

UDC 81'255.4

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.21>

Sense and Sensibility in Political Translation: A Choice Between Linguistic Accuracy and Stylistic Ambiguity

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У статті проаналізовано когнітивно-дискурсивні особливості функціонування політичних образних виразів, як-от “coalition of the willing”, “boots on the ground” і “the shield of Europe”, в англomовному політичному дискурсі, а також встановлено специфіку їхньої інтерпретації та перекладу в україномовному медіапросторі та офіційній онлайн-комунікації з акцентом на стилістичній варіативності перекладу. Результати аналізу свідчать, що українські відповідники цих виразів не лише зазнають модифікації значення, прирощення смислів і переосмислення ідеологічних акцентів у межах українського політичного дискурсу, а й стають тригерами формування внутрішньоукраїнських політичних наративів, які не завжди пов’язані з їхнім вихідним значенням. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена спрямованістю сучасних перекладацьких студій на комплексне вивчення ролі політичного перекладу в глобалізованому інформаційному просторі на тлі загострення міжнародних конфліктів, а також нагальною потребою у формуванні цілісної теоретико-методологічної основи для аналізу когнітивно-стилістичного підґрунтя перекладу.

Метою статті є виокремлення основних типів стилістичних трансформацій у політичному перекладі та з’ясування їхнього впливу на реконфігурацію когнітивних моделей репрезентації й інтерпретації політичної реальності в межах вихідної та цільової лінгвокультур. Поставлена мета передбачає виконання таких завдань: 1) визначити денотативні та конотативні характеристики аналізованих образних виразів та встановити особливості їхнього функціонування в англomовному політичному дискурсі; 2) здійснити їхній зіставний аналіз з українськими перекладними відповідниками; 3) виявити перекладацькі трансформації, які зумовлюють зміну стилістичного забарвлення цільового тексту й, як наслідок, когнітивний зсув, що веде до зміщення ідеологічних акцентів; 4) здійснити аналіз типових перекладацьких помилок і надати власні варіанти перекладу, обґрунтувавши їхню доцільність на основі методики, запропонованої в статті.

Методологічна база дослідження ґрунтується на поєднанні лексичного, семантико-когнітивного та дискурсивного аналізів, що дозволяє комплексно оцінити функціонування зазначених виразів, встановити їхні денотативні та конотативні характеристики, простежити етимологію й асоціативні зв’язки, визначити стилістичну валентність, а також виявити когнітивні механізми формування смислів, що впливають на сприйняття текстів цільовою аудиторією.

Результати дослідження свідчать, що стилістична варіативність у перекладі здатна як посилювати, так і нейтралізувати ідеологічні наративи, впливаючи на формування політичних образів і колективних уявлень у суспільстві. Встановлено типи стилістичних трансформацій,



зокрема надання додаткового стилістичного значення, відновлення стилістичного потенціалу чи застосування референтного зсуву, які можуть істотно змінювати референтність висловлень, їхнє емоційно-експресивне забарвлення та ідеологічне навантаження. Виявлення семантичних нюансів, стилістичних конотацій і культурно обумовлених відтінків значень дало змогу авторам статті обґрунтовано запропонувати українські відповідники та визначити ступінь їхньої адекватності в межах відповідного стилістичного контексту. Проаналізовано варіанти перекладу, що вже функціонують в українському інформаційному просторі, та виокремлено типові перекладацькі помилки, які призводять до зміщення смислів, ускладнення сприйняття або неадекватного відтворення змісту. Доведено агентність політичного перекладу, який постає як активний творчий процес, у межах якого перекладач діє як співтворець змісту й стилю політичного дискурсу, посилюючи його ідеологічний та когнітивний вплив у цільовому мовно-культурному середовищі.

Ключові слова: англомовний і україномовний медійний та офіційний політичний дискурс, міжкультурна комунікація, переклад, перекладацькі стратегії, агентність перекладу, політичні ідіоми та образні вирази, метафора, метонімія, стилістика перекладу, когнітивна семантика, дискурсивний аналіз.

To cite this article: Daineko, V., Prysiazhniuk, L. (2026). Sense and Sensibility in Political Translation: A Choice Between Linguistic Accuracy and Stylistic Ambiguity. *Alfred Nobel University Journal of Philology*, 1 (31), 369-389, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.21>

Introduction

In today's era of global conflicts, marked by rapid information flows, widespread social media engagement, and hybrid information warfare, political translation plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion on issues dominating the international agenda and the global standing of nations. Translating political texts is therefore not only a linguistic task but also an ideological act [Álvarez, Vidal, 1996], where each choice of wording can shape interpretations of political realities and requires both linguistic competence and a nuanced understanding of cultural, historical, and political contexts.

This article seeks to explore the role of translation in framing political narratives, with particular attention to the balance between linguistic precision and stylistic flexibility in rendering political messages. It examines stylistic variability in translation and how shifts in connotation and associations reconfigure cognitive frameworks for interpreting political events in target linguocultures. A special focus is placed on politically significant collocations (“coalition of the willing,” “boots on the ground,” and “the shield of Europe”) and their stylistic adaptation across different contexts, highlighting how translation decisions can reshape meaning and influence public perception. These expressions are examined in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine, reflecting both their international perception and their role in shaping internal political narratives.

The aim of the article is to identify the main types of stylistic transformations in political translation and to examine their impact on the reconfiguration of cognitive models for representation and interpretation of political reality within the source and target linguocultures. To achieve the defined aim, the study addresses the following research *objectives*: to identify the denotative and connotative features of the selected political figurative expressions; to compare the English expressions with their Ukrainian equivalents in relevant contexts; to analyse translation transformations at both linguistic and cognitive levels that lead to semantic or ideological shifts and potential translation errors; and to propose translation variants based on the analytical findings of the study.

The analysis draws on online news outlets, social media accounts of high-profile political figures (Facebook and Instagram), and official governmental and non-governmental websites. These sources, characterized by salient stylistic features, provide an effective basis for studying how translation shapes meaning in both official and unofficial political communication.

Theoretical background

Political translation represents a focal research area in contemporary translation studies as a distinct type of translation that encompasses not only semantic and cultural dimensions but also the influence of political agendas, involving the reinterpretation and reframing of political

messages and identities across linguocultural boundaries. Numerous studies reveal that translation can significantly modify political narratives, attitudes, and interpretation of events depending on the political context of the target linguoculture [Kamyans, 2024; Riggs, 2022; Zaid, Bennoudi, 2023, pp. 246–247]. For instance, prior research suggests that in political translation, traditional translation strategies, such as addition, are in some cases not primarily aimed at ensuring fidelity to the original, but may instead serve to align the target text with the expectations of the target audience and to guide their perception of the political content [Prysiashniuk, Bachurina, 2025, p. 66]. In line with this, particular attention has been paid to the role of ideological framing in rendering political ideas [Álvarez, Vidal, 1996; Valdeón, Calafat, 2020], with translation understood as “the form of rewriting since it is performed under certain constraints and for certain purposes” [Zaid, Bennoudi, 2023, p. 245]. This perspective underlines that translation is not merely a matter of transferring meaning, but a process deeply intertwined with political and ideological contexts. As Valdeon and Calafat [2020, p. 1] note, “the influence of politics on translation practice can be observed in the translation of political texts, but also in the use of translation as a political statement.” Consequently, the role of translation becomes even more important in times of military conflicts [Baker, 2006; Salama-Carr, 2007], “shaping the way in which conflict unfolds in a number of ways” [Baker, 2006, p. 2]. Translation can, therefore, serve as a weapon for disseminating strategic narratives abroad while simultaneously influencing domestic public opinion.

