CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH LANGUAGE: THE UKRAINIAN CASE AND THE POTENTIAL OF MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

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This article examines the Ukrainian language as a key instrument of cultural diplomacy in the digital age, particularly in the context of hybrid war, geopolitical transformation, and global media expansion. It addresses the growing importance of language as a vehicle of national identity, symbolic resistance, and soft power projection in times of crisis. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research analyzes how contemporary multimedia platforms, such as the global language-learning app Duolingo, the volunteer-driven Ukrainian online course Ye-Mova, and the ethnographic storytelling project Ukraïner, contribute to the international promotion of the Ukrainian language and cultural narratives. In parallel, the study explores state-led initiatives coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ukrainian Institute, including Ukrainian-language audio guides in major international museums. The findings indicate that digital tools not only facilitate access to the Ukrainian language but also foster intercultural dialogue and global solidarity. However, the article also identifies several limitations, including weak institutional coordination and a lack of long-term impact assessment. By highlighting both the opportunities and challenges of linguistic diplomacy, the study offers insights relevant to scholars of philology, cultural studies, and international communication. It concludes by outlining future research directions in digital diplomacy, educational innovation, and the role of language in global identity formation.

Keywords: *cultural diplomacy, digital platforms, Duolingo, intercultural communication, language policy, Ukrainian language, Ukraïner, Ye-Mova.*

The problem statement. The article is devoted to the underexplored role of the Ukrainian language as an instrument of cultural diplomacy in the context of digital globalization and hybrid

conflict. Language has long functioned as a key component of a nation's soft power, enabling states to influence perceptions and build cultural affinity abroad. Classical examples, such as the *Alliance Française* (est. 1883), illustrate how language promotion may serve as a strategic tool of international engagement and cultural projection. However, the Ukrainian case – shaped by a complex history of linguistic suppression, postcolonial identity formation, and renewed geopolitical confrontation – requires specific scholarly attention.

Since regaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has consistently sought to assert the distinctiveness of its national language as a core element of identity and sovereignty. This process has intensified significantly since 2014 and especially following the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. The Ukrainian language, once marginalized by decades of Russification policies, has now emerged as a symbol of resistance, resilience, and cultural self-assertion. Consequently, its international promotion has become not only a matter of national prestige but also a tactical response to aggression in the informational and cultural spheres.

Despite the growing presence of Ukrainian on global digital platforms and within international cultural institutions, academic literature still lacks a comprehensive analysis of how the language functions as a channel of cultural diplomacy. Specifically, little attention has been paid to the ways in which Ukraine strategically leverages multimedia tools, online education platforms, and state-sponsored initiatives to amplify its cultural visibility and foster international solidarity through language.

This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing Ukrainian linguistic initiatives – what may be termed "language diplomacy" – across various digital domains. I focus on how the Ukrainian language is being used to shape foreign perceptions, facilitate cultural immersion, and engage international audiences in the Ukrainian narrative. In doing so, the research contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions at the intersection of philology, cultural studies, and international communication.

The aim and tasks of the research. The primary goal of this research is to investigate the role of the Ukrainian language as an instrument of cultural diplomacy in the digital era. This objective is achieved through the analysis of contemporary multimedia platforms, educational initiatives, and official state programs aimed at promoting

the Ukrainian language internationally. The study also aims to conceptualize Ukrainian as a vehicle of soft power that contributes to Ukraine's image-building and narrative sovereignty on the global stage.

To achieve this goal, the research sets out the following tasks:

1. To define the strategic importance of the Ukrainian language within the framework of Ukraine's cultural diplomacy and national identity construction.

2. To analyze selected digital platforms (e.g., Duolingo, Ye-Mova, Ukraïner) and assess their effectiveness in promoting the Ukrainian language globally.

3. To examine state-led initiatives and the role of governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ukrainian Institute in shaping international language policy.

4. To identify current challenges and limitations in the coordination of language diplomacy efforts between institutional and grassroots actors.

5. To outline the educational and civic significance of Ukrainian language promotion, especially in higher education settings.

Analysis of current research. Contemporary research increasingly conceptualizes language not merely as a communicative tool but as a strategic resource in international relations and cultural diplomacy. Foundational work by Joseph Nye (2004) on soft power laid the theoretical groundwork for viewing language promotion as an act of influence and prestige. François Chaubet (2015) further elaborated this concept by referring to institutions like the Alliance Française as examples of "language diplomacy" [2].

