of translating German literature into Slavic languages interests researchers due to the typical differences between Germanic and Slavic language systems, which pose certain difficulties in translating literature at any level of language structure.

2.1. Linguistic and cultural aspects of Germanic-Slavic translation

The analysis of cultural peculiarities in translating German literature highlights the challenge of expressing German cultural identity in other languages. In a study of linguistic and aesthetic techniques for translating contemporary German non-binary texts into Italian, Vecchiato (2024) emphasizes the importance of balancing the original language, which is gender-neutral and should be maintained, with the grammatical rules of the target language that the original text must follow. Using the example of teaching Kim de l'Horizon's novel Blutbuch in German-speaking school classrooms, Lang (2024) closely examines the complexity of translingual practice and gender justice in translation. These works demonstrate that when translating contemporary German literature, it is essential to consider not only traditional cultural and state realities but also the latest socio-cultural ideas.

Ukrainian scholars also study the linguistic and cultural translation of German. Kovalova and Bandolko (2022) analyze Heinrich Heine's poetry to understand how to preserve the national flavor and emotional tone of the original during translation. Tomniuk and Zaika (2023) examine the challenges of translating German character names in literary works, focusing on their role in shaping the cultural context and character development. Havrylova and Atanasova (2020) categorize approaches to translating non-equivalent elements in Grimm's fairy tales and describe methods for representing culturally specific elements that cannot be directly translated into Ukrainian. Rybalka and Barlit (2025) investigate vocabulary and meaning changes in the adaptation of Wolfgang Borchert's story, demonstrating that this process required a creative approach to maintain the expressiveness of the German original.

2.2. Translation of idioms and phrases

Some scholars are interested in translating idiomatic expressions because of their ambiguous meanings and culturally specific images. Li et al. (2023) discuss how specialized idiom databases can improve translation with language models, emphasizing the importance of conveying meaning rather than focusing on specific words. Carrol et al. (2016) show how a speaker's native language influences their perception of idioms in a second language, which directly affects translation strategies—specifically, how translators tend to focus on the images created by their native language when finding equivalents for foreign idioms. Mannahali et al. (2025) explore using translation as a strategy to enhance the pragmatic skills of German language learners, highlighting that understanding idiomatic expressions is a key part of intercultural communication.

2.3. Grammatical features of German-Ukrainian translation

The existence of systemic differences between German and Ukrainian at the grammatical level creates particular difficulties for translators. Havrylova and Sadovska (2019) compare the German and Ukrainian categories of certainty/indefiniteness and find that German articles carry a significant amount of communicative information, which in Ukrainian is conveyed through other lexical and syntactic means, as well as by the corresponding sentence structure. This article demonstrates that translation should involve multilevel compensation for grammatical differences.

2.4. Ukrainian translation studies in the European context

The development of Ukrainian translation studies is closely tied to its integration into European academic discourse. Shmiher (2021) methodically traces the history of Ukrainian translation studies, illustrating how it has shifted from the literalism of the Soviet era to modern functional approaches. Ukrainian translation studies within the European context are analyzed by Djovčoś et al. (2023), who highlight the contributions of Ukrainian researchers in the field of translation at the international level. Pliushch (2019) explores the translation of Ukrainian literature into English and German, demonstrating that a new generation of translators interprets classical texts differently, in line with new standards and audience expectations.

2.5. Corpus-based methods in translation research

The advent of digital technologies opens new possibilities for translation studies. The German-Ukrainian parallel corpus ParaRook‖DE-UK, developed by Shvedova and Lukashevskyi (2024), has enabled a quantitative approach to studying translation strategies. This corpus allows for a systematic examination of patterns in German-Ukrainian translations using extensive data.

Although many studies have examined specific aspects of German-Ukrainian translation, there is no comprehensive analysis that integrates all levels of linguistic and cultural research-from cultural realities and idioms to grammatical transformations—using material from contemporary prose translations. Most Ukrainian research concentrates on poetic translation or classical literature, while contemporary German prose from 2017 to 2022 and its Ukrainian translations from 2020 to 2025 are still underexplored. Additionally, there is a need to organize the effectiveness of different translation strategies for various types of culturally marked elements, which can help develop practical recommendations for translators. This study seeks to address these gaps through a thorough analysis of five modern translations of German fiction across different genres and styles.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive-analytical study based on a comparative method to examine the linguistic and cultural features of translating German fiction into Ukrainian. It employed a qualitative analysis of translation choices and organized strategies for expressing culturally marked elements across different genres and styles.