Existing research proves the significance of this function of translation in the context of Ukraine [Gon, Pavliuk, 2025; Kamyans, 2024; Prysiashniuk, Bachurina, 2025], while raising critical questions regarding translators’ role and responsibility as they seek to reconcile the ethical principle “to perform from a position of in-between” [Salama-Carr, 2007, p. 1] with political pressures and wartime realities. In other words, it exposes another critical gap for current translation studies: the insufficient accounting for the decisive role of translators in shaping meaning and mediating ideological effects.

Translation agency in political discourse

These considerations call for a review of the linguistic theory of agency, originally conceptualized as the capacity to act and exert influence through language [Ahearn, 2010, pp. 28-30; Campbell, 2005; Duranti, 2004, pp. 453-454; Yang, 2016]. In this context, translators’ decisions gain heightened significance, foregrounding the concept of translational agency [Gon, Pavliuk, 2025], which may be defined as the capacity to make cognitive and linguistic choices that elicit and reconstruct meaning at both semantic and stylistic levels in order to exert influence within specific communicative settings. Translators act as co-creators of meaning, reconciling competing narratives and shaping how political messages circulate across languages and cultures [Gon, Pavliuk, 2025; Rebrii, 2018, p. 111]. They do more than convey information, as they can reinforce, weaken, or reshape political messages. As Alvarez [1996, p. 4] observes, “the translator can become a true author, by determining what the implicit meanings of the final version are and also those of the original version.” Since contemporary political discourse mostly unfolds in digital environments characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and high-speed information transmission [Izotova et al., 2021, p. 201], which may lead to changes in participant roles and modes of meaning-making [Izotova et al., 2021, p. 201; Yang, 2016, p. 16], the visibility and importance of translation choices are intensified. The fluidity of online discourse requires not only analytical precision but also creative strategies [Rebrii, 2018], allowing translators to adapt, reframe, or reconstruct messages while preserving their informative, persuasive, and ideological functions [Álvarez, 1996, p. 6; Valdeón, Calafat, 2020].

Accordingly, this study adopts an agency-based perspective, conceptualizing translators as active decision-makers whose lexical, stylistic, and cognitive choices impact political narratives.

Cognitive and discourse studies in translation research

Although current studies emphasize the impact of translators, there is still a lack of systematic research into the linguistic strategies and cognitive mechanisms through which political translation reshapes meanings and ideological loading across linguocultures.

Traditional definitions of equivalence [Catford, 1978, p. 27] and approaches that construe adequacy in terms of content fidelity and pragma-stylistic correspondence [Baker, 2011], largely focus, as noted by Mizin and Slavova [2025, p. 150], “on finding interlingual equivalents, without paying attention to the modern interpretation of translation as a transition not so much from language to

language as from culture to culture, i.e. the translator must not only convey words, but also reproduce all the semantic shades of the concepts represented by them in the target culture.” The proponents of cognitive translation theories [Martynyuk, Huliieva, 2025; Rebrii, 2018, pp. 118-119; Schwieter, Ferreira, 2020] aim to bridge this gap by examining the underlying cognitive nature of translation processes and probing into the mechanisms through which translators navigate linguistic, cultural, and ideological dimensions to render multifaceted meaning across diverse linguocultural environments.

At the same time, to give a comprehensive account of how translated political texts can reflect, reconstruct, or modify source political narratives, it is essential to consider the social, political, cultural, and historical facets of translation, as the way a text is rendered may vary when these contexts change. Discourse analysis, which involves ideological framing [Van Dijk, 2012] and the construction of strategic narratives as “methods to influence international affairs” [Roselle, Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, 2014, p. 71] seems particularly useful in this regard, as it enables researchers not only to examine how specific words or phrases are translated depending on the political context but also to study the role of translation in “shaping political discourse” [Zaid, Bennoudi, 2023, p. 248]. According to L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, and B. O’Loughlin [2014, p. 79], strategic narratives that underlie verbal messages are “central to understanding how all aspects of a conflict are defined, constructed and understood” and serve to create a particular image of the conflicting parties. Thus, a detailed analysis of socio-political and historical discursive configurations along with conceptual structures facilitates the evaluation of translators’ choices by eliciting the underlying narratives [Zhabotynska, 2024, pp. 87-88] activated in the source text and its translation, thereby revealing how translators’ decisions reshape meaning and guide audience perception.

Stylistics of political metaphors and metonymies in translation

This approach provides a solid ground for studying political figurative language, notably metaphors and metonymies, which serve to encode ideological meanings and construct strategic narratives. Translating such expressions poses a distinct range of challenges that go beyond lexical equivalence, requiring translators to take into account cultural and ideological nuances embedded within figurative language [Orel, Stoyanova, 2025]. In line with this, the integration of critical discourse analysis [Zaid, Bennoudi, 2023, p. 247] with metaphor theory [Lakoff, Johnson, 2003] and the cognitive metonymy framework [Radden, Kövesces, 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021] offers new avenues for studying the translation of political figurative expressions and their subsequent autonomous functioning in the target linguocultural environment.

The foundations of contemporary approaches to metaphor and metonymy in political discourse can be traced to the works by George Lakoff [1991, 2014] where he demonstrated how they systematically shape political reasoning and “foreign policy deliberations” [Lakoff, 1991, p. 17]. These early insights have since gained considerable traction in contemporary political and linguistic studies, where metaphor is increasingly viewed as a key tool for “enhancing the persuasive power of messaging and explanations” [Flusberg et al., 2024, p. 3] when addressing topical social issues. Moreover, metaphors and metonymies often serve to encapsulate strategic narratives by transforming complex socio-political issues into familiar images and memorable associations, thereby facilitating the comprehension of intricate senses. Alongside explanatory metaphors deployed to cover issues such as climate change and vaccination [Ibid, pp. 3-5], we distinguish institutional metaphors, which are actively employed to represent and communicate the values, structures, and policies of non-governmental organisations, alliances, global entities, and states, as well as to frame approaches to international relations. Such metaphors not only convey official positions but also shape the identity, legitimacy, and authority of institutions, shaping how audiences perceive their role and priorities, which makes them particularly significant for translation, as their rendering requires careful consideration to preserve or strategically adapt these effects across linguocultural contexts. Typical examples include “Eastern Sentry,” used to describe NATO’s activity in protecting its eastern flank, and “the European family of nations,” which evokes ideas of shared values and unity within the EU.

Although institutional and other political metaphors and metonymies are conventional, forming part of the relevant lexicon and being easier to process and perceive than unconventional expressions [Goatly, 2007, pp. 21-22], they nonetheless retain stylistic potential in cross-cultural rendering, which poses translation challenges. The problem lies in the fact that adhering to the

imagery in the source text may evoke divergent connotations and unintended associations in the target language, potentially transforming a conventional metaphor / metonymy into a novel one and altering its interpretation.

Previous research has identified a range of strategies for translating idioms and set expressions, taking into account the specific lexical and grammatical resources of both the source and target languages. In her coursebook on translation, Mona Baker [2011, pp. 76-85] provides an extensive set of approaches, including: using an idiom of similar meaning and form; using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form; borrowing the source language idiom; translation by paraphrase; translation by omission of a play on idiom; and translation by omission of entire idiom. While being detailed and systematic, this approach still fails to fully address the challenges arising from stylistic shifts in the translation of political language, where figurative expressions often carry ideological and culture-bound nuances.

