Translating the Russo-Ukrainian War

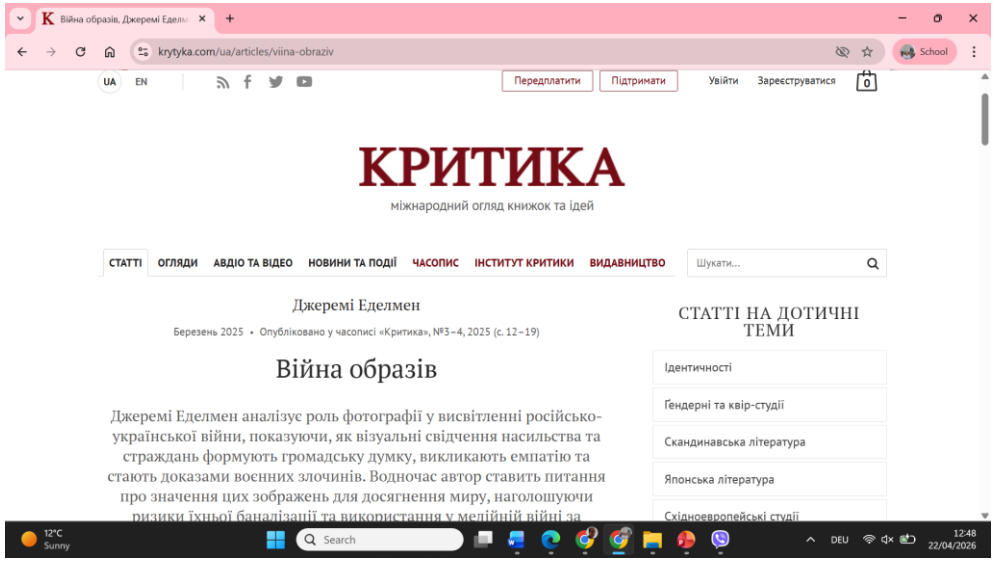
Pavlo Shopin, associate professor in the department of applied linguistics and translation studies at Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine

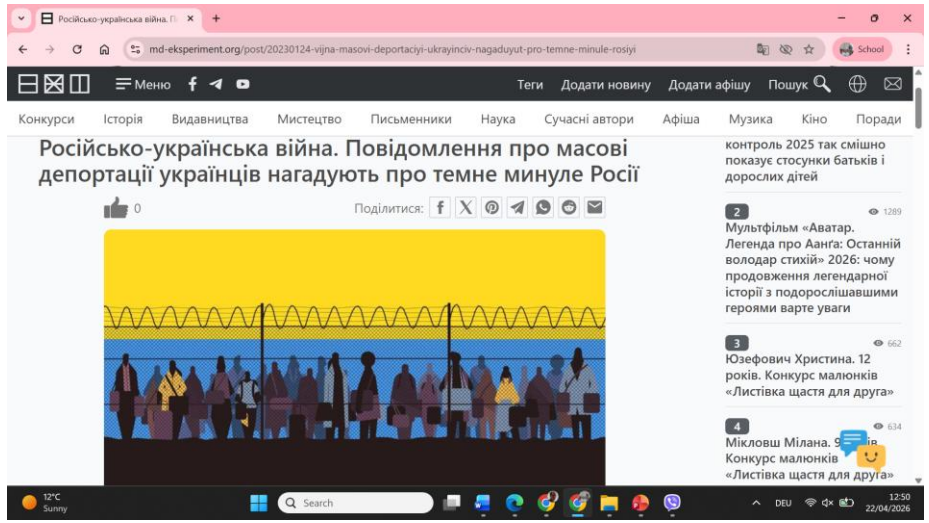
XIII International Scientific Conference

Major Problems of Translation Studies and Translator/Interpreter Training

Main question and claim

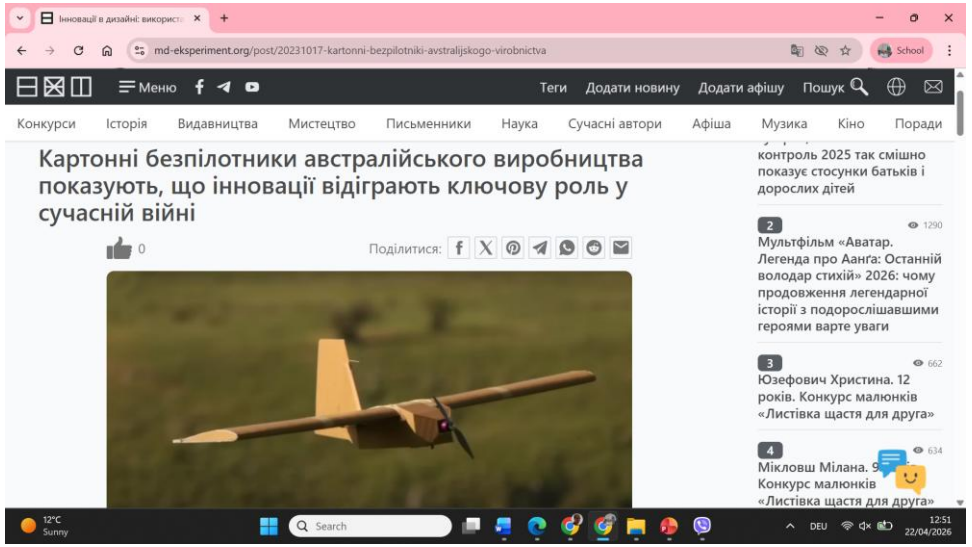
- How can translation teaching work during wartime and still serve the public?
- This paper argues that translation can be both an educational practice and a form of cultural solidarity.
- It is based on 37 published translations from March 2022 to October 2025.
- These translations helped move arguments, testimony, and analysis across languages.

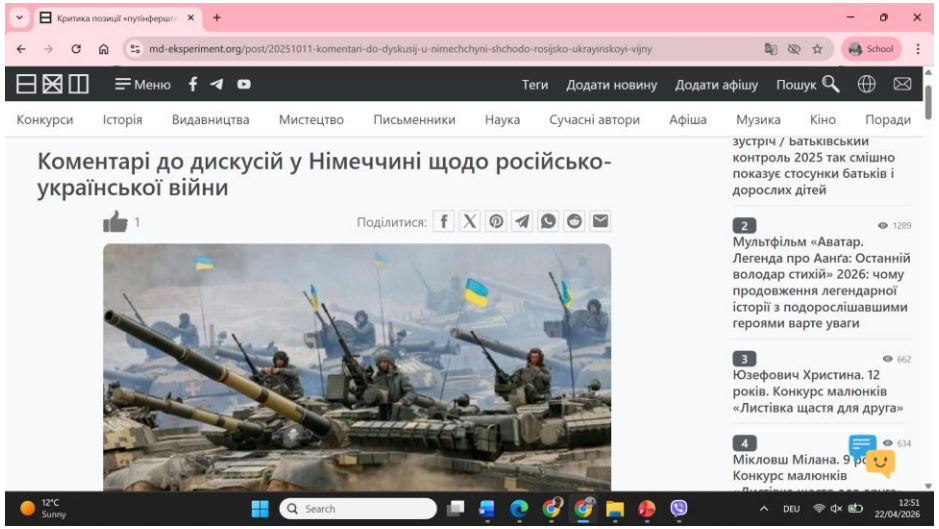




Why translation mattered after 24 February 2022

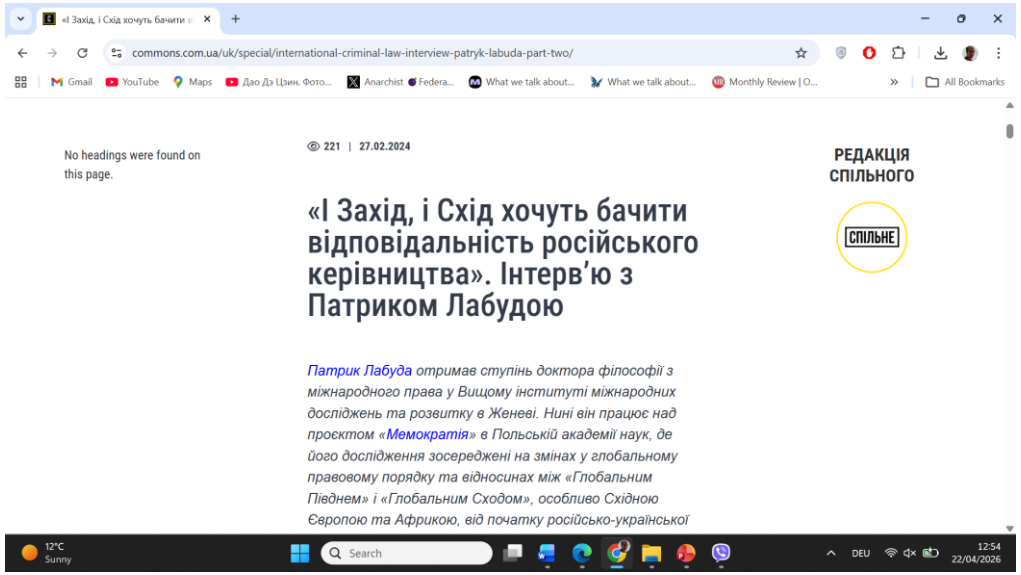
- The full-scale invasion created a flood of texts: updates, witness accounts, appeals, and analysis.
- Ukrainians needed access to foreign debates about the war.
- Foreign readers needed access to Ukrainian experience and thought.
- Translation helped shape how the war was understood in different publics.