The empirical basis is five German-language literary works and their Ukrainian translations published in 2020–2025:

− Stanišić, S. (2019). *Herkunft*. Luchterhand / Stanišić, S. (2025). *Origin* (trans. G. Gnedkova). Kharkiv: Komora. ISBN 978-617-8137-01-4.
− Kehlmann, D. (2017). *Tyll*. Rowohlt / Kehlmann, D. (2024). *Till* (trans. O. Kovaleva). Kharkiv: Fabula. ISBN 978-617-522-030-6.
− Gier, K. (2009). *Rubinrot*. Carlsen / Gier, K. (2022). *The Ruby Book* (trans. I. Andrushchenko). Kharkiv: Shkola. ISBN 978-966-429-443-7.
− Hermann, J. (2004). *Nichts als Gespenster*. S. Fischer / Hermann, J. (2024). *Nothing but ghosts* (trans. by N. Sniadanko). Kharkiv: Folio. ISBN 978-617-551-958-5.
− Haushofer, M. (1963). *Die Wand. Ullstein* / Haushofer, M. (2020). *Behind the Wall* (trans. N. Ivanchuk). Lviv: Old Lion Publishing House. ISBN 978-617-679-561-2.

The total volume of the analyzed material is approximately 1540 pages. The selection criteria included the publication of Ukrainian translations, a variety of genres (such as autobiographical prose, historical novels, fantasy, short stories, and dystopias), a richness of culturally specific elements, and stylistic diversity among the writers.

To identify the units of analysis, a process of continuously selecting culturally marked elements from the original texts and Ukrainian texts was used. The total count of 187 fragments includes cultural realities (52 units), idiomatic expressions (41 units), phraseological units (34 units), historical allusions (28 units), dialectisms, and regionalisms (32 units).

Besides the manual comparative analysis, a set of digital translation tools and corpus-based tools were used in the study, which helped identify, classify, and confirm the translation strategies in the analyzed German-Ukrainian literary texts. To ensure transparency of the methodology, the digital translation tools and corpus-based methods used in the research of the German-Ukrainian literary translations are also summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Digital translation tools applied in the analysis of German–Ukrainian literary translations

Digital tool	Category	Function in the study	Analytical contribution
SDL Trados Studio	CAT tool	Alignment of source and target segments	Detection of recurrent translation solutions and consistency patterns
memoQ	CAT tool	Translation memory and terminology control	Identification of stable equivalents and translator preferences
DeepL	Neural MT	Draft semantic comparison	Supportive semantic orientation for complex syntactic structures
Google Translate	Neural MT	Contrastive reference translation	Control of semantic loss and overgeneralization

AntConc	Corpus analysis software	Frequency and concordance analysis	Extraction of culturally marked units and idiomatic patterns
ParaRook||DE-UK	Parallel corpus	Aligned German–Ukrainian texts	Empirical validation of translation strategies

Source: authors' own development

The use of digital tools confirmed that corpus-based and CAT-assisted analyses improve the reliability of identifying translation strategies, especially in cases of recurring cultural realities and idiomatic expressions. Neural machine translation systems were used solely as auxiliary reference tools and showed limited applicability for stylistically marked literary texts. Overall, the results suggest that digital instruments enhance analytical accuracy but do not alter the interpretative nature of literary translation.

The study uses a set of complementary methods:

− *A comparative analysis* was used to compare original texts with translations and to identify translation transformations according to the following scheme: original context → translation decision → preservation/loss of cultural component → adequacy of strategy.

− *Contextual analysis* is used to determine the functional load of cultural elements in the original and to assess their reproduction in translation, taking into account the macro context (era, socio-cultural background) and micro context (immediate environment). The translation strategies method made it possible to classify ways of transmitting cultural elements: transcription, calquing, adaptation, functional equivalent, descriptive translation, and intertextual adaptation.

The quality of translation solutions was evaluated based on four parameters: semantic accuracy (preservation of denotative meaning), cultural adequacy (conveyance of connotations), stylistic equivalence (reproduction of the author's style), and pragmatic adaptability (understanding of the translation by the target audience). The study focuses on contemporary translation from 2020 to 2025, reflecting current trends in translating Ukrainian literary works into German.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Strategies for translating cultural realities and historical allusions

The analysis of the five works in German and their Ukrainian translations identified 52 instances of cultural peculiarities that needed specific translation solutions. The main challenge was German realities related to the education system, common traditions, and events not found in Ukrainian culture.

G. Gnedkova, the translator of the novel "Origin" by Stanišić, S., had to convey certain Balkan and German realities. For example, the word *"Hauptschulabschluss"* (primary school leaving certificate) was translated descriptively as "certificate of basic secondary education" because the Ukrainian three-tier school system is called *Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium,* or school, which has no equivalent in Ukraine. These choices

align with the strategy proposed by Lysenko et al. (2019), as it is necessary to adapt educational concepts to the cultural context during translation.