Attempts to overcome these challenges have been undertaken in the works by J. Boase-Beier [2020, 2021] who highlights the importance of stylistics in translation, foregrounding the translator's interpretive role and considering cognitive aspects of style. In her later work, J. Boase-Beier [2021] develops a method for analysing stylistic patterns of metaphorical expressions and their cognitive counterparts, as well as the ways these patterns are rendered in translation. This method enables a systematic comparison of connotations in the source and target texts, offering a more nuanced understanding of how stylistic meanings are preserved or transformed in the translation process. While J. Boase-Beier focuses on translators' cognitive choices, the present study examines recurring cognitive patterns underlying shifts in stylistic valency in the translation of political figurative language, with particular attention to how such shifts foreground or obscure expressive and evaluative connotations, thereby producing conceptual remapping. Conceptual remapping is understood here as a process that involves altering conceptual structures of a message through translation. This perspective is based on recent cognitive studies demonstrating that metaphors in political discourse may generate different conceptual entailments depending on domain-specific contexts [Flusberg et al., 2024, p. 3]. Such findings point to the interdependence of metaphorical systems and cultural models and illustrate how conceptual remapping may reorganize the conceptual structure of a metaphor or metonymy to foreground different connotations, associations, or interpretations in line with specific cultural or ideological frameworks. To trace this process, we rely on the methods of cognitive stylistics, which focuses on cognitive mechanisms revealing how stylistic meaning is constructed through the interaction of mental processes and linguistic forms [Semino, Culpeper, 2002; Vorobyova, 2025].

Thus, we introduce three interrelated terms to describe recurring patterns of stylistic shifts in translation that may result in conceptual remapping: **reviving stylistic potential**, **ascribing additional stylistic value**, and **shifting referential focus**. The first strategy, defined as *reviving stylistic potential*, arises when the source expression contains inherent stylistic potential, which translation can restore in a contextually appropriate way, enabling it to evoke emotional resonance for the target audience. The second strategy, *ascribing additional stylistic value*, occurs when the expression lacks stylistic charge in the source language. Here, the translator may intentionally or unintentionally imbue it with rhetorical or expressive force in the target text, effectively generating stylistic significance absent in the original. The third strategy involves *shifting the referential focus* in which the translation reconfigures the emphasis of reference, thereby reshaping the underlying political narrative along with its ideological and persuasive impact within the target culture. Collectively, these three strategies offer a solid ground for analysing how translation not only transfers meaning but also reconstructs the stylistic and conceptual architecture of political discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a translation-oriented methodology integrating an agency-focused approach with tools from discourse analysis and cognitive stylistics. It combines lexical, stylistic, cognitive, and discourse analyses to provide a comprehensive assessment of political figurative expressions, including their etymology, associative networks, stylistic valency, and meaning-making mechanisms in real political discourse. The approach focuses on stylistic shifts that reshape underlying political narratives, thereby aligning them with specific cultural and political contexts of the target linguoculture. Moreover, it enables making well-conceived translation choices that

prevent stylistic errors while addressing the relevant communicative situation and mitigating unintended ideological shifts in the target discourse. By foregrounding stylistic adaptation alongside cognitive processing, this methodology provides a more nuanced and contextually sensitive understanding of effective translation practices.

The analysis proceeds in four interrelated steps:

1. *Semantic, Etymological, and Associative Analysis*. Key political expressions (“coalition of the willing,” “boots on the ground,” and “the shield of Europe”) are examined comparatively in English and Ukrainian public discourse. Their denotative and connotative meanings, as well as associative links, are analysed using dictionaries, monographs, and studies on English political discourse.

2. *Stylistic Interpretation*. Translated expressions are analysed in relation to the source political discourse, with particular attention to whether the translation preserves the original stylistic value, reconfigures its stylistic potential, or transforms a conventional expression into a more novel one. The analysis of stylistic shifts focuses on how changes in tone, register, and expressive intensity contribute to the reframing, reinforcement, or attenuation of ideological meanings in the target discourse.

3. *Discourse Analysis*. Each expression is considered within its broader social, political, and media context to assess its ideological function, pragmatic role, and cognitive effect. This stage examines how translation choices are shaped by political agendas, cultural norms, and power relations, and how these choices influence the construction and reception of political narratives in the target discourse.

4. *Cognitive Analysis*. The final stage examines how translations reconstruct the cognitive models activated by political catchphrases. By comparing English phrases with their Ukrainian equivalents, the study shows how participants, actions, relationships, and evaluative stances are represented and potentially transformed across source and target contexts.

Results and discussion

This section will explore specific examples of translation challenges related to Ukraine’s positioning in the world, focusing on idiomatic expressions associated with public diplomacy, as well as on how political nuances are handled in practice. The scope of this analysis encompasses three terms frequently used in political discourse concerning Ukraine, both domestically and internationally: “*coalition of the willing*,” “*boots on the ground*,” and “*the shield of Europe*.” The first and third expressions are grounded on metaphorical relations, while the second is a metonymy. They differ in their stylistic and pragmatic value in English: “*coalition of the willing*” is largely stylistically neutral, though it has the potential to convey emotional or evaluative connotations. In contrast, “*boots on the ground*” functions as a conventional metonymy in English, whereas “*the shield of Europe*” carries a stylistic charge. In Ukrainian translations, however, these expressions often acquire different stylistic nuances that become evident in specific media and political contexts. For example, the emotional resonance or persuasive force of the “*the shield of Europe*” may be amplified or attenuated depending on the target discourse, while the perceived neutrality or conventionality of other phrases can shift due to cultural and linguistic conventions.

“Coalition of the willing”

The term “*coalition of the willing*” has regained visibility in public and political discourse in the context of the Russo-Ukraine War, as it is frequently invoked to describe international alignments and the voluntary support extended to Ukraine. Its renewed relevance highlights both the strategic and ideological weight the phrase carries, making it a noteworthy case for examining the challenges of translating politically charged terminology.

The expression first entered the widespread use in the early 1990s during U.S.-led military interventions, including the Gulf War (1990-1991) and later the Iraq War (2003-2011), where it was employed to describe groups of countries that joined voluntarily without the formal endorsement of established international institutions such as the United Nations. According to the definition given by Professor Lincoln P. Bloomfield, who is credited with introducing this term, such a coalition consists of “fragments of a community who share basic values and premises on a certain issue and are willing to forego a degree of freedom of action thereon” [Bloomfield, 1974, p. 166]. This definition highlights

three key semantic features: a foundation of shared values, a voluntary sacrifice of autonomy, and a demonstrated capacity to act. Dictionary evidence further enriches the concept by emphasizing the energetic and enthusiastic connotations of “willing,” suggesting not only consent but an active readiness or eagerness to participate [McIntosh, 2026]. Taken together, the term denotes a value-based, intentionally formed group that chooses to move forward decisively and cooperatively, often as an adaptable and action-oriented alternative to broader and more formalized alliances.

Further contextual analysis of the term in public discourse shows that its adoption often depends on the political agenda, with different outlets choosing formulations that align with their preferred framing of international cooperation and the motivations of participating states. In 2003, a group of 30 nations collectively known as the *Coalition of the Willing* lent at least partial support to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, making it one of the most debated alliances of the period [Baum, 2013; Rodiles, 2018; Walker, 2025]. Due to widespread criticism of American foreign policy, it has also been wryly referred to as “the *Coalition of the Unwilling*” [Carty, 2011].

While primarily a political term, “coalition of the willing” can also carry stylistic force in English public discourse. The headline “*The Brief—Europe’s coalition of the unwilling, unready and unable*” [Wax, 2025] repurposes the term to convey irony and critique. Replacing “willing” with “unwilling, unready and unable” highlights reluctance and incompetence, with the repeated “un-” morpheme adding rhythm and emphasis. This semantic shift shows how political terminology can gain rhetorical power, relying on the audience’s familiarity with the original phrase. This example underscores the challenges translators face in conveying not only the literal political reference but also its nuanced stylistic play across languages. Below, we examine various Ukrainian translations of the term, considering how different political contexts and historical periods have shaped their interpretation.