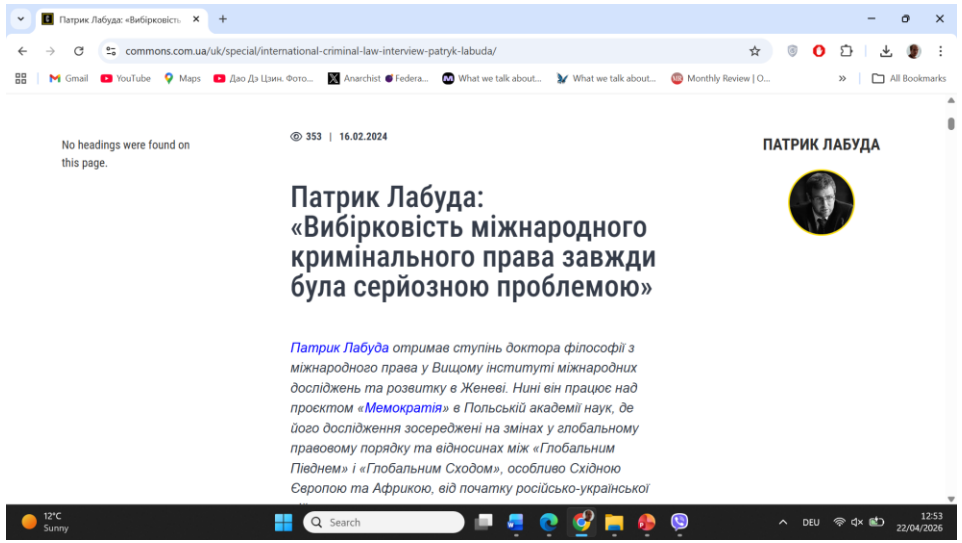




How translation is understood here

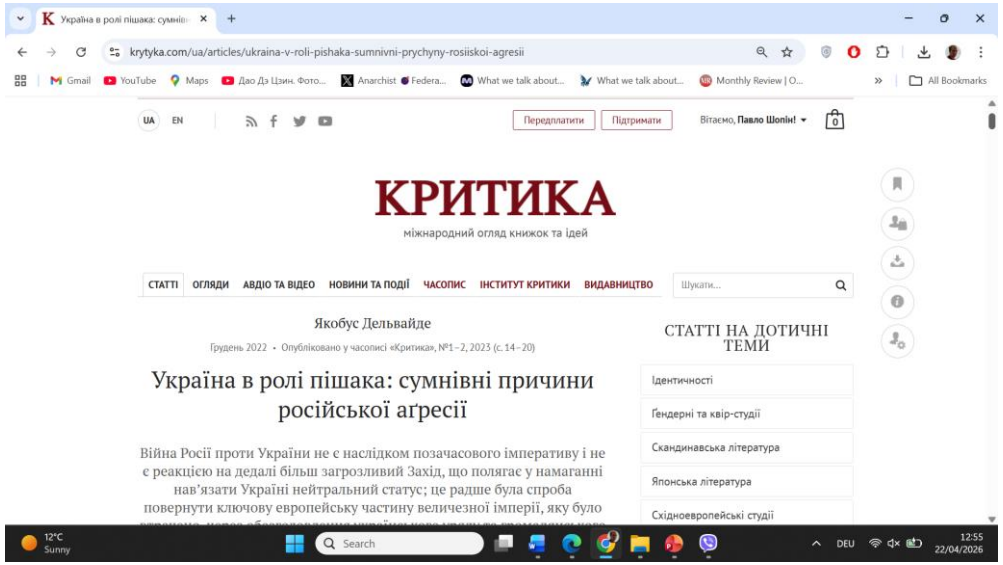
- Translation is a public act that carries arguments, testimony, and cultural analysis across languages.
- Translators make choices about context, tone, and how responsibly the text is presented.
- In wartime, these choices have ethical and political weight.

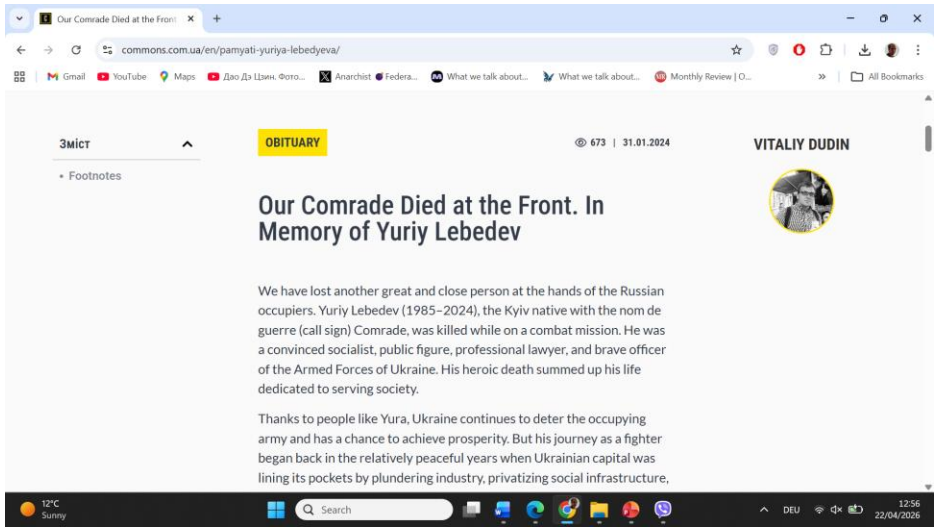




Research setting

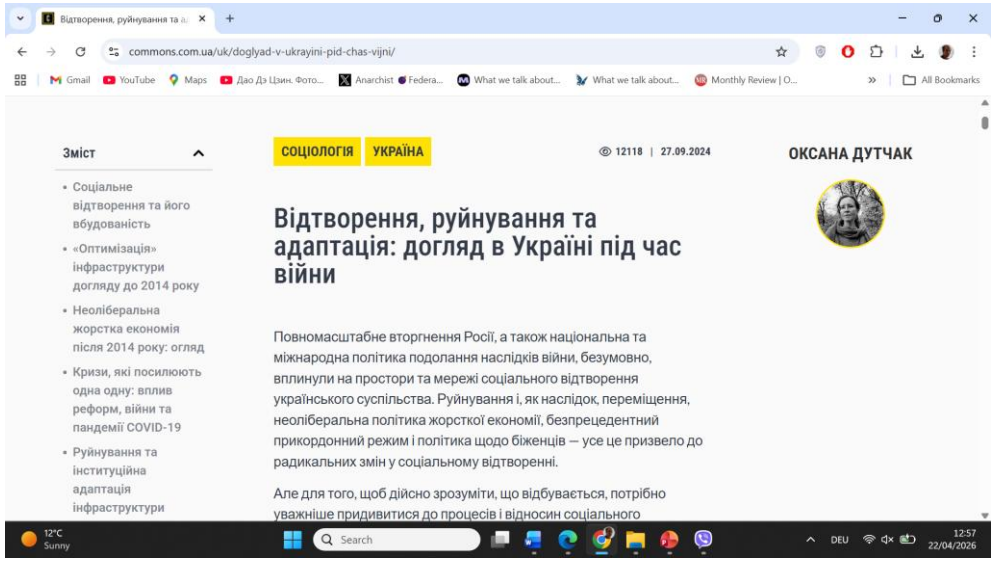
- The study draws on the work of a translation circle (student rstudy group under my supervision) at Mykhailo Dragomanov State University of Ukraine.
- The circle has worked since 2018 as a co-curricular space for students of different language levels.
- Students translated popular texts on a wide range of topics.
- The work was prepared for publication in media outlets.