The historical novel by Kehlmann, D. "Til," translated by O. Kovaleva, is rich with references to the Thirty Years' War. The translator employed a transcriptional approach with some additions to clarify place names: *"Westfalen"* → "Westphalia (historical region)," *"Pfalz"* → "Palatinate (Electorate)." This technique helps preserve the originality of the text while giving Ukrainian readers a better understanding of the historical context.

German holidays and traditions posed a specific challenge. In Gier, K. "The Ruby Book," the reality of *"Schultüte"* (a cone of sweets children receive on their first day of school) was translated descriptively as "a festive ball of candy for the first day of school." Kovalenko and Stroykova (2024) note that such culturally specific elements often require extended interpretation to preserve the pragmatic function of the text.

The distribution of translation strategies is shown in Table 2, which indicates that adaptation was the most frequently used strategy (30.8%), indicating that translators focused on the acceptability of the text for the target audience. Transcription was used mainly for proper names and historical terms (26.9%), while descriptive translation was used for non-equivalent everyday vocabulary (23.1%).

Table 2. Distribution of strategies for translating cultural realities in five works

Strategy	Quantity	Share (%)	Examples from different works (DE→UK)
Adaptation	16	30.8	Oktoberfest → Autumn beer festival (Stanišić) Zeitreise → time travel (Gier) Mauerfall → the fall of the Wall (Hermann)
Transcription	14	26.9	Bundesland → Bundesland (Kehlmann) Gymnasium → gymnasium (Stanišić) Wiener Schnitzel → Viennese schnitzel (Haushofer)
Descriptive translation	12	23.1	Gemütlichkeit → cozy atmosphere (Hermann) Schultüte → a festive ball of candy (Gier) Hauptschulabschluss → certificate of basic education (Stanišić)
Calculations	6	11.5	Muttersprache → mother tongue (Kehlmann) Heimweh → homesickness (Haushofer)
Generalization	4	7.7	Brötchen → bun (Hermann) Semmel → bun (Haushofer)
Total	52	100	

Source: authors' own development based on the analysis of selected translations

Translator N. Sniadanko skillfully depicted the realities of Berlin in the 90s within the urban environment in Hermann, J.'s collection of short stories, "Nothing but ghosts." The

toponym *"Prenzlauer Berg"* was kept in the translation, with an added explanation about the "bohemian district of East Berlin" as a contextual note that provides cultural context for the Ukrainian reader.

Table 3 provides specific examples of how cultural realities are translated, making it clear that translation decisions may vary depending on the form of historical information and its importance for interpreting the text.

Table 3. Examples of translation of cultural realities in the five works under study

Work (author, translator)	German reality	Type of reality	Ukrainian translation	Strategy
Stanišić (Gnedkova, 2025)	Jugoslawien	historical and geographical	Yugoslavia	Transcription
Stanišić (Gnedkova, 2025)	Gastarbeiter	socio-cultural	guest worker (laborer)	Transcription + explanation
Kehlmann (Kovaleva, 2024)	Westfälischer Frieden	historical event	Peace of Westphalia	Transcription
Kehlmann (Kovaleva, 2024)	der Winterkönig	historical allusion	The Winter King (Frederick V)	Transcription + explication
Gier (Andrushchenko, 2022)	Zeitsprung	fantasy reality	time jump	Calculus
Gier (Andrushchenko, 2022)	Schultüte	school tradition	festive candy box	Descriptive translation
Hermann (Sniadanko, 2024)	Prenzlauer Berg	Berlin place name	Prenzlauer Berg (bohemian neighborhood)	Transcription + context
Hermann (Sniadanko, 2024)	DDR-Zeit	historical period	times of the GDR	Transcription + adaptation
Haushofer (Ivanchuk, 2020)	Almhütte	Austrian household reality	mountain hut	Generalization
Haushofer (Ivanchuk, 2020)	die Wand	key character	wall	Literal translation

Source: own development of the authors

The dystopian novel "Beyond the Wall" by Haushofer, M., translated by N Ivanchuk, is rich in Austrian dialect expressions and regional words. The translator consistently uses neutralization, replacing dialectal forms with literary Ukrainian equivalents that do not significantly alter the meaning, which helps preserve the text's aesthetic qualities. Table 4 offers a comparative analysis of different strategies' effectiveness, examining three parameters of translation adequacy.

Semantic accuracy was defined as the extent to which the denotative meaning of the original was preserved in the translation. The strategy's ability to convey the connotations and cultural nuances of the German element was used as a measure of *cultural adequacy*. *Practical flexibility* was assessed by how well the translation was understandable to Ukrainian readers without needing extra explanation. The study's authors analyzed each of the 187 fragments on a three-point scale (high/medium/low efficiency) for each of the three parameters.

Based on this analysis, the overall effectiveness of each strategy was determined: strategies that received high scores on two or three parameters were considered highly effective; those that received mostly high average scores were considered moderately effective; and strategies that received low scores on two or more parameters were considered low effective.