The first period concerns the reception of the term during the Iraq War, when Ukraine’s participation in the U.S.-led coalition sparked significant public discussion and media reflection. With Ukrainian troops deployed as part of the multinational stabilization forces, controversies over global security alignments, the legitimacy of the intervention [Koziaikov, Merezhko, 2004], and Ukraine’s own strategic orientation became closely linked to the language used to describe political actors and decisions. The most common references to the international coalition were *міжнародна коаліція* (international coalition), *коаліційні сили* (coalition forces), *країни-союзники* (allied nations), and *антиіракська коаліція* (anti-Iraq coalition), which avoided any explicit evaluation of the participants’ willingness, motives, or political stance.

However, the neutral tone of the phrase shifts noticeably when Ukrainian media employ the term “coalition of the willing” in the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. When Keir Starmer used the term, allegedly addressing the US government to remind them of Europe’s support during the Iraq war [Walker, 2025], it provoked debates over its proper Ukrainian equivalent. Two variants emerged as the most prevalent: “*коаліція охочих*” and “*коаліція рішучих*.” The former emphasizes voluntary participation, highlighting readiness based on consent, while the latter foregrounds decisiveness and active commitment, stressing resolve over mere willingness. Notably, “*коаліція охочих*” (coalition of the willing) is the expression consistently employed by official Ukrainian state institutions and government-affiliated communication channels, underscoring its status as the standardized term in formal discourse. For instance,

Президент України Володимир Зеленський узяв участь у засіданні Коаліції охочих, яке відбулося у форматі відеозв’язку

(President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky participated in a video conference meeting of the Coalition of the Willing) [*Official Website of the President of Ukraine, 2025*].

By contrast, “*коаліція рішучих*” (coalition of the determined) is used predominantly in media outlets and journalistic commentary, where its more emphatic and rhetorically charged connotations align with the communicative goals of news reporting and public debate:

Британія та Франція створили “коаліцію рішучих”, взявши на себе провідну роль у просуванні мирних зусиль щодо України

(Great Britain and France have formed a “coalition of the determined,” taking a leading role in advancing peace efforts regarding Ukraine) [Uliianenko, 2025].

From a perspective of translation studies, the Ukrainian expression “коаліція охочих” (coalition of the willing) exemplifies a semantic calque that prioritizes denotative fidelity. The word “охочий” (willing) conveys voluntary willingness or inclination [Bilodid, 2024], rather than active determination, and corresponds nominally to “доброволець” (volunteer) [Ibid.]. By contrast, the variant “коаліція рішучих” (coalition of the determined) attempts to render “willing” as readiness to act, adding a sense of determination does not present in the original. In English, “willing” denotes readiness or voluntary agreement, without implying resoluteness [McIntosh, 2026], while the predominant senses of the Ukrainian word “рішучий” (determined) are “сміливий, непохитний у своїх рішеннях, діях, вчинках; дуже наполегливий, сильний, енергійний, завзятий” (brave, resolute in one’s decisions, actions, and deeds; very persistent, strong, energetic, and determined) [Bilodid, 2024].

Thus, while “коаліція рішучих” (coalition of the determined) sounds stronger stylistically, it is not a precise equivalent of “coalition of the willing” going beyond its meaning and foregrounding agency and volition only subtly implied in English. Moreover, media outlets appear to select one variant over the other strategically: “коаліція охочих” (coalition of the willing) is often used to highlight voluntary support and international solidarity, while “коаліція рішучих” (coalition of the determined) emphasizes the coalition’s decisiveness, uplifting national morale and underscoring the practical significance of the support provided.

In both cases, the strategy of reviving stylistic potential was employed, allowing the latent expressive or evaluative power of the source-language phrase to be activated in the target text. In the first variant, the stylistic register was shifted to something that resonates more directly with people, while in the other, the emotional nuance was modified to foreground determination or resolve. Importantly, the anonymity of institutional references is maintained, with stylistic and emotional resonance prioritized over formal designations.

Within a framework of conceptual metaphor theory [Lakoff, Johnson, 2003], the expression “coalition of the willing” is grounded in several interrelated conceptual metaphors. The noun “coalition” reflects the ontological metaphor POLITICAL ALLIANCE IS ENTITY, implying international cooperation as a collective unit. The adjective “willing” activates a low-intensity willingness schema, in which participants are construed as receptive or open to engagement but not necessarily as initiating action.

In Ukrainian, the variant “коаліція охочих” (coalition of the willing) closely mirrors this low-intensity construal, emphasizing voluntary participation. By contrast, “коаліція рішучих” (coalition of the determined) evokes a high-agency action-readiness schema, profiling actors as self-driven, goal-directed, and proactively committed. This conceptual remapping means that translation choices do not merely substitute lexical items but reconfigure the reader’s mental model of the actors involved, altering perceived motivation, responsibility, and the degree of intentional force behind the coalition’s actions. As a result, translated terms may become focal points for internal political discussion, as seen in the Ukrainian contrast between “коаліція охочих” and “коаліція рішучих” [Hetmanchuk, 2025]. The interplay between the stylistic nuances of these two Ukrainian equivalents of “coalition of the willing” becomes a platform for the emergence of new domestic narratives. This is evident in the media headline:

Час казати про свої дії: політолог пояснив, як ‘коаліції охочих’ стати ‘коаліцією рішучих’.

(Time to speak about your actions: political scientist explained how ‘coalition of the willing’ can become ‘coalition of the determined’) [Hrabovska, 2025].

In this formulation, the shift is not merely descriptive but narrative-forming with the structure “‘how ‘coalition of the willing’ can become ‘coalition of the determined’” shaping a trajectory of transformation: from passive readiness to active determination. It introduces a storyline of escalation, heightened commitment, and increased expectations placed on political actors. Stylistic play with these variants legitimizes “рішучих” (the determined) as a rhetorically stronger alternative, even though it departs from the meaning of the original English phrase. In doing so, the media discourse demonstrates how translation choices can activate new evaluative frames and discursive strategies within Ukrainian political commentary.

However, the simultaneous use of both variants can also lead to translation errors when the flow of languages is reversed. For example, a Ukrainian article referring to a “коаліція рішучих” may be translated into English as “coalition of the determined”, even though the original English term was “coalition of the willing.” An actual case is seen in headlines such as

France is leading troops in the ‘coalition of the determined.’ How Macron is mastering a new role in helping Ukraine [Sidorenko, 2024].

Here, the nuanced difference between “willing” and “determined” is lost, and the translation inadvertently alters the intended meaning of the phrase. This example highlights how translation errors can spread across media, subtly reshaping political narratives and public perception. While “рішучих” (the determined) may function effectively within Ukrainian discourse, its back translation into English demonstrates the risk of semantic drift, showing that even small shifts in word choice can carry ideological and rhetorical consequences.

Drawing on the analysis above, we propose several Ukrainian equivalents to “coalition of the willing”: *коаліція активістів* (coalition of activists), *коаліція добровольців* (coalition of volunteers), *коаліція доброї волі* (coalition of good will), *коаліція одностудців* (coalition of the like-minded people), each highlighting specific semantic and stylistic nuances. “Коаліція доброї волі” (coalition of good will) appears particularly well suited for use in the field of international relations, as it preserves the stylistic and rhetorical potential of the English “coalition of the willing” while introducing a more explicitly value-oriented semantic layer. Moreover, this equivalent is attested in official Ukrainian practice, having been used in the authorized translation of the Agreement on the Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe [Rada, 2026]. At the same time, alternative variants such as “коаліція одностудців” (coalition of like-minded people) or “коаліція добровольців” (coalition of volunteers) may be preferable in analytical or journalistic contexts, as they foreground interpersonal affinity or voluntariness and thus introduce a more subjective, emotive layer that lacks the degree of formality and institutional neutrality typically required in official or legal contexts.