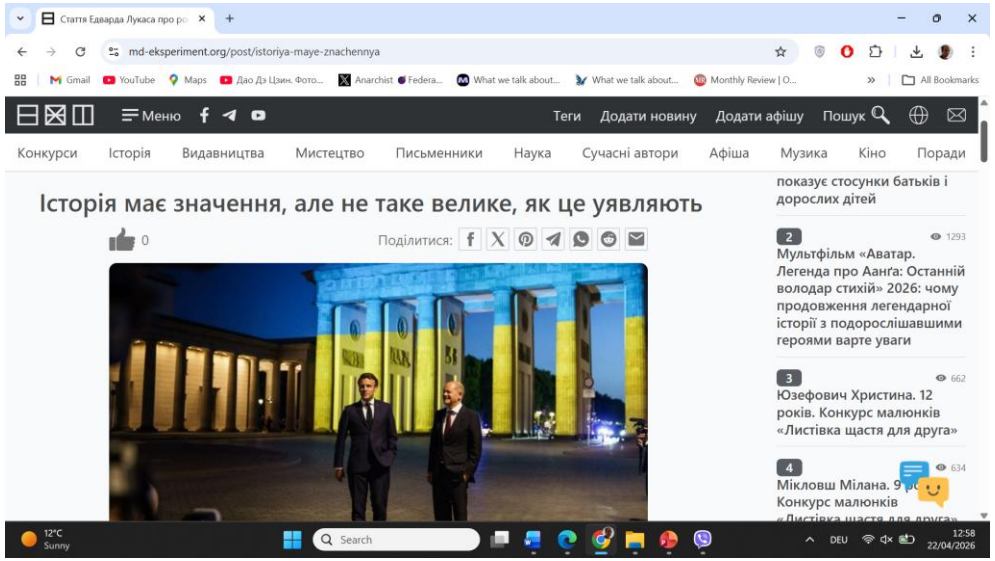




Corpus overview

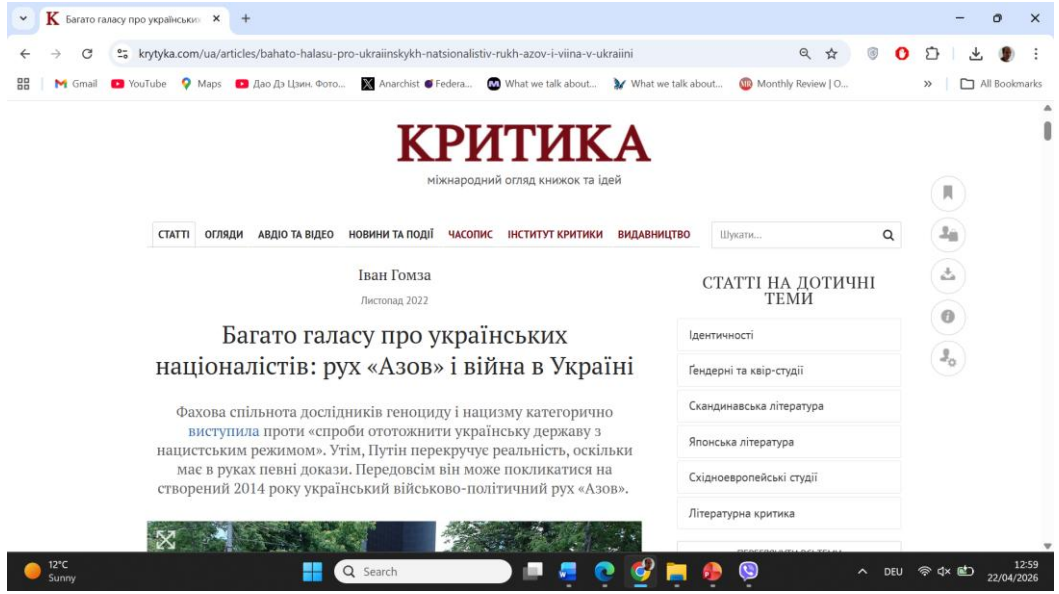
- Total corpus: 37 published translations.
- Languages involved: English, German, and Ukrainian.
- Total size (word count): 114,339 words.
- The paper combines corpus description with a practice-based account of how the work was done.

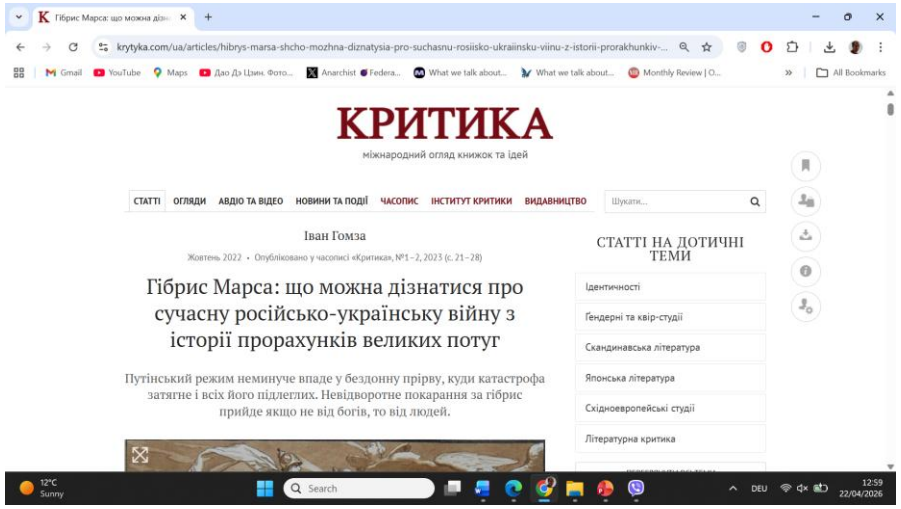




Student corpus

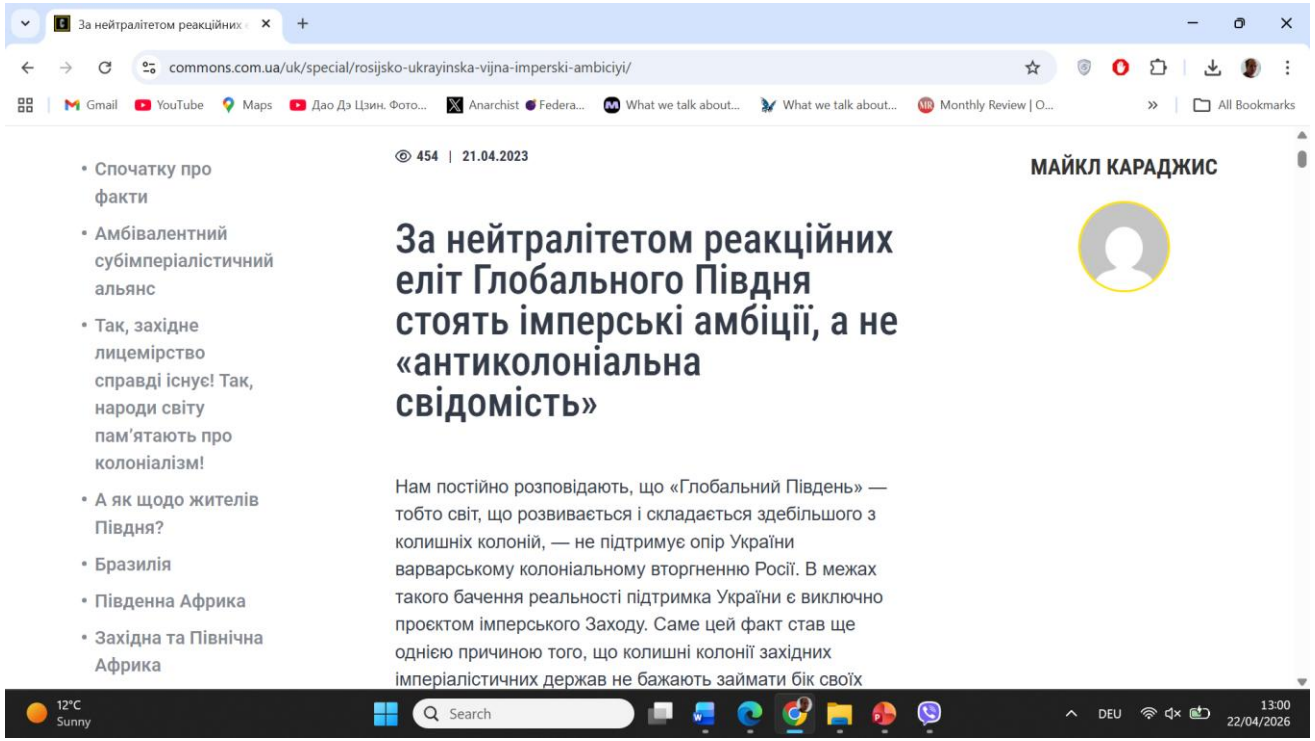
- 22 published translations.
- 8 in 2022, 5 in 2023, 4 in 2024, 5 in 2025.
- Published mainly in *Krytyka* and *Experiment*, plus 1 in *Commons*.
- The translation circle published 376 translations in total in this period, but only 22 directly addressed the war.