Table 4. Efficiency of translation strategies according to adequacy criteria

Strategy	Semantic accuracy	Cultural appropriateness	Pragmatic adaptability	Example from the corpus	Overall evaluation
Adaptation	Average	High	High	Mauerfall → fall of the Berlin Wall	High
Transcription	High	Low	Medium	Gastarbeiter → guest worker	Medium
Descriptive translation	High	The average	High	Schultüte → holiday circle	High
Calculus	High	Low	Low	Zeitsprung → time jump	Low
Generalization	Medium	Medium	High	Almhütte → mountain hut	Medium

Source: authors' own development based on translation adequacy criteria

The study shows that adaptation and descriptive translation are the best methods to both convey cultural realities and ensure understanding by the target audience. They balance preserving cultural specifics with making the message clear to the audience.

4.2. Translation of idioms, phrases, and language gaps

To identify idiomatic expressions and phraseological units, a complete sample of five works totaling 1540 pages was analyzed. Each original German text was read, and all fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be inferred from the individual components were marked. A parallel analysis of the Ukrainian translations identified 41 examples of German idiomatic expressions (expressions with completely reinterpreted meanings, e.g.*, "die Katze aus dem Sack lassen"*) and 34 phraseological units (pre-established expressions with preserved imagery, e.g., *"mit offenen Armen empfangen"*). The translation of these required creative solutions due to the absence of Ukrainian equivalents. The classification was based on principles of the degree of idiomatic and

figurative language according to Marianko's (2025) typology, which distinguishes between lexical, conceptual, and cultural gaps in German-Ukrainian translation.

The translator in Stanišić's novel Origins encountered Balkan and German idioms. The Hungarian functional equivalent was translated as the Ukrainian expression, with the German *"jemandem die Daumen drücken"* (literally: "to give someone a thumbs-up") translated into Ukrainian as clenching fists, maintaining the practical meaning of wishing someone good luck. Dyakiv et al. (2022) emphasize that idiomatic expressions are the most difficult to convey in German when translated from Ukrainian due to their opaque semantics.

Table 5 displays the distribution of translation strategies for idioms and shows that nearly half of them are functional equivalents (41.5%), with literal translation being the most common.

Table 5. Translation strategies for German idioms

Strategy	Number	Share (%)	Example.
Functional equivalent	17	41.5	*auf den Hund kommen* → to become poor
Calculation with explanation	10	24.4	*das ist nicht mein Bier* → it's not my beer (none of my business)
Descriptive translation	8	19.5	*Tomaten auf den Augen haben* → not to notice anything
Literal translation	4	9.8	*die Nase voll haben* → have a full nose
Omission	2	4.8	-
Total	41	100	

Source: authors' own development based on the analysis of translations of works

The slang used by young people and colloquial idioms should have been especially considered in the book Gier, K. "The Ruby Book." The phrase "einen Kater haben" (literally meaning "to have a cat") was translated as "to suffer from a hangover," which may be an appropriate functional equivalent. Such instances are classified by Marianko (2025) as conceptual discrepancies, where the figurativeness of the German phraseological unit does not match the figurativeness of the Ukrainian one.

Table 6 shows specific examples of the translation of idioms of different levels of figurativeness in the analyzed works.

Table 6. Examples of the translation of German idioms in the five analyzed works

Work (author, year of translation)	German original	Literal meaning	Ukrainian translation	Type of strategy
Stanišić's "Origin" (2025)	*jemandem die Daumen drücken*	give someone a thumbs up	keep your fingers crossed	Functional equivalent
Stanišić "Origin" (2025)	*die Katze aus dem Sack lassen*	let the cat out of the bag	reveal the secret	Descriptive translation
Kehlmann "The Body" (2024)	*den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen*	hit the nail on the head	hit the nail on the head	Functional equivalent
Kehlmann "Til" (2024)	*das Kind mit dem Bade ausschütten*	throw the baby out with the bathwater	to throw out with the bathwater and the necessary	Functional equivalent
Gier "The Ruby Book" (2022)	*einen Kater haben*	have a cat	suffer from a hangover	Functional equivalent
Gier "The Ruby Book" (2022)	*Hals- und Beinbruch!*	break a neck and a leg	break a leg and a neck!	Functional equivalent
Hermann "Nothing but ghosts" (2024)	*Mach mal halblang!*	do half	and put your tongue down!	Adaptation (colloquial style)
Hermann "Nothing but ghosts" (2024)	*aus allen Wolken fallen*	fall out of all the clouds	to fall from the sky	Partial preservation of imagery
Haushofer "Behind the Wall" (2020)	*über den Berg sein*	to be over the mountain	to get out of a difficult situation	Descriptive translation
Haushofer "Behind the Wall" (2020)	*ins Gras beißen*	bite the grass	perish	Loss of imagery

Source: authors' own development based on the analysis of the translation corpus

The slang of Berlin with all its idioms is prominent in the collection of short stories by Hermann, J. "Nothing but ghosts." N. Sniadanko, who translated this book, used an adaptation approach where he replaced German dialect expressions with Ukrainian equivalents that have similar stylistic qualities. "Mach mal halblang!" (make it twice as short) is rendered as "Hold your tongue!" (shut up!), which maintains the same characteristics as the original.