In conclusion, the Ukrainian translations of “coalition of the willing” demonstrate that the same concept can be rendered in multiple ways, with each choice carrying distinct semantic, cognitive, and ideological implications. Variants such as “коаліція охочих” (coalition of the willing) and “коаліція рішучих” (coalition of the determined) not only reflect differing degrees of agency and commitment but also serve as instruments for rhetorical framing, narrative construction, and evaluative emphasis. By selecting either “рішучих” (the determined) or “охочих” (the willing), translators activate the stylistic potential of the source phrase, shaping tone, highlighting particular facets of voluntariness or determination, and guiding readers’ interpretation of the coalition’s character and intent. At the same time, the variant “коаліція доброї волі” (coalition of good will) demonstrates how this stylistic potential can be harnessed to emphasize institutional characteristics rather than individual motivation. It maintains the rhetorical and evaluative charge of the original while providing an appropriate level of formality and neutrality, making it especially suitable for official, legal, or diplomatic contexts.

Translation “Boots on the ground”

Originally rooted in military discourse, the expression “boots on the ground” has gained widespread usage in media, political commentary, and public discourse, particularly in relation to the war in Ukraine. Despite its frequent use, the phrase is regarded in English as “a bog-standard cliché” [Phillips, 2014], denoting “soldiers present somewhere taking military action, or prepared to take military action” [Mayor, 2026]. Its meaning extends beyond mere presence, emphasizing the significance of “armed individual human beings on the ground” [Safire, 2008] and thereby conveying direct engagement and tangible involvement in a conflict, while underscoring urgency, accountability, and the concrete realities of warfare. Nevertheless, it can retain stylistic and rhetorical potential when activated in a contextually salient discourse. For instance, “*Missiles in the sea, drones in the air, but no boots on the ground*” [Norton-Taylor, 2013]. In this example, the expression gains rhetorical weight through parallel constructions and enumeration that make it more memorable. In this way, the collocation transcends its clichéd status and acquires a distinct evaluative colouring, reinforcing its persuasive impact within political discourse.

The translation of “boots on the ground” poses significant challenges, as the word “boot” carries strong culture-bound associations that may not be readily transferable across languages. For example, it conveys negative connotations, suggesting something humiliating or unclean, in Islamic cultures [Phillips, 2014]. In the following discussion, we critically examine the strategies employed to address these challenges, balancing literal fidelity and conceptual equivalence in Ukrainian political journalism and institutional communication. Particular attention is given to cases in which insufficient consideration of culture-specific associations has resulted in mistranslations or shifts in interpretive meaning, as exemplified by the following case:

Чоботи солдатів НАТО та аналог Статті 5: про які гарантії безпеки говорять у Європі. “Чоботи на землі”, “стратегія дикобраза” та європейська сестра Статті 5 – які гарантії обговорюють для України

(NATO Boots on the Ground and an Article 5 Equivalent: What Security Guarantees Are Being Discussed in Europe. “Boots on the ground,” the “porcupine strategy,” and a European counterpart to Article 5—the security guarantees under discussion for Ukraine) [Holovan, 2025].

The Ukrainian headline and its subheadline exemplify the complex translation challenges posed by culturally loaded lexical and figurative expressions in political journalism. Notably, the expressions “чоботи” (boots) and “стратегія дикобраза” (porcupine strategy) are calques or literal translations from English, which creates particular difficulties for Ukrainian linguistic consciousness. By contrast, “європейська сестра Статті 5” (a European counterpart to Article 5) is a fresh metaphor describing institutional kinship and relational proximity to NATO’s Article 5. The author’s use of a range of stylistic devices that remain opaque to Ukrainian linguistic consciousness disrupts the semantic coherence of the article. Rather than clarifying the intended argument, which is a typical function for metaphors and metonymies in journalistic texts, these devices instead obscure it. Furthermore, through ascribing stylistic value to the phrase “чоботи на землі” (boots on the ground) the author changes its original meaning, imbuing it with evaluative connotations absent in its English equivalent and thereby illustrating how translation can shape rhetorical and affective meaning.

Another example illustrates a divergence in the conceptualization of the expression “boots on the ground” within Anglophone and Ukrainian linguistic consciousness. In the English headline:

Put US Boots in Ukraine to Defend a UN-Approved Security Zone. It worked in Syria [Jeffrey, 2022b]

the word “boots” functions as a conventional metonymy referring to the presence of military personnel. As a highly entrenched unit in contemporary political and media discourse, it readily evokes the idea of deploying foreign troops without requiring additional contextual specification. By contrast, a literal Ukrainian rendering:

Поставити чоботи на землю: США має долучитись до створення зони безпеки в Україні
(Put boots on the ground: the US must join the creation of a security zone in Ukraine) [Jeffrey, 2022a]

disrupts this metonymic mapping and generates interpretive ambiguity. In the absence of prior familiarity with the English idiom, a Ukrainian reader may fail to activate the intended frame of military deployment, instead construing the phrase compositionally and thus questioning why “boots” are being placed on the ground. This asymmetry demonstrates how conventionalized metonymy, while transparent within one linguoculture, may lose its semantic meaning in cross-linguistic transfer, thereby necessitating adaptive rather than literal translation strategies.

At the same time, the word “чобіт” (a boot) bears associative and figurative links in the Ukrainian language, which are recorded both in dictionaries and natural language use. As attested in the *Dictionary of Contemporary Ukrainian* [Bilodid, 2024], “чобіт” (boot) displays a rich polysemy that extends beyond its primary denotative meaning of footwear. A systematic lexicographic examination of the entry, combined with componential analysis and the identification of phraseologically bound meanings, reveals a network of figurative extensions entrenched in Ukrainian cultural frameworks.

A salient group of expressions links “чоботи” (boots) with negative intellectual or moral judgement. The idiom “дурний, як чобіт” (stupid as a boot) depicts a person as extremely ignorant, using “чобіт” (boot) metonymically as an object devoid of understanding. English lacks a comparable metaphor, so functional equivalents such as “as dumb as a rock” are preferable in translation. Another cluster associates “чоботи” (boots) with subservience and power. For instance, “лизати чоботи” (to lick someone’s boots) denotes sycophancy, while “під чоботом чийм бути” (to be under someone’s boot) expresses oppression or total subjugation, evoking hierarchical and often militaristic imagery. The idiom “з чобітьми в душу (лізти) кому” (to climb into someone’s soul with boots on) conveys rude intrusion into one’s private or emotional sphere, with vivid imagery of violation. English lacks an equally strong metaphor, often requiring descriptive translation. Finally, “чоботи каші просять” signals poverty through ironic metonymy, imagining boots “asking for porridge” due to material deprivation.

Thus, the use of “чоботи” (boots), as evidenced in dictionary entries, evokes associations with ignorance, servility, oppression, intrusiveness, and poverty, rather than establishing a connection to the abstract notion of deterrence through the presence of soldiers. Furthermore, the negative associations recorded in dictionaries are reinforced in contemporary Ukrainian speech, which is reflected in both media coverage and official communications. The following examples illustrate this point:

І немає ніяких перемовних столів до того часу, поки чобіт окупанта на нашій землі
(And there are no negotiation tables until the boot of the occupier is on our land.) [Solomko, 2023].