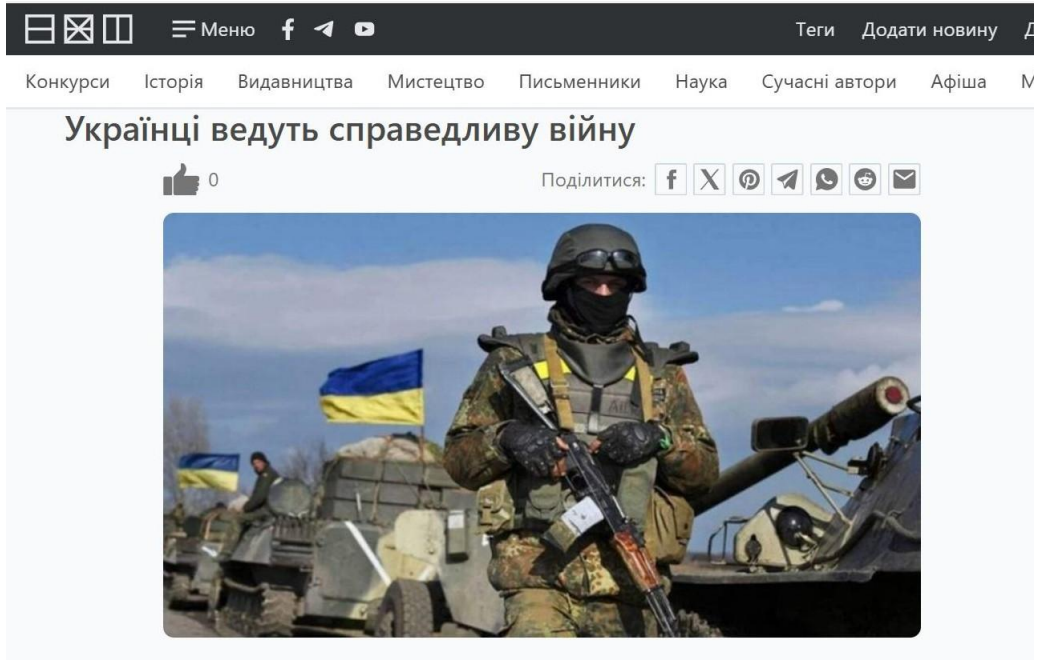
Supervisor corpus

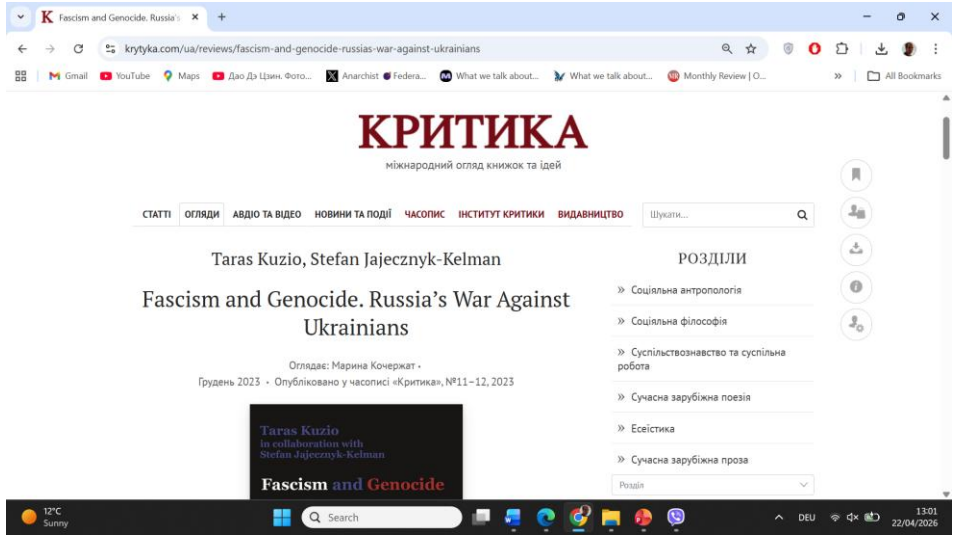
- 15 published translations.
- 2 in 2022, 2 in 2023, 6 in 2024, 5 in 2025.
- Published in *Krytyka*, *Commons*, and *The Claquers*.
- These texts were longer on average and show the level of responsibility expected in professional publication.



Translation directions and genres

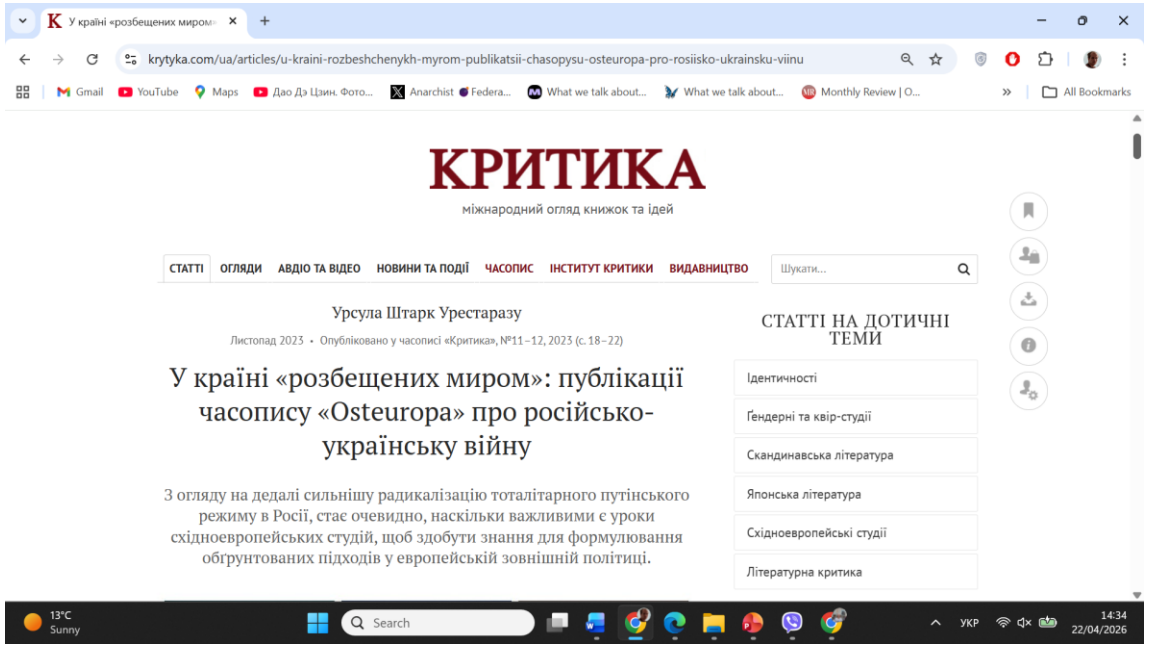
- Student translations: 17 English to Ukrainian, 4 German to Ukrainian, 1 Ukrainian to English.
- Supervisor translations: 8 English to Ukrainian, 7 Ukrainian to English.
- Genres include essays, reviews, interviews, reportage, memorial texts, and texts on wartime support and professional practice.
- So the project worked in two directions: into Ukraine and out from Ukraine.

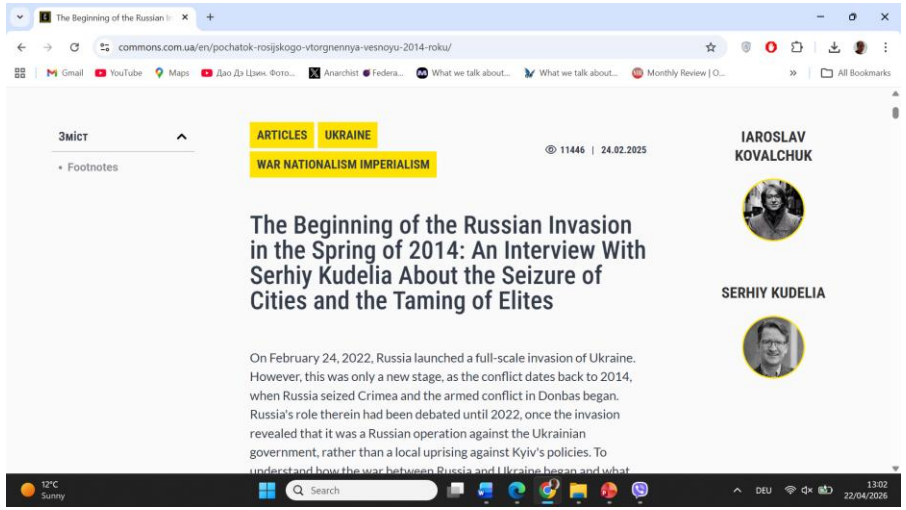




The basic workflow

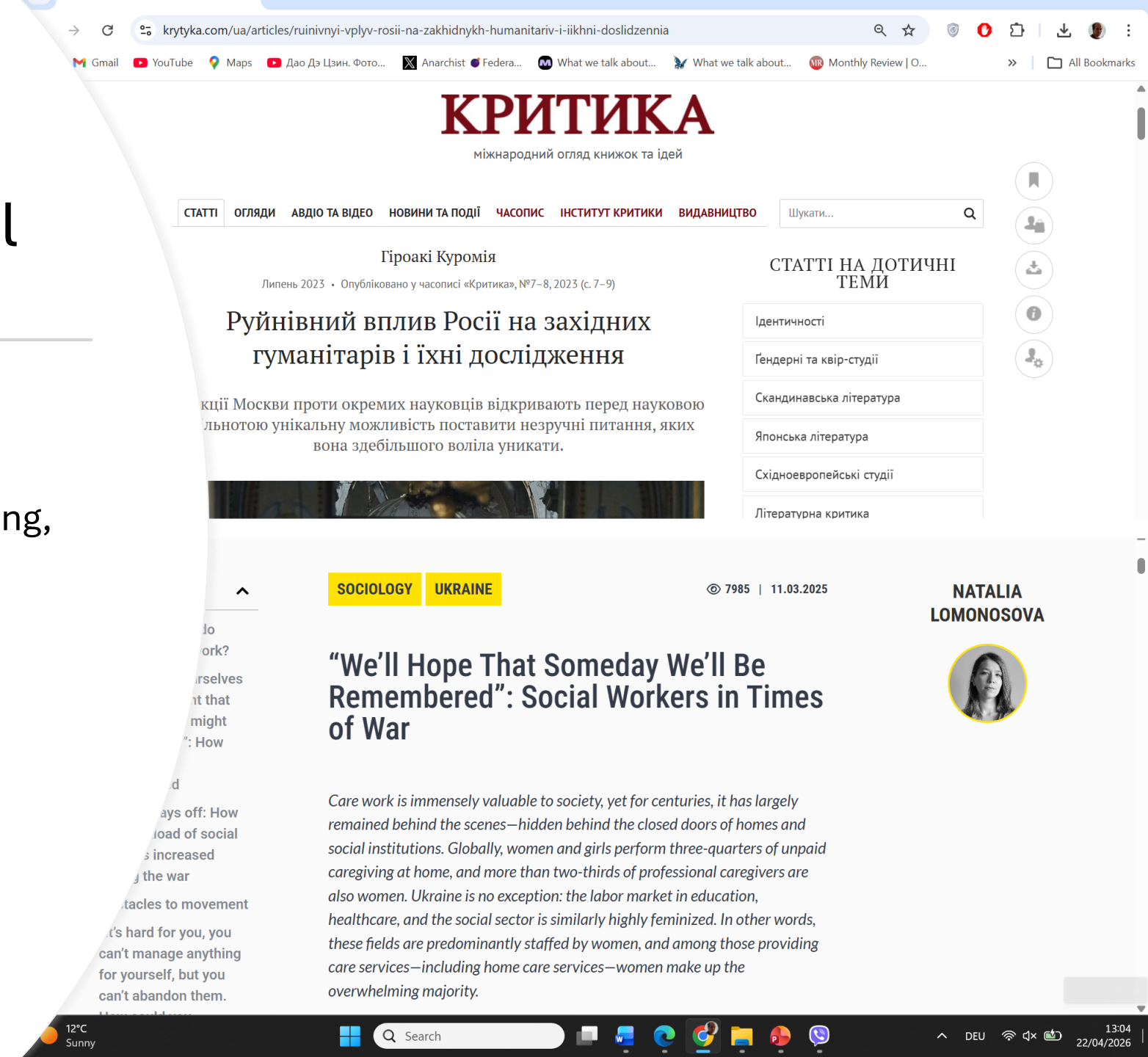
- Text selection.
- Pre-translation orientation: genre, audience, terms, references.
- Drafting, usually individually or in pairs.
- Peer revision, supervisor editing, editorial negotiation, and publication.