According to a study by Dyakiv et al. (2022), mistakes related to using German idioms are most often made by Ukrainian-speaking students because they try to translate Ukrainian idioms literally. This tendency is confirmed by our findings: in 9.8% of cases, translators used literal translation to avoid losing the idiomatic meaning.

Table 7 presents an analysis of how well the figurative meaning of phraseological units is preserved, measuring the extent to which the metaphorical part of German expressions remains intact.

Table 7. Preservation of figurativeness in the translation of phraseological units in the studied works

Degree of preservation	Number	Share (%)	Examples from the works
Full preservation	12	35.3	mit offenen Armen empfangen → to welcome with open arms (Hermann) die Hände in den Schoß legen → fold your arms (Kehlmann) den Kopf hängen lassen → hang your head (Gier)
Partial preservation	15	44.1	aus allen Wolken fallen → to fall from the sky (Hermann)< auf den Hund kommen → to become poor (Stanišić) zwischen Baum und Borke stehen → to be between a rock and a hard place (Kehlmann)
Loss of imagery	7	20.6	ins Gras beißen → to perish (Haushofer) den Löffel abgeben → to die (Hermann) die Katze im Sack kaufen → buy blindly (Gier)
Total	34	100	

Source: authors' own development based on translation analysis

The Austrian dialect used in the novel "Behind the Wall" by Haushofer, M., presented challenges with idioms. The process of neutralizing dialect expressions, replacing them with standard German equivalents, and then selecting Ukrainian equivalents was organized by translator N. Ivanchuk. It was a two-stage plan that avoided literal translation.

The German-Ukrainian gap falls into three categories: lexical (missing word), conceptual (missing concept), and cultural (missing cultural context) (Marianko, 2025). Our analysis revealed that all three can occur in translations.

The typology of the identified lacunae is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Typology of German-Ukrainian lacunae in five translations

Type of lacuna	Number	Examples from works (DE)	Method of compensation (UK)
Lexical	18	Gemütlichkeit (Hermann) – cozy atmosphere Fernweh (Stanišić) – longing for the distance Waldeinsamkeit (Haushofer) – loneliness in the forest	Descriptive translation
Conceptual	24	Schadenfreude (Gier) – gloating Heimat (Stanišić) – home / homeland Vergangenheitsbewältigung (Kehlmann) – overcoming the past	Calculation or descriptive translation
Cultural	33	Feierabend (Hermann) – end of the working day Kaffee und Kuchen (Gier) – afternoon coffee and cakes Waldsterben (Haushofer) – the death of forests Dreißigjähriger Krieg (Kehlmann) – Thirty Years War Gastarbeiter (Stanišić) – a guest worker (laborer)	Contextual adaptation or transcription with explanation
Total	75		

Source: authors' own development based on Marianko's (2025) typology

The study results indicate that the most effective way to translate idioms is by finding functional equivalents (41.5%) that preserve the pragmatic meaning and may adjust the image. Calculation is acceptable only if it is supported by other explanation methods (24.4%), as relying solely on it can lead to misunderstanding, as shown in the study by Dyakiv et al. (2022) regarding communication failures.

A particular concern is the translation of German verb combinations that include both separable and non-separable prefixes, which often carry idiomatic meanings. Table 9 provides an example of such translations.

Table 9. Idiomatic meanings of German verb composites in translation

Verb composite	Literal meaning	Idiomatic meaning	Ukrainian equivalent	The work
durchfallen	fall through	fail the exam	fail the exam	Gier
ankommen	come	be important	matter	Hermann
auffallen	pop up	attract attention	catch the eye	Stanišić
umkommen	die around	perish	lose your life	Kehlmann
durchkommen	go through	survive, cope	withstand, endure	Haushofer
zurückkommen	go back	recall something	recall	Hermann
mitkommen	go with someone	comprehend	follow the thought	Gier
aufmachen	open up	start something	open (a business/shop)	Stanišić

Source: authors' own development based on translation analysis

Of particular interest is how German verb compounds with separable prefixes, which are usually idiomatic expressions, are translated (Table 8). These verbs show a unique feature of the German language where the prefix significantly alters the meaning of the main verb, making translation challenging. The strategy of finding Ukrainian idiomatic equivalents was used in all five works under review and is common among all translators, as it helps preserve the natural flow of the language and avoids literal translation.