До того, як брудний чобіт російського окупанта ступив на запорізьку землю, Мелітополь був спокійним, затишним і таким рідним для своїх мешканців українським містом. Його вулиці завжди були сповнені життя

(Before the dirty boot of the Russian occupier stepped on Zaporizhzhia land, Melitopol was a calm, cosy, and so familiar Ukrainian city for its residents. Its streets were always full of life) [Sender, 2025].

In both examples, the word “чобіт” (boot) is explicitly linked to the enemy and oppression, reinforcing a strong negative connotation. In the first example, the boot symbolizes the physical presence of the enemy, representing force, coercion, and the threat of enslavement. The phrase suggests that no dialogue is possible under occupation, emphasizing the boot as a marker of oppression and domination.

In the second example, “чобіт” (boot) is further characterized as “dirty,” enhancing its negative connotation and reinforcing the image of an intrusive, tainting, and violent force disrupting everyday life. Here, “чобіт” (boot) serves not only as a symbol of occupation but also as an agent that turns the city’s tranquil and stable life into fear and hardship. Thus, contemporary Ukrainian news media and social media platforms enhance the negative associations of “чобіт” (boot) recorded in dictionaries, employing it as a powerful metonymy for occupation and aggression.

Moreover, in Ukrainian culture, “чобіт” (boot) is universally understood as a symbol of violence and domination. This semiotic significance is vividly illustrated in a museum exhibition in Kyiv, where the boots of Russian occupiers form a red star, evoking the gloomy legacy of the Soviet past while simultaneously alluding to Russia’s ongoing aggression, thereby linking historical and contemporary forms of subjugation:

Нас зустрічає червона зірка, зроблена з чобіт російських окупантів. ‘Чобіт окупанта - це знайомий усім і зрозумілий символ агресії та насильства для будь-якого народу, - каже нам гендиректор. - Це перетин не тільки державних кордонів, а й перетин кордонів людяності та моралі’. За авторським задумом, ці чоботи окупантів повернули назад за кордон - всередину червоної зірки, як примари радянського минулого

(A red star made of the boots of Russian occupiers welcomes visitors. ‘The occupier’s boot is a familiar and universally understood symbol of aggression and violence for any nation,’ the Director General tells us. ‘It signifies not only the crossing of state borders, but also the transgression of the boundaries of humanity and morality.’ According to the author’s concept, these occupiers’ boots have been sent back across the border—inside the red star—like phantoms of the Soviet past) [Rylov, 2024].

In view of this, a word-for-word translation of the phrase “American boots on the ground” provided in the following example illustrates the potential for a dramatic shift in connotation:

Якщо США дійсно обіцяли Україні гарантії безпеки за зразком статті 5 НАТО - це означає, в ідеалі, відправлення американських військових до України в разі повторення російської агресії. Проте з Вашингтона лунають офіційні й неофіційні заяви, що чобіт американського солдата не ступить на українську землю

(If the United States really promised Ukraine security guarantees modelled on NATO’s Article 5, this would ideally mean deploying American troops to Ukraine in the event of renewed Russian aggression. However, official and unofficial statements from Washington indicate that the boot of an American soldier will not step onto Ukrainian soil) [Kalnyk, 2025].

In English, the expression typically conveys a positive sense: the presence of the United States army as a guarantor of Ukraine’s security. In Ukrainian, however, the translation “чобіт американського солдата” (boot of an American soldier) evokes associations of violence and occupation, rooted in historical experience of foreign military domination. In this context, what is intended as reassurance is potentially interpreted as a symbol of coercion, highlighting how linguistic and cultural frameworks shape the reception of military figurative language.

This transformation in interpretation, from a positive signal of security to a symbol of domination, can be fruitfully examined through the lens of cognitive stylistics, by considering the interaction between the linguistic form and metonymic mapping. From a cognitive perspective [Radden, Kövesces, 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza, 2021], the English metonymic expression “boots on the ground” ostensibly relies on a PART-WHOLE mapping (BOOTS FOR SOLDIERS = MILITARY PRESENCE = SECURITY GUARANTEES). However, within Ukrainian linguistic consciousness this mapping is not conventionalized relying on a different conceptual scheme: BOOTS FOR INVADERS = OCCUPATION = SECURITY THREAT. This example demonstrates how translation calques may inadvertently transfer additional meanings, altering the message, whereas conventional military terminology ensures clarity and functional accuracy in the target text.

Taken together, these examples show that even seemingly transparent lexical items require careful translation. Translators must balance semantic accuracy with discursive appropriateness, as literal calques can introduce unintended meanings or evaluative overtones. A clear example is “boots on the ground”: while neutral in English, a literal Ukrainian rendering “чоботи на землі” sounds coarse or ironic due to the negative connotations of “чоботи” (boots). Instead, functional equivalents such as “наземний особовий склад” (ground personnel), “жива сила” (military manpower), “військовий контингент” (military contingent), “сухопутні війська” (land forces) are preferable, avoiding unintended evaluative colouring. Crucially, the choice of translation depends not only on linguistic equivalence but also on the communicative and political context, since the connotations of military language are strongly shaped by historical experience, cultural perception, and the current geopolitical environment. For example, in the context of the war in Ukraine, possible translation equivalents of “boots on the ground” also include “міжнародні миротворчі війська” (international peacekeeping forces), “багатонаціональні військові сили” (multinational military forces), and “присутність іноземних військ” (presence of foreign troops), reflecting both the current security situation in Ukraine and the plans for the deployment of multinational military contingent following the cessation of hostilities. However, when referring to American military activities in settings such as Venezuela or Iran, it may be appropriate to translate the phrase as “наземна операція” (a ground operation) to emphasize direct intervention.

The proposed translation variants are based on explicitation as a translation technique [Becher, 2011, pp. 17–18], as they make implicit elements of the source expression more explicit by specifying the nature, composition, and function of the deployed forces, avoiding unintended evaluative colouring. By contrast, a literal rendering of “boots on the ground” preserves the original image but may create cultural dissonance, particularly in contexts where the use of the direct equivalent “чоботи” (boots) triggers associations of violence, domination, or occupation.

Together, the suggested examples show how a weakly marked metonymy in the source text can become a salient rhetorical device in translation. By adding stylistic value absent in the original, the translator acts as a co-creator of meaning, reshaping the political message for a new cultural context. In cases such as “*boots on the ground*,” however, such transformations may introduce unintended or negative connotations, distorting the message. This illustrates how translating figurative language depends on balancing idiomatic equivalence, functional precision, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of the broader political context.

Perceptions of “the shield of Europe” in Ukraine and beyond

The metaphor “the shield of Europe” has become salient in contemporary political communication pertaining to relations between the European Union and Ukraine. As an institutional metaphor, not only does it convey a symbolic meaning, but it also reflects tangible priorities in the foreign and domestic policies of both sides. Although this metaphor circulates widely in both Ukrainian and European political narratives, its interpretation differs markedly across these contexts, generating distinct associations and entailments in each case.