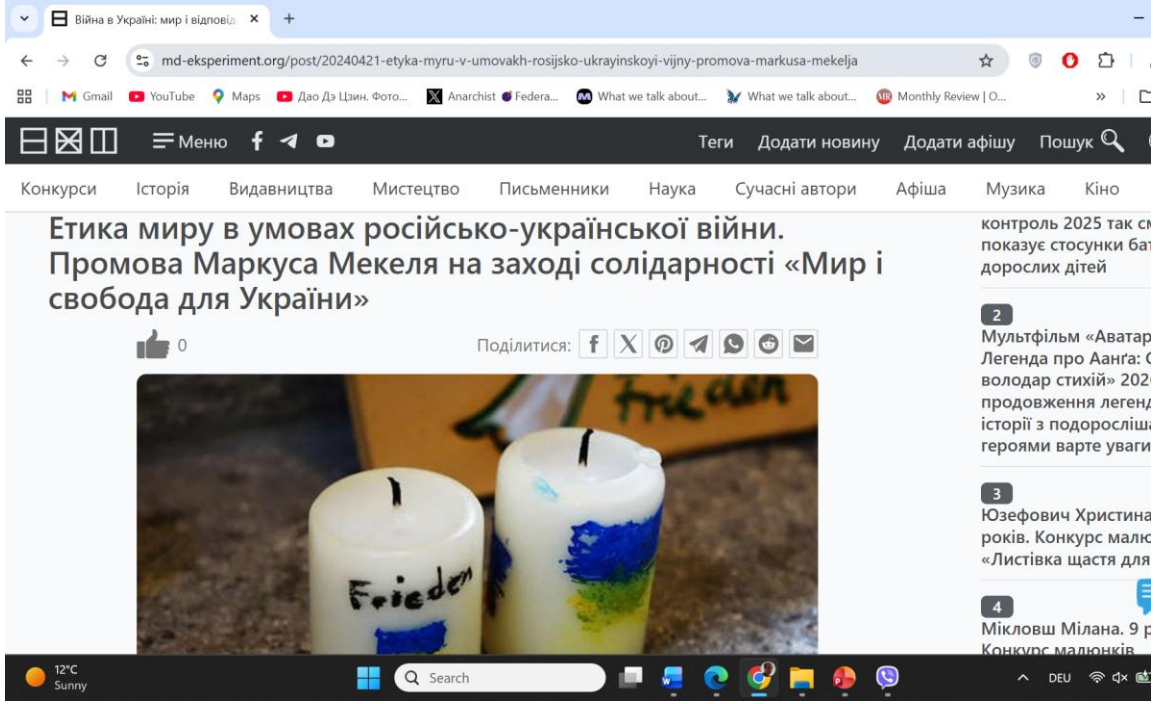
Why revision was central

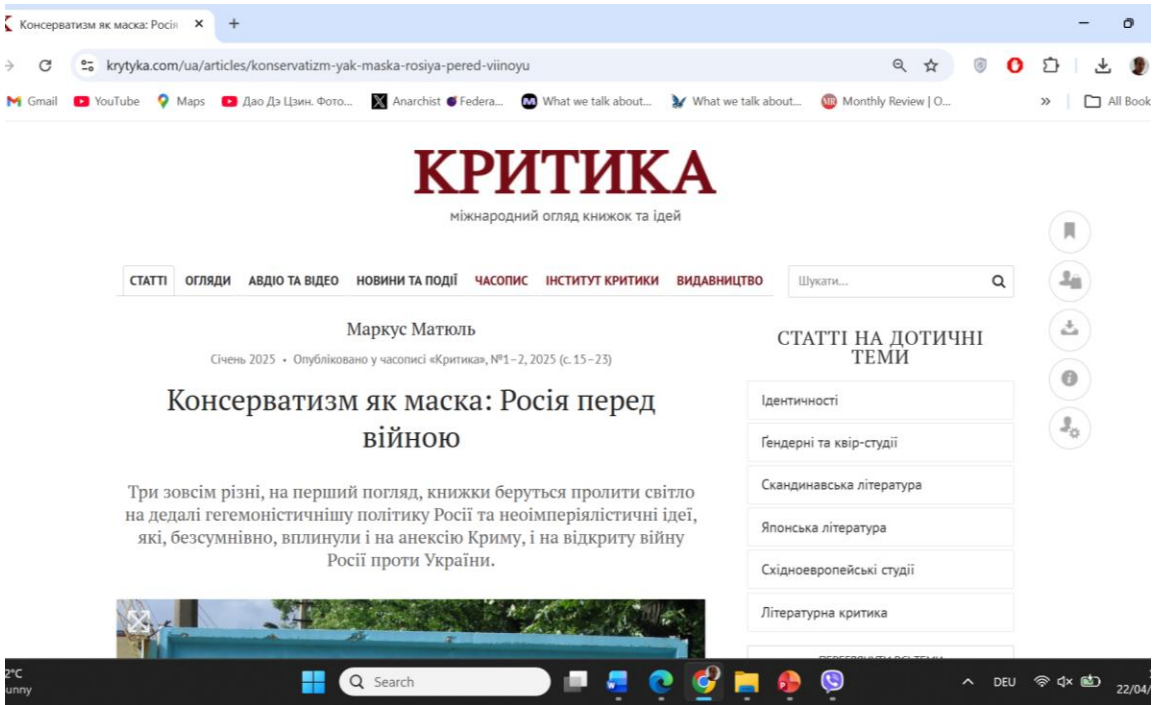
- Peer revision gave students a first audience inside the classroom.
- Supervisor editing focused on meaning, structure, accuracy, and tone.
- Editors then shaped titles, introductions, style, and framing for publication.
- One published translation usually passed through several versions.



A key terminology choice

- Many English and German sources use labels such as “war in Ukraine” or “Ukraine war.”
- In Ukrainian, such wording can leave the aggressor unnamed.
- The translations consistently used “the Russo-Ukrainian War.”
- This kept responsibility explicit.