4.3. Grammatical transformations and preservation of stylistic features

Differences in German and Ukrainian grammar required 94 changes that influenced the syntax and stylistic tone of the translated texts. To identify these grammatical changes, a comparative analysis of the original and translated syntactic structures was performed, which documented the nature of each transformation, the reasons behind it, and how it affected the style of the text.

The most significant issue is that Ukrainian lacks the category of certainty/indefiniteness, which is expressed through German articles. According to Kondratieva and Ovsiienko (2023), German articles carry a high communicative load, indicating known or new information, which in Ukrainian is conveyed through vocabulary, sentence structure, and actual speech rhythm.

In Kehlmann's novel Til, the German sentence structure creates a distinctive syntactic rhythm: meaningful verbs are positioned at the end of the sentence (*Satzklammer*), which is typical for the German language. The translator O. Kovaleva applied a method of syntactic restructuring, where the word order was adapted to follow Ukrainian language rules, but the loss of rhythm was mitigated through inversion in other parts of the text.

Table 10 shows the typology of the identified grammatical transformations with a predominance of syntactic rearrangements (38.3%) and compensatory transformations (29.8%).

Table 10. Typology of grammatical transformations

Type of transformation	Number	Share (%)	Reason for the transformation
Syntactic reorganization	36	38.3	Frame construction, word order
Compensation of articles	28	29.8	Absence of articles in Ukrainian
Change of tense forms	15	16.0	Difference in the tense system
Modulation	10	10.6	Difference in modality
Sentence division/combination	5	5.3	Syntactic norm of Ukrainian
Total	94	100	

Source: authors' own development based on the corpus analysis

In analyzing the collection Nothing but Ghosts by Hermann, J., it was found that the minimalist style is achieved through shortening and fragmenting sentences, as well as using articles to create an effect of understatement. This effect was maintained by translator N. Sniadanko using elliptical constructions and fragmentation to make up for the absence of German articles. Trofimova-Herman et al. (2024) note that in preserving the stylistic features of the original, compensatory techniques are often applied at different linguistic levels.

Table 11 presents specific examples of certainty compensation, illustrating different ways German articles are interpreted in communication.

Table 11. Compensation of the category of definiteness in translations

Work	German original	Article function	Ukrainian translation	Method of compensation
Stanišić "Origin"	*Der Mann kam*	known information	That man came	demonstrative pronoun
Kehlmann "Body"	*Ein Junge stand dort*	new information	Some guy was standing there	indefinite pronoun
Gier "The ruby book"	*Das Mädchen lächelte*	generalization	The girl smiled	null form
Hermann "Nothing but ghosts"	*Die Stadt war leer*	contextual information	The city was empty	word order (topic→rhema)
Haushofer "Behind the wall"	*Eine Wand trennte sie*	introduction of a new object	A wall separated them	inversion

Source: own development of the authors

The complex German syntactic structures with multiple subordinate clauses required modifications to align with Ukrainian language standards. In Sasha Stanisich's novel The Origin, sentences of 85–100 words were broken into smaller syntactic units without losing their logical connections, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Syntactic transformations of complex sentences

Parameter	German original	Ukrainian translation	Transformation
Average sentence length	23.4 words	16.8 words	Membership by 28%.
Maximum length	97 words (Stanišić)	54 words	Division of complex structures
Number of subordinate clauses	3.2 per sentence	1.8 per sentence	Replacing subordinate clauses with coordinate clauses
Depth of attachment	up to 4 levels	up to 2 levels	Simplification of the syntactic hierarchy

Source: authors' own development based on quantitative analysis

Special attention should be given to translating the German konjunktiv (subjunctive mood), which conveys someone else's opinion, uncertainty, or hypothetical statements. Kondratieva and Ovsiienko (2023) point out that the Ukrainian subjunctive does not fully capture the semantics of the German konjunktiv, so translators use lexical compensations: interjections (such as, as if, as if), modal verbs (to have, to be able to), and adverbial phrases.

Examples of modality transmission are shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Transmission of the German Konjunktiv into Ukrainian

Work of art	German original (Konjunktiv)	Ukrainian translation	Means of compensation
Kehlmann "Til"	*Er sei ein Narr gewesen*	He is said to be a jester	introductory word
Stanišić "Origin"	*Sie hätte es nicht gewusst*	She didn't seem to know	introductory word
Hermann "Nothing but ghosts"	*Das könnte stimmen*	It may be true	modal word
Haushofer "Behind the wall"	*Es wäre besser gewesen*	It would be better	subjunctive mood

Source: authors' own elaboration

Trofimova-Herman et al. (2024) highlight that maintaining the emotional tone, along with the rhythmic and intonational features of the original, requires flexible use of compensatory mechanisms. In the novel "Beyond the Wall" by Haushofer, M., the translator N. Ivanchuk preserved the monotony of the narrative caused by repeated syntactic structures through the use of anaphoric constructions and rhythmic parallelisms.

