

Culture in Transit: from Russophone Writing to Ukrainian Language and Back

The full-scale war in Ukraine, which began in 2022, has triggered a dramatic transformation not only in the everyday lives of its citizens but also in their cultural and linguistic identities. The research project *Culture in Transit: from Russophone Writing to Ukrainian Language and Back* focuses on the phenomenon of contemporary Ukrainian literature written in Russian—a body of work currently undergoing profound transformations. The goal of the project is to understand how Russophone writers in Ukraine respond to the war through changes in language, themes, and their cultural positioning.

The project is grounded in the concept of culture in transit—a culture in motion, shaped by displacement, political rupture, and identity redefinition. It involves the analysis of literary works and interviews with authors who, after 2022, shifted from Russian to Ukrainian, suspended their literary activity, or are attempting to operate in both linguistic spheres simultaneously. The research will be conducted in Poland, Germany, France, and other countries where refugee writers currently reside.

The project combines postcolonial theory with literary and discourse analysis. The collected texts and interviews will undergo in-depth examination to understand how authors are redefining their identities and their relationship to the Russian language—a language that for many was once a tool of expression but is now often associated with violence and domination. Special attention will be paid to poetry published on social media, émigré publishing houses, and the phenomenon of “silence” as an act of resistance.

The motivation for undertaking this topic stems from a gap in existing research on Ukrainian literature written in Russian. While many authors from Odesa, Kharkiv, or Donbas identified strongly as Ukrainian, they wrote in Russian, forming part of a complex and often marginalized cultural phenomenon. This project aims not only to document this phenomenon but also to situate it within a broader post-imperial and decolonial context.

The project posits that Russophone writers from Ukraine, in reacting to the war and the forced shift in cultural context, adopt one of three linguistic strategies. The first is a full transition to Ukrainian as a conscious act of resistance against imperial heritage and a declaration of belonging to a new civic community. The second strategy is a “retreat into silence”—abandoning literary work due to an internal identity crisis. The third is navigating between languages: bilingualism, professional translation, self-translation, and code-switching, allowing authors to preserve the complexity of their experiences. The project’s hypothesis is that choosing one of these paths depends not only on ideological beliefs but also on migratory context, social pressures, and access to cultural institutions and the publishing market.

The research will use modern methods that combine literary analysis with qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian writers who remain in the country or have gone into exile will play a central role. These conversations will help reveal personal decisions about language, identity, and creativity during wartime. In addition, consultations will be held with émigré publishers and cultural institutions that shape the circulation and reception of such texts. Simultaneously, archives, blogs, social media, and digital publications will be analyzed to capture new forms of literary presence and self-expression.

The findings will be presented in scholarly articles, a monograph, and at international conferences. The project will contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic changes in Ukrainian culture, highlighting the voices of writers who operate at the crossroads of languages, identities, and geocultures. It also represents a contribution to the broader debate on the role of the Russian language in the post-Soviet territories.