In Ukraine, the metaphor “*щит Європи*” (the shield of Europe) functions as an institutional metaphor as it conveys strategic aspirations of the Ukrainian government and emphasizes the country’s trajectory towards the European Union. The metaphor performs two main functions. On the one hand, it serves to represent Ukraine in the international arena as a bulwark safeguarding Europe against external threats, creating associations with protection, endurance, and sacrifice, while entailing expectations of recognition and support from European partners. On the other hand, within domestic narratives, it is employed to raise public morale and to articulate Ukraine’s aspirational alignment with the European project, activating associations with belonging, resilience, and shared values. Such framing is widely used by Ukrainian public agencies and high-ranking politicians, and in line with Lakoff’s insight [2014, p. 17] that “the more it is activated, the stronger it gets,” its recurrent use cognitively prepares the public to perceive and interpret the metaphor as a self-evident framework for understanding Ukraine’s role both as a strategic bulwark for Europe and as an integral part of the European project. For instance, the headline

Україна – щит Європи та шлях до миру і нової системи безпеки
(Ukraine is the Shield of Europe and the Path to Peace and a New Security System) [Skrypnyk, 2024]

maps the abstract domain of state responsibility onto the concrete, embodied image of a shield, highlighting Ukraine’s frontline defensive role. This mapping not only shifts responsibility onto Ukraine as the protector but also shapes an evaluation of the state’s role, associating it with heroism, resilience and self-sacrifice.

At the same time, this metaphor is employed in Ukrainian journalistic discourse to trigger public discussions on Ukraine’s future in the EU and to raise public awareness of European values:

Якщо Україна є щитом для мирної Європи, чи мають право європейці вимагати, щоб цей щит був відполірований до дзеркального блиску?

(If Ukraine is a shield for a peaceful Europe, do Europeans have the right to demand that this shield be polished to perfection?) [Dubynianskyi, 2025].

Used in this context, the metaphor “*Україна – щит Європи*” (Ukraine is a shield of Europe) acquires additional meanings. Besides conveying the idea of Ukraine as Europe’s bulwark, it foregrounds the contrast between Ukraine as a site for struggle and Europe as a secure and peaceful place, while also subtly alluding to internal Ukrainian challenges, including corruption and the ongoing struggle to safeguard statehood amid prolonged military aggression. The notion of the “shield” is thus imbued with the meaning of a boundary or protective barrier, positioning Ukraine as a liminal space between conflict and stability, the Soviet legacy and European aspirations. The following example highlights the efforts to combine security functions with the pursuit of national and European identity:

Отже, нам залишається балансувати між “щитом Європи” та “частиною Європи”. Шукати точки дотику між двома цивілізаційними проектами. Намагатися поєднати дві рольові моделі. Якось згладжувати неминучі протиріччя. І при цьому вціліти під тиском Кремля, який не бачить Україну ні частиною Європи, ні її щитом

(Thus, we are left to balance between the “shield of Europe” and “part of Europe.” To seek points of convergence between the two civilizational projects. To attempt to reconcile the two role models. To somehow mitigate the inevitable contradictions. And, at the same time, to survive under the pressure of the Kremlin, which recognizes Ukraine as neither part of Europe nor its shield.) [Dubynianskyi, 2025].

The passage exemplifies the tensions inherent in Ukrainian political discourse, reflecting the pressures placed on Ukraine by external threats and internal expectations. In this context, the metaphor “щит Європи” (the shield of Europe) functions as an explanatory device, addressing the Ukrainian audience and prompting reflection on the country’s European future, while simultaneously communicating strategic and moral responsibility.

Thus, in Ukrainian political discourse, “щит Європи” (the shield of Europe) functions as a salient institutional metaphor to frame and articulate Ukraine’s dual role as both a defensive bulwark for Europe and a prospective member of the European community. It foregrounds Ukraine’s role as a guardian of European values and security, underlining its strategic significance. Ukraine is presented as an active agent, while Europe is framed either as a passive recipient of protection, benefiting from Ukraine’s efforts without direct involvement, or as a supervisory actor, assessing Ukraine’s readiness for integration into the European Union. The metaphor carries strong emotional associations with self-sacrifice, heroism, and endurance. At the same time, it serves as a cognitive tool for framing public understanding of Ukraine’s national and European identity, its geopolitical mission, and the necessity of maintaining statehood amid external aggression.

In the European context, the “shield metaphor” is actively employed by EU institutions and bodies to refer to official European policies aimed at ensuring the European security:

On 13 November 2025, the European Commission adopted its European Democracy Shield, the first comprehensive, flagship strategy for strengthening democratic resilience within the bloc, with a key focus on free and independent media, fighting disinformation and creating healthier information ecosystems to protect European values and security [Lamm, 2025].

In this framing, the metaphor evokes security and resistance, positioning Europe simultaneously as the active agent, while the role of Ukraine is comparatively marginalized. Unlike in Ukrainian discourse, the metaphor here has no links with heroism or moral sacrifice, being functional and formalized, foregrounding determination, commitment to core European Union values, and institutional unity. The agency of Europe is further emphasized in the following example:

The European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) was proposed by former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in 2022 to counter Russian ballistic missiles, such as the Iskanders. A second objective is to integrate all alliance members into the NATO Integrated Air Defense System, ensuring that each state is prepared to address emerging challenges [Mcbride, 2025].

In this passage, Europe is presented as a proactive and self-reliant actor, capable of planning and implementing measures to ensure the European security. By emphasizing Europe’s capacity to protect itself, the metaphor obscures the role of external forces, including Ukraine, framing security as a collective endeavour rather than as dependent on the agency or sacrifices of a single state. The impersonal and functional character of the shield metaphor in the examples above stands in stark contrast to its heroic and ethically charged connotations in Ukrainian narratives.

Furthermore, the shield metaphor may acquire evaluative connotations, as in: “*From shield to sword: Europe’s offensive strategy for the hybrid age*” [Brown et al., 2026]. In this framing, the metaphor acquires the meaning of decisiveness and resolve, reinforcing the role of Europe as an autonomous actor. The agency of external actors is still downplayed, highlighting the contrast with Ukrainian narratives.

In sum, in European contexts the shield metaphor functions as an impersonal and formal device to frame the EU institutions as proactive agents capable of defending European security and values. It emphasizes Europe's readiness to confront emerging political and military threats, while relegating the role of external forces, including Ukraine, to the background. Thus, the shield metaphor, which at first glance appears equivalent in both languages, entails divergent interpretations in Ukrainian and European contexts. This difference is largely accounted for by a *reference shift*: in Ukrainian discourse, the metaphor foregrounds Ukraine as a heroic defender of European values, underlining its agency and sacrifice, whereas in European narratives, the referent shifts toward Europe as a self-reliant guardian of its own security. At the same time, since the shield metaphor is frequently employed in Ukraine and across Europe, the public becomes accustomed to interpreting it within the familiar cognitive frameworks, which poses additional challenges for political translation. From a translation perspective, a literal rendering of "щит Європи" (the shield of Europe) into English may preserve the lexical meaning but misalign the referential emphasis: in the target language discourse, the shield metaphor may be read as European rather than Ukrainian, illustrating a reference shift where the agent changes across cultural contexts. Several strategies can be employed to navigate these challenges.

Although literal translation preserves the original wording, as in rendering "щит Європи" directly as "the shield of Europe," it may lead to misunderstanding shifting the perceived agency to Europe rather than Ukraine. Adaptation, on the contrary, allows the translator to adjust the referent to align with the target audience's expectations. For example, translating the phrase as "Ukraine, the shield of Europe," explicitly foregrounds Ukraine's role. Explicitation involves adding elucidating details to make the intended referent clear, such as "Ukraine, acting as the shield defending European values." Finally, footnoting or commentary can provide contextual explanations, especially in scholarly or journalistic texts, highlighting the connotative layers of the metaphor and clarifying the historical or political background shaping its interpretation.

Overall, the shield metaphor illustrates, on the hand, how conceptual metaphors shape public perception of political initiatives and, on the other hand, how certain institutional metaphors that appear to be identical across different linguocultures may acquire divergent meanings due to reference shifts. Translation, therefore, requires a balance between metaphorical meaning, cultural resonance, and political context. Translators must take into account these layers, deciding whether to preserve the original referent, adapt it for the target audience, or use explanatory strategies to uphold pragmatic equivalence and ideological consistency.