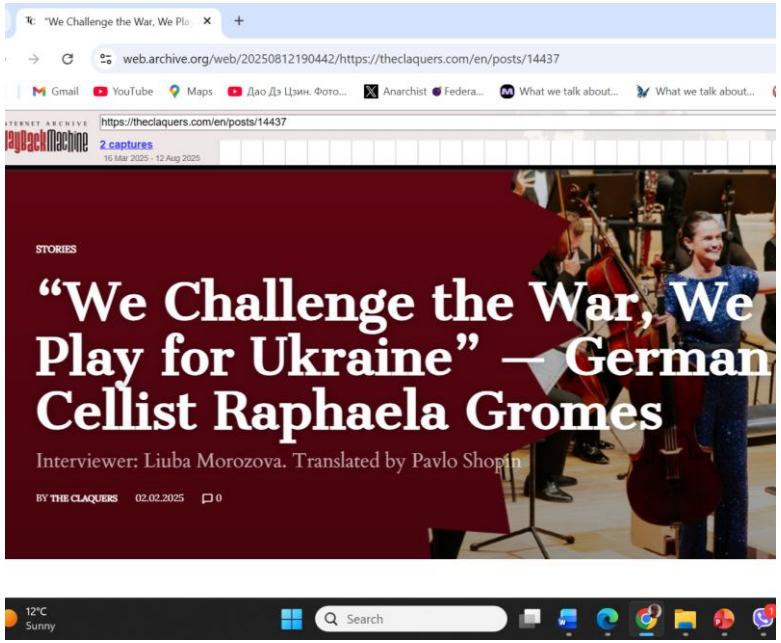




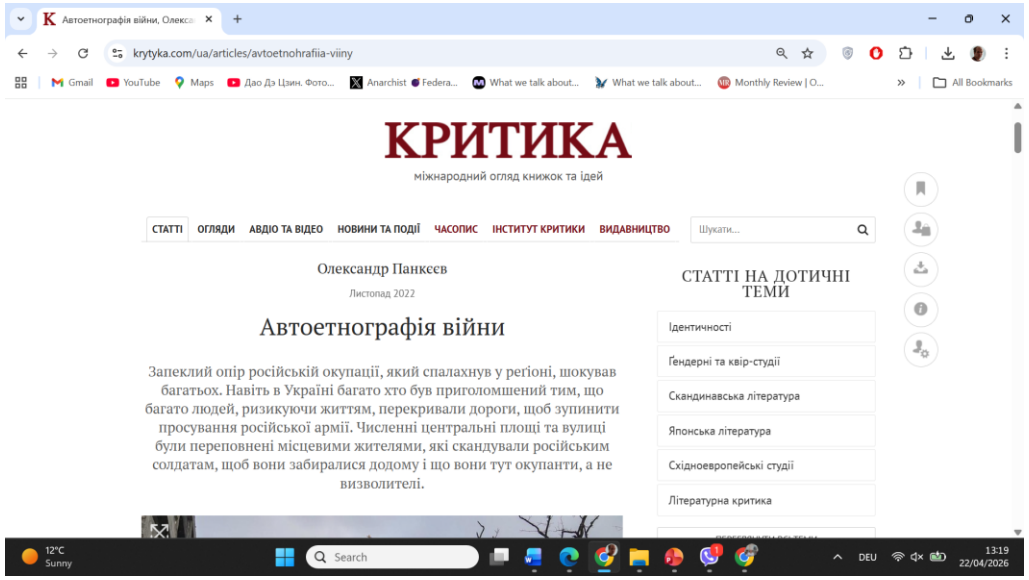
Main themes across the corpus

- Ceasefire debates and heavy weapons.
- Historical memory, imperial claims, and responsibility.
- International criminal law and justice.
- Labour, care, farming, and cultural life under wartime pressure.

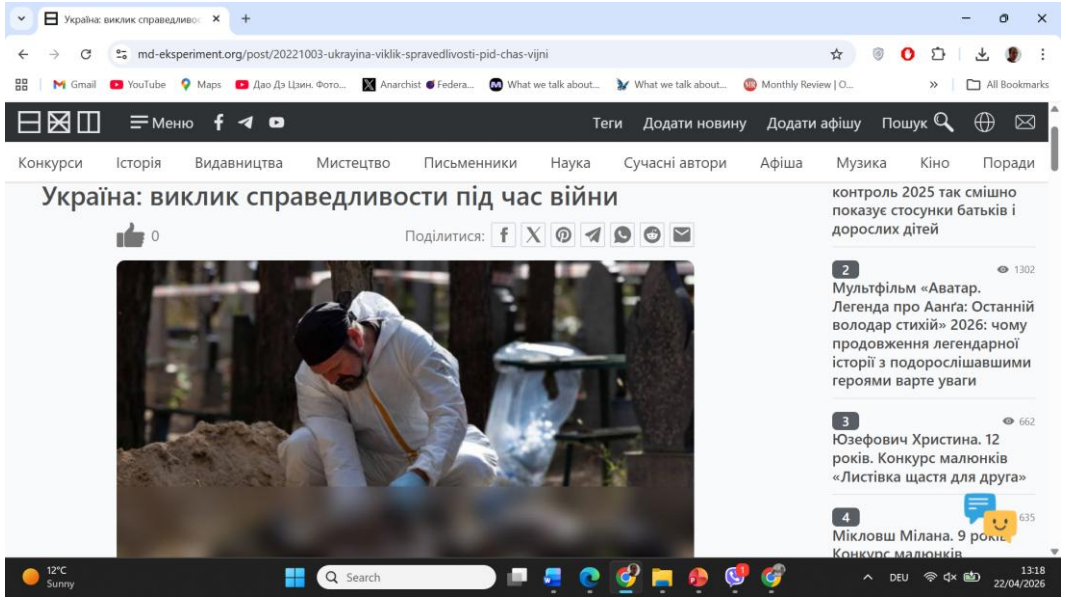




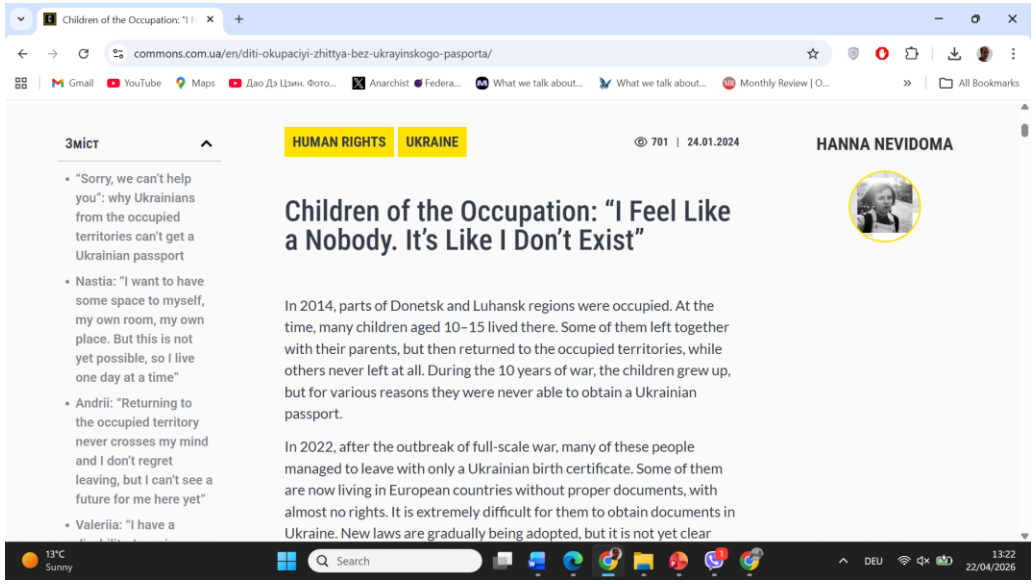
Translating English and German texts into Ukrainian



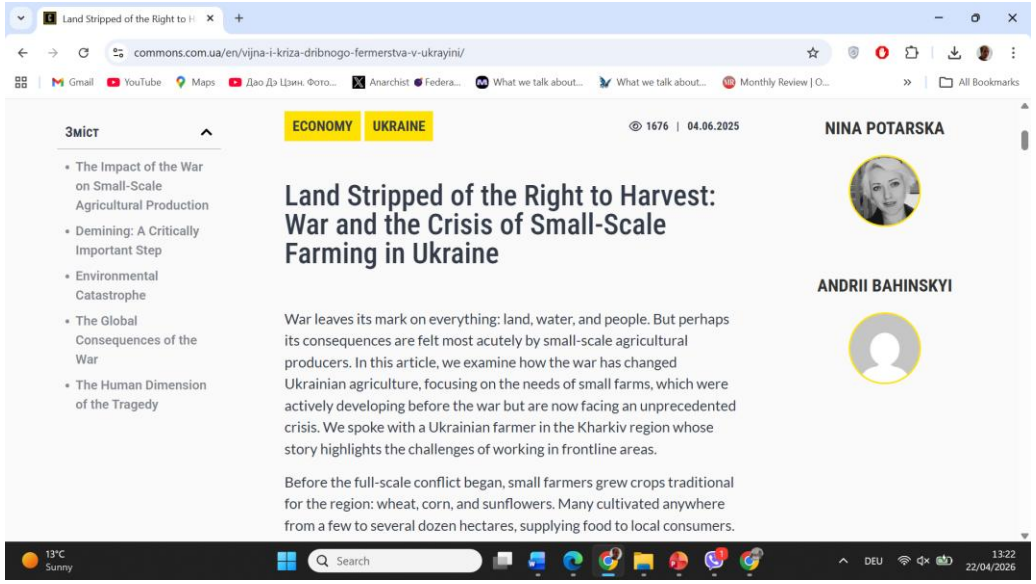
- This brought outside commentary into Ukrainian public discussion.
- Ukrainian readers could judge foreign arguments directly, in their own language.
- Examples include “Heavy Weapons Now!”, “Peace Ethics in the Face of the Russo-Ukrainian War: A Speech for the Solidarity Event ‘Peace and Freedom for Ukraine’.”, and “Comments on Debates in Germany on the Russo-Ukrainian War.”
- These texts were demanding because they mixed politics, history, and rhetoric.