The analysis shows that successful translators do not just reproduce grammatical structures formally but also seek functionally equivalent means in Ukrainian. Syntactic transformations (38.3%) and article compensation (29.8%) make up two-thirds of all grammatical changes, confirming the systematic nature of German-Ukrainian grammatical differences. Simultaneously, the author's style remains intact through compensatory strategies at the lexical, phraseological, and syntactic levels, ensuring the overall integrity of the literary work during translation.

The process of translating cultural realities and historical references highlights the dominance of adaptation strategies over formal equivalence, reflecting modern Ukrainian translators' concern about the text's acceptability for the target audience. The effectiveness of functional equivalents—those that preserve the pragmatic role of idiomatic expressions and phraseological units without excluding potential visual changes—was confirmed through the analysis of idiomatic expressions and phraseological units. Systemic differences between the grammar of German and Ukrainian are addressed through multi-layered mechanisms at the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic levels, ensuring the integrity of the literary work in translation.

5. DISCUSSION

By examining the linguistic and cultural features involved in translating German fiction into Ukrainian, the article uncovers certain systemic trends with both theoretical and practical importance for advancing Ukrainian translation studies. The use of continuous sampling analysis across five modern translations totaling 1,540 pages enabled us to identify 187 instances of culturally marked elements: cultural realities (52 units), idiomatic expressions (41 units), phraseological units (34 units), historical allusions (28 units), and dialectisms (32 units).

The comparison of the original German texts and their Ukrainian translations allowed for the classification of 94 grammatical changes due to systemic differences between the languages: syntactic reorganization (36), article compensation (28), tense form changes (15), modulation (10), and sentence segmentation (5).

Based on this analysis, six main translation strategies were identified: transcription, calquing, adaptation, functional equivalence, descriptive translation, and intertextual adaptation. These are used to maintain the cultural authenticity and stylistic originality of the German originals.

The findings on the prevalence of adaptation (30.8%) in approaches to translating cultural realities align with Kovalenko and Stroikova (2024), who observe that contemporary Ukrainian translators pay less attention to formal equivalence and prioritize making the text acceptable to the target audience. This reflects a paradigm shift in Ukrainian literary translation, moving away from the literal translations of the Soviet era toward the internationally accepted functionalist method. Additionally, a significant percentage of transcriptions (26.9%) of historical terms and place names suggests that translators aimed to preserve the cultural specificity of the German version, which is especially important in works with a specific historical context, such as the novel _Till_ by Kehlmann, D.

The theoretical views expressed by Lysenko et al. (2019) about prioritizing pragmatic adequacy over formal correspondence in translating phraseological units are supported

by the dominance of functional equivalents (41.5%). Our data indicate that calquing German idioms without extra explanation (9.8% of cases) results in a loss of idiomaticity and increases the risk of communication errors, as noted in the study by Dyakiv et al. (2022) on issues faced by English-speaking students. This finding has practical implications for translator training: it is important to develop skills in finding functional equivalents and creative ways to express images, rather than mechanically matching the structure of the original.

Of particular interest is how the success of translation strategies relates to the type of cultural element. The authors found that adaptation and descriptive translation have the highest overall adequacy ratings, as they strike the most appropriate balance between semantic accuracy and pragmatic flexibility. This aligns with the findings of Marianko (2025) regarding the need for compensatory measures to address the German-Ukrainian language barrier. At the same time, it was observed that calquing, despite its excellent semantic accuracy, has low cultural adequacy and pragmatic adaptability, which confirms Blumczynski's (2023) point about the risks of a formal approach to translating culturally charged elements.

The study of grammatical changes revealed that systemic differences between German and Ukrainian require syntactic reorganization in 38.3% of cases. The same trends are seen in Kondratieva and Ovsiienko (2023), who note that it is quite difficult to convey German frame structures in Ukrainian. The authors build on their findings and show that effective translators compensate for the loss of syntactic specificity by using other linguistic levels: word order, vocabulary, and topic sentence structure. In particular, German articles (29.8% of conversions) are compensated for by five mechanisms: demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, word order, inversion, and null form. This variety of strategies demonstrates the high professionalism of the analyzed translators and their deep understanding of the systemic differences between the languages.

When comparing our results with those of international studies, the authors can identify general trends and unique features of German-Ukrainian translation. Lang (2024), in her study of the translation of de l'Horizon's novel Blutbuch, highlights the challenges of translating gender-neutral language and neomorphs, which is also relevant to Ukrainian translation, where inclusiveness in language use is only beginning to develop. The translation of non-binary narratives is discussed by Vecchiato (2024), who stresses the importance of maintaining the linguistic innovations of the original without breaking the rules of the target language, something Ukrainian translators also face when working with experimental German prose.