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that political translation is not a neutral linguistic activity but a complex, ideologically and cognitively mediated practice. Translators function as active agents, shaping meaning, framing narratives, and influencing how political realities are perceived across languages and cultures. The analysis of politically salient expressions ("*coalition of the willing*," "*boots on the ground*," and "*the shield of Europe*") illustrates how translation choices interact with stylistic, cultural, and political dimensions.

The expression "coalition of the willing" underscores the intricate interplay of ideology and translation. While generally stylistically neutral in English, the expression can acquire evaluative or persuasive overtones in certain contexts, signalling voluntary alignment with shared political goals or, alternatively, implying exclusion and moral judgment. Translators must consider these nuances, deciding whether to preserve literal equivalence or reshape stylistic meaning through reviving or amplifying stylistic potential that is latent in the source text. In Ukraine, the choice of equivalent expressions is often strictly dependent on the political agenda, reflecting the translator's or publisher's attitude.

The English idiom "boots on the ground", although technically neutral in English, carries a range of cultural and evaluative connotations in Ukrainian. The lexeme "чоботи" (boots) evokes associations with ignorance, servitude, intrusion, and poverty, making literal translations prone to unintended meanings or negative colouring. Functional equivalents such as "сухопутні сили" (land forces), "військовий контингент" (military contingent), preserve the referential meaning of troop deployment while avoiding misinterpretation. Translation variants based on explicitation, including "міжнародні миротворчі війська" (international peacekeeping forces), "багатонаціональні

військові сили” (multinational military forces), and “присутність іноземних військ” (presence of foreign troops), reflect internal political narratives in Ukraine and demonstrate how translation choices may align with broader discursive and geopolitical frameworks. At the same time, variants that retain idiomatic features, such as “чоботи на землі” (boots on the ground) demonstrate how translators can ascribe stylistic value, transforming a conventional military term into a rhetorically potent device, yet also highlight the challenges of cultural differences.

Similarly, the metaphor “the shield of Europe” that functions as an institutional metaphor representing public policies in both Ukrainian and European discourse, reveals divergent conceptualizations in each. In Ukrainian narratives, the metaphor positions Ukraine as an active, frontline defender, emphasizing agency, sacrifice, and strategic significance. European sources, by contrast, foreground continental collective security, often marginalizing Ukraine’s agency. Translation thus involves considering referential shifts, ensuring that the attribution of responsibility and evaluative emphasis aligns with the target audience’s conceptual and cultural framework.

These cases collectively suggest several key insights for the study of political translation:

– Translation serves as a form of ideological mediation, especially during conflicts, with translators actively shaping how political discourse represents the conflicting parties.

– Since political figurative expressions are embedded in culturally specific conceptual frameworks, efficient translation requires sensitivity to these contexts to prevent misrepresentation or unintended connotations.

– Translators must balance semantic fidelity, stylistic effect, and discursive appropriateness, effectively employing strategies such as reviving latent stylistic potential, attributing additional stylistic value, and shifting reference to adapt meaning for target audiences while preserving cultural and ideological coherence.

Overall, political translation emerges as a stylistically and ideologically bound activity. The cases of “boots on the ground,” “the shield of Europe,” and “coalition of the willing” demonstrate that even ostensibly transparent expressions involve a complex approach, where lexical choice, stylistic strategy, and cultural awareness converge to influence interpretation and translation. These findings underscore the importance of integrating linguistic, cognitive, and socio-political considerations when analysing translation in globalized digital contexts.

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Sense and Sensibility in Political Translation: A Choice Between Linguistic Accuracy and Stylistic Ambiguity

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32342/anuJPh.2026.31.21>

Key words: *media and official political discourse in English and Ukrainian, intercultural communication, translation, translation strategies, agency of translation, stylistics of translation, political idioms and figurative expressions, metaphor, metonymy, cognitive semantics, discourse analysis.*

The article centres on the stylistic variants of translation of three politically salient expressions, namely “coalition of the willing,” “boots on the ground,” and “the shield of Europe,” which are widely used in news media, social networks, and official political statements in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Besides being embedded in a sensitive sociopolitical environment, these terms also encode complex denotative, connotative, and culturally specific meanings, thus posing translation challenges.

The aim of the article is to identify the main types of stylistic transformations in political translation and to examine their impact on the reconfiguration of cognitive models for representation and interpretation of political reality within the source and target linguocultures. To achieve the defined aim, the study addresses the following *research objectives*: to identify the denotative and connotative features of the selected political figurative expressions; to compare the English expressions with their Ukrainian equivalents in relevant contexts; to analyse translation transformations at both linguistic and cognitive levels that lead to semantic or ideological shifts and potential translation errors; and to propose translation variants based on the analytical findings of the study.

Methodologically, the research draws on an agency-oriented approach, cognitive stylistics, and discourse analysis. The expressions under study are analysed in both English and Ukrainian using dictionaries, scholarly monographs, and examples from online news outlets, social media accounts of political figures, and official governmental and non-governmental websites. Semantic and associative analyses trace their denotative and connotative meanings, historical development, and cultural associations, while stylistic and cognitive analyses examine shifts in tone, evaluative force, and the mental representations activated through translation. Discourse analysis transcends linguistic boundaries, situating the expressions within broader contexts and highlighting how ideological priorities influence lexical choices and framing.

Beyond descriptive analysis, the authors propose and systematically evaluate alternative Ukrainian translation variants for the expressions under study, explicitly commenting on the balance between semantic fidelity, stylistic naturalness, and evaluative impact. By juxtaposing multiple translation solutions, the study demonstrates how theoretical insights into cognition, style, and discourse can explain practical translation decisions.

The study draws on the vision of translation adequacy as operating on both linguistic and cognitive planes. It encompasses not only formal, semantic, and pragmatic alignment between source and target texts, but also the cognitive processes underlying meaning interpretation and reconstruction in translation. Thus,

translation adequacy and stylistic equivalence reflect how effectively translators exercise cognitive and interpretive agency to produce socioculturally and ideologically appropriate texts.

This framework is further complemented through the identification of three types of stylistic transformations applied to translating conventional political metaphors and metonymies: reviving stylistic potential, ascribing additional stylistic value, and shifting referential focus. Common translation variants of “coalition of the willing”, e.g., “*коаліція охочих*” and “*коаліція рішучих*,” illustrate how latent stylistic potential can be activated through lexical options that enhance nuance, tone, and evaluative force in the target language. Similarly, “boots on the ground,” a trite metonymy in English denoting military presence, acquires negative or evaluative overtones when calqued as the image-bearing expression “*чоботи на землі*” in Ukrainian, prompting context-sensitive alternatives such as, “*наземна операція*” (a ground operation, “*військовий контингент*” (military contingent), or “*присутність іноземних військ*” (presence of foreign troops). The metaphor “*the shield of Europe*” likewise requires careful modulation, as it undergoes a reference shift through translation: from collective protection in European discourse to an emphasis on Ukraine’s defensive agency in Ukrainian contexts.

The findings show that even seemingly transparent political catchphrases are sites of subtle interpretive work, where translators exercise cognitive, stylistic, and ideological agency. Translation thus emerges not as a mechanical transfer of meaning but as active modification of political discourse, shaping mental models, audience perception, and narrative framing, and underscoring the translator’s role as both mediator and co-creator of political meaning.

Дата надходження до редакції / Submitted: 17.10.2025

Дата прийняття до публікації / Accepted: 03.02.2026

Дата публікації / Published: 04.06.2026