Translating Ukrainian texts into English

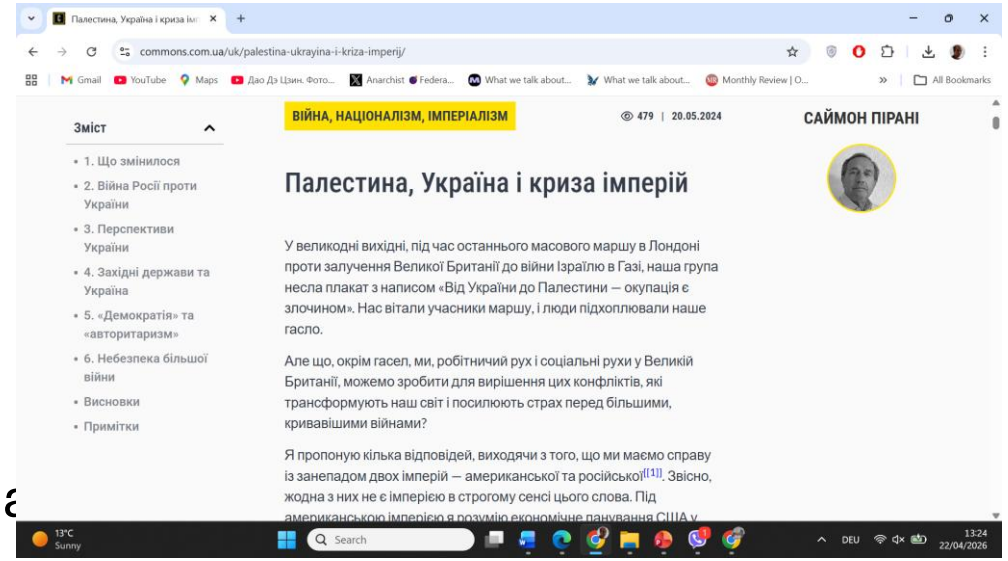


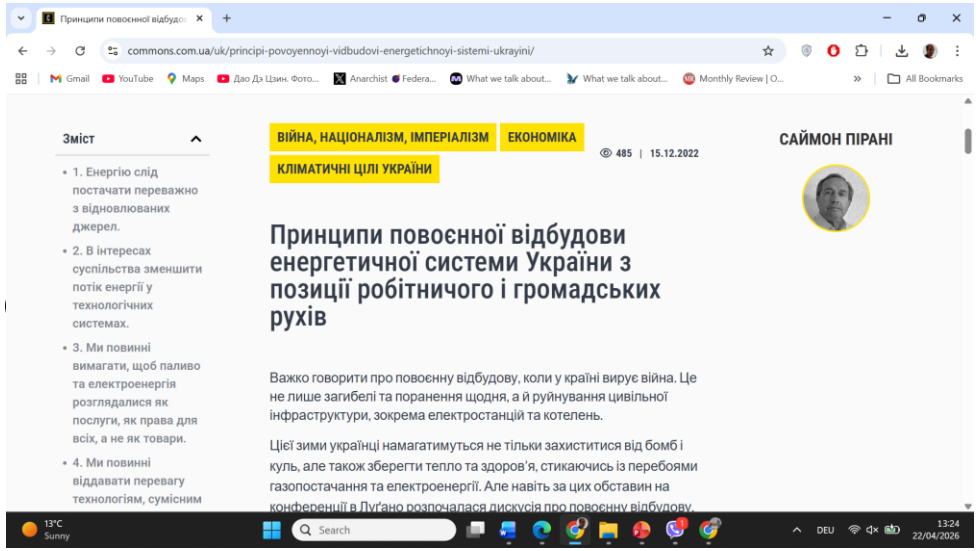
- This brought Ukrainian testimony and analysis to international readers.
- It showed Ukraine as a society with organized labour, care, law, and culture.
- Examples include "Our Comrade Died at the Front. In Memory of Yuriy Lebedev", "Children of the Occupation: 'I Feel Like a Nobody. It's Like I Don't Exist'," and "Land Stripped of the Right to Harvest: War and the Crisis of Small-Scale Farming in Ukraine."
- These translations helped English-language readers encounter Ukrainians as subjects whose voices should be heard.



Publication venues

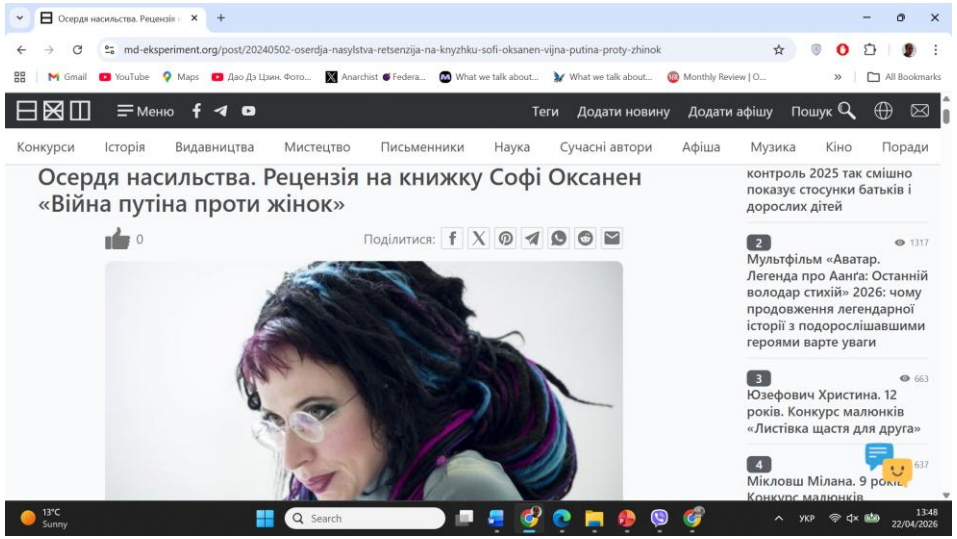
- *Krytyka* (14) expected careful argument and historica depth.
- *Experiment* (10) allowed faster publication for different texts.
- *Commons* (11) foregrounded labour, care, international law, and social critique.
- *The Claquers* (2) focused on music, artistic work, an cultural institutions.

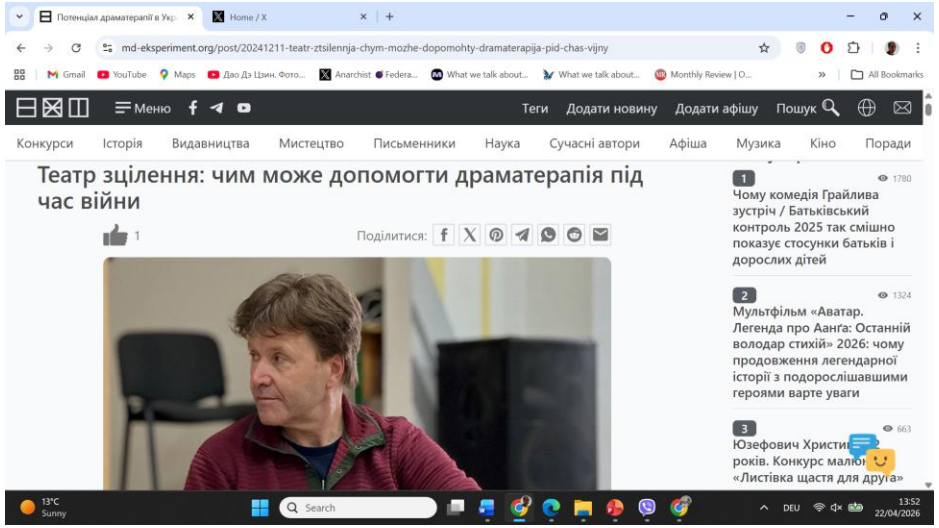




What students learned

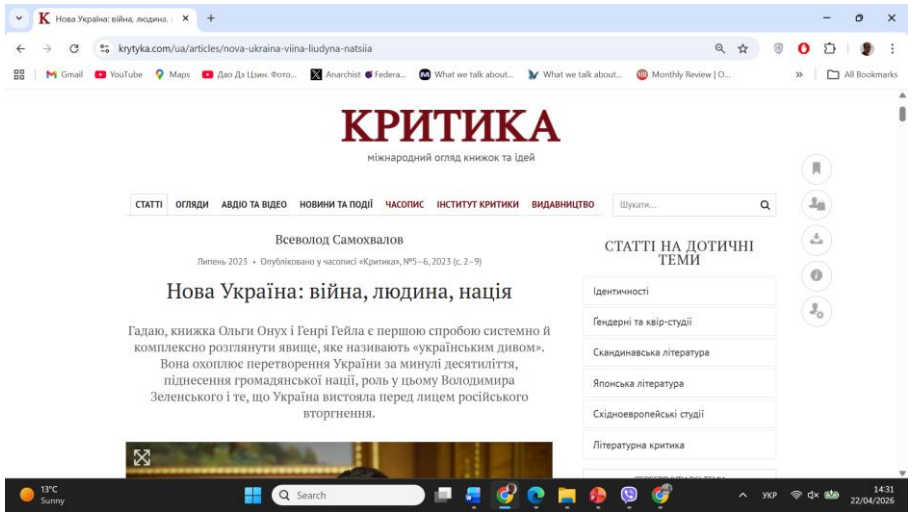
- How to translate for different audiences.
- How to work with genre, register, references, and terminology.
- How to revise collectively and respond to editorial feedback.
- How translation choices can affect public understanding in wartime.