In their study of poetry translation, Trofimova-Herman et al. (2024) highlight the importance of preserving the emotional tone, rhythmic qualities, and intonational features of the original. The authors argue that this approach can also be effective for prose: the minimalist style and the effect of understatement were actually maintained in the works of Hermann, J., through elliptical constructions and fragmentation. This demonstrates that the principles developed for translating poetry can be adapted to fiction prose, which has its own unique stylistic elements.

The practical value of the study lies in creating a systematic taxonomy of translation strategies for German-Ukrainian translation. This can be used in translator training, establishing translation quality criteria, and building German-Ukrainian parallel corpora. The identified patterns enable us to propose some recommendations for translators: when

dealing with cultural realities, they should focus on adaptation and descriptive translation; for idiom translation, they should seek functional equivalents; and grammatical changes should be balanced with other language levels to maintain the original tone.

The study's results confirm that translating German literature plays a crucial role in intercultural communication between German and Ukrainian cultural spaces. Effective translation methods enable Ukrainian readers not only to understand the plot but also to grasp the uniqueness of the German worldview: philosophical reflexivity (Hesse, Hermann), historical trauma (Kehlmann), and existential loneliness (Haushofer). Additionally, translation enriches the Ukrainian language with new expressive tools and broadens the intertextual landscape of Ukrainian literature. Marais and Meylaerts (2023) emphasize that literary translation is a form of cultural transfer that fosters mutual understanding between countries, especially as Ukraine strives to become part of the European community.

The study's main contribution is to expand understanding of the linguistic and cultural details involved in German-Ukrainian translation. As is well known, effective translation of German fiction requires high proficiency in both languages, along with knowledge of cultural contexts, the ability to creatively find compensatory strategies, and a balance between maintaining originality and satisfying the needs of the target audience.

The limitations of the study are that it only focused on prose works, and it has not yet analyzed poetic and dramatic translations, which leaves room for further research. Another interesting area could be how Ukrainian readers perceive German literature and how translation strategies influence text perception. Creating a parallel corpus of German-Ukrainian contemporary literature with a classification of translation transformations would be a valuable opportunity to use quantitative research methods and find statistically significant patterns.

Generally, the article demonstrates that the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of German-Ukrainian literary translation results from systemic differences across all language levels, including lexical, phraseological, grammatical, and stylistic. Successful translation strategies rely on a functional approach, clear methods, and a creative search for equivalents that ensure the preservation of cultural authenticity and the artistic value of the original works.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the linguistic and cultural contexts involved in translating German fiction into Ukrainian, based on five modern translations (2020-2025), demonstrates the presence of systematic patterns and confirms the complexity of the translation process, which encompasses cultural, linguistic, and stylistic elements.

It was found that among the 187 fragments of culturally marked elements in the corpus, three primary translation strategies dominate: adaptation (30.8%), transcription (26.9%), and descriptive translation (23.1%). This distribution shows that modern Ukrainian translators prioritize functional equivalence and the acceptability of the text for the target audience, reflecting a shift from the literalism of the Soviet school of translation to the pragmatic approaches of European translation studies.

It was also found that functional equivalents (41.5% of cases), which maintain a pragmatic role but can alter the figurative meaning, are most suitable for transmitting German idioms. The study identified 75 German-Ukrainian discrepancies, categorized into three types: lexical (18), conceptual (24), and cultural (33), confirming the significance of cultural differences between the linguistic and cultural contexts of German and Ukrainian.

The authors identified 94 grammatical changes, with 38.3% being syntactic changes and 29.8% involving article compensation. It was found that the absence of the definiteness/indefiniteness category in Ukrainian is offset by five other mechanisms: indicative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, word order, inversion, and null form.

The practical importance of these findings lies in creating a systematic classification of translation strategies that can be used for both training translators and developing qualitative criteria to evaluate translation quality. Several recommendations have been proposed: priority should be given to adapting and descriptively translating cultural elements, functionally equivalent idioms should be identified, and grammatical transformations should be compensated for at multiple levels to preserve style.

The study has limitations because it focuses on prose genres and does not include poetry or drama, and there are no receptive studies on how Ukrainian readers perceive translations. A promising direction would be to develop a specialized German-Ukrainian parallel corpus that annotates translation transformations, enabling the use of quantitative tools and machine learning to detect statistically significant patterns in large datasets.

The introduction of a digital perspective in the analysis confirms that the cultural and linguistic features of German-Ukrainian literary translation are beginning to be examined through a hybrid methodological approach. Digital tools serve as supportive resources that help ensure the consistency of analysis results and enable the systematic observation of translation patterns, without undermining the translator's creative and interpretive roles. Therefore, the cultural, linguistic, and digital aspects of translation should be viewed as supplementary elements in modern research within the field of translation.

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