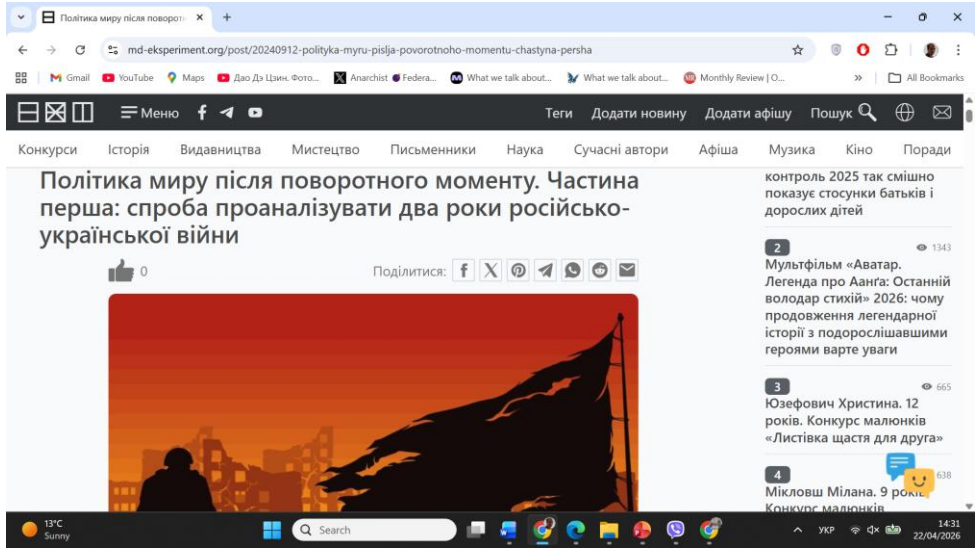




Translation pedagogy as public humanities

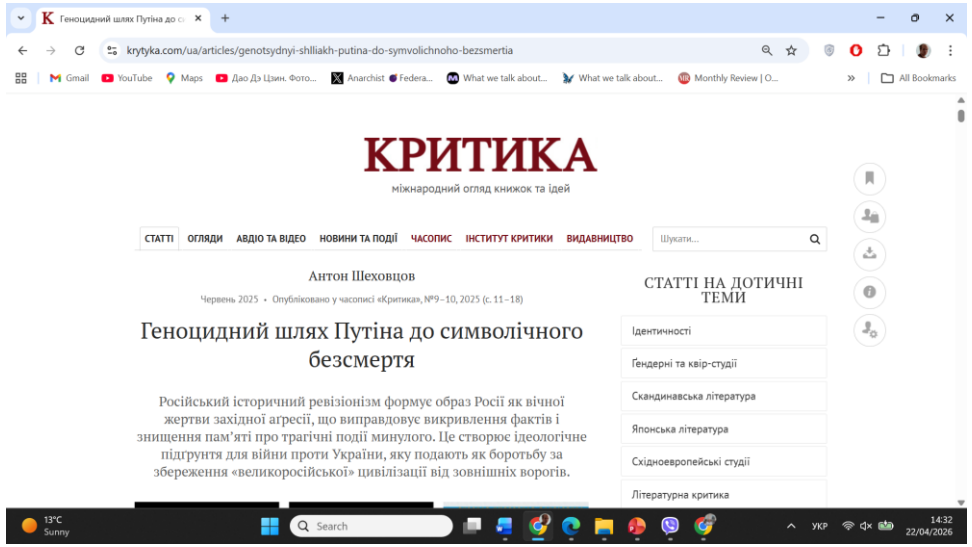
- This model joins teaching and public communication.
- Students learn by producing texts that matter outside the classroom.
- Translation becomes a way of bringing knowledge across linguistic borders.
- In this sense, translation training becomes public service.

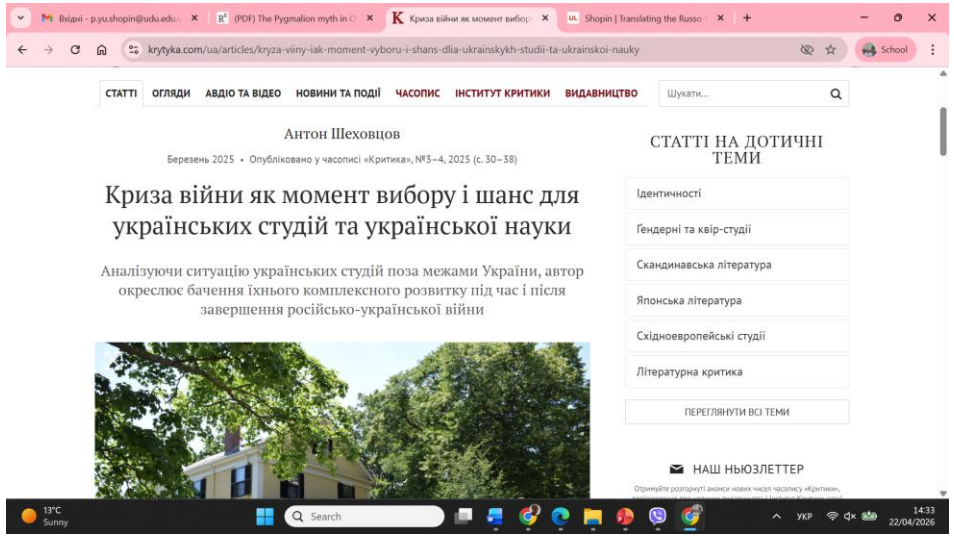




Limits and risks

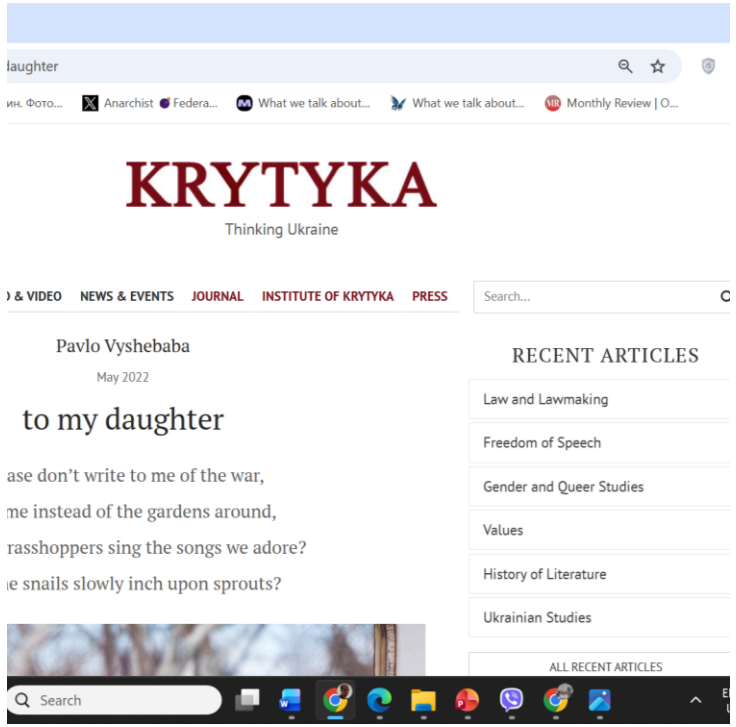
- This model needs outlets willing to edit and publish translations.
- It also needs strong supervision and quality control.
- Wartime information is unstable, emotionally heavy, and politically contested.
- So source selection, fact-checking, and framing are especially important.

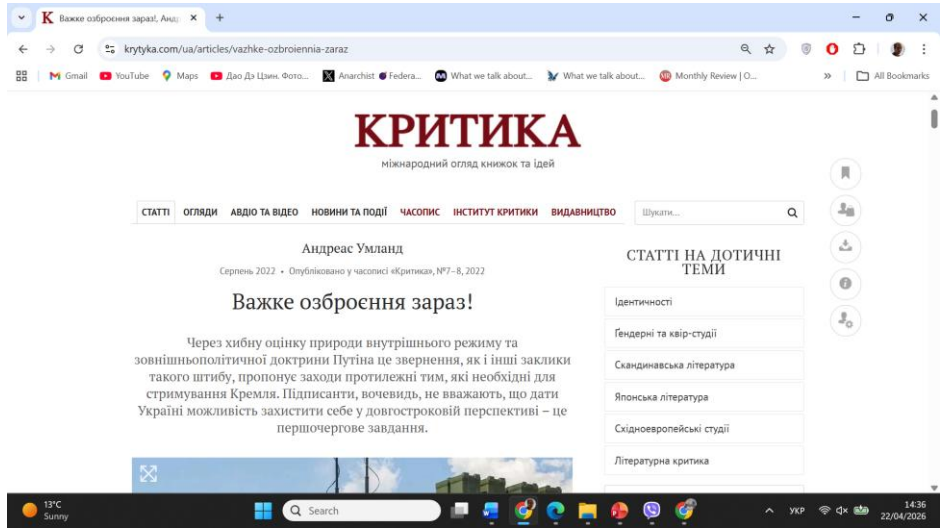




Conclusion

- The project shows that a student translation circle can keep working during wartime and publish reliable texts.
- Translation teaching and the media can support each other.
- Translation helped make Ukraine visible as a place of debate, analysis, care, culture, and resistance.
- In this case, translation became a concrete form of cultural solidarity.





Preprint

Shopin, P. (2026). Translating the Russo-Ukrainian War: pedagogy and solidarity. *Zenodo*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19356570