In the Ukrainian context, several scholars have explored the emergence of cultural diplomacy following the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. Olha Filatova (2021) argues that Ukraine's efforts to internationalize its cultural and linguistic heritage are driven by both defensive needs and aspirations to reposition itself within the European cultural space. She points to the need for more cohesive policy mechanisms and sustainable funding to support long-term diplomatic initiatives [4].

Digital diplomacy has also become a key theme in studies by Ilan Manor (2019) and Bjola & Pamment (2018), who analyze how digital platforms are reshaping the modes of diplomatic communication [1]. Their work has been applied to the Ukrainian case by Morozova et al. (2023), who document how Ukrainian state actors and civil society use

social media and online campaigns to mobilize international support and disseminate Ukrainian narratives [7].

Empirical investigations have explored concrete initiatives. Valeriia Samoilova (2021) examines the Ukrainian-language audio guides in European museums, launched with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the First Lady's office. She finds that such projects serve not only diasporic needs but also enhance the symbolic presence of the Ukrainian language in prestigious cultural venues [8].

Antonina Ivashchuk (2024), focusing on narrative framing, highlights the importance of accurate, emotionally resonant portrayals of Ukrainian identity in international media. She advocates for a shift from monologic nation-branding to participatory cultural storytelling [5].

In the digital humanities domain, researchers such as Kononenko and Petrenko have examined platforms like Ye-Mova and Ukraïner [9; 10]. These are viewed as grassroots tools of cultural diplomacy that contribute to language dissemination and cultural immersion. However, the long-term impact of these tools – especially on learning outcomes and foreign audience retention – remains underexplored.

Presentation of the main material. The relevance of this research lies not only in its geopolitical urgency but also in its educational significance. The findings are particularly meaningful for students of philology, cultural diplomacy, digital humanities, and international relations, as they highlight the potential of language to function as a medium of intercultural dialogue, symbolic resistance, and national visibility. Understanding these dynamics enables future professionals and researchers to better comprehend the practical and theoretical dimensions of linguistic identity in global contexts – especially under conditions of conflict, displacement, and sociocultural transformation.

This research is highly relevant in the contemporary humanitarian and socio-political context, as Ukraine is currently engaged not only in a military conflict but also in an ongoing cultural and informational struggle. The Russian Federation's invasion has directly threatened Ukrainian sovereignty and identity, thereby elevating cultural diplomacy to a position of strategic significance. In response to aggression, Ukraine has intensified its efforts to promote its "unique and melodious" language, emphasizing its distinction from Russian and reinforcing its role as a cornerstone of national heritage.

In this context, language serves not solely as a means of communication, but as a symbolic and ideological domain. Ukrainian is increasingly positioned internationally as a language of resilience and cultural depth – countering longstanding disinformation and foreign narratives that have historically marginalized or misrepresented it. The war has amplified global awareness of Ukrainian culture and created a pressing demand for effective linguistic diplomacy – ranging from official governmental messaging and presidential addresses to grassroots digital initiatives designed to mobilize international support.

Digital media play a central role in this cultural-diplomatic landscape. The modern geopolitical environment is profoundly shaped by technologies that have transformed conventional diplomatic practice. Ukraine's public diplomacy, in particular, has rapidly adapted to real-time communication via social platforms, employing digital channels to foster transparency, refute propaganda, and engage international audiences. In this regard, studying the interplay between language, diplomacy, and digital tools is both timely and necessary. It offers insights into the ways in which nations under duress deploy cultural soft power in digital environments to influence international public opinion and defend their cultural sovereignty.

Understanding this relevance helps to situate the present study within an urgent global context – one defined by hybrid warfare, identity contestation, and the broader struggle for the preservation of humanistic values amid the pressures of globalization.

Beyond its geopolitical dimension, the topic holds substantial educational value, particularly for students in the fields of linguistics, international relations, communication studies, and cultural diplomacy. By examining the mechanisms of Ukraine's linguistic diplomacy in the digital age, students and early-career researchers are offered insight into the real-world application of theoretical constructs encountered in philological and communication curricula.

The case of Ukraine demonstrates how language may function as a soft power asset – enhancing national presence globally, facilitating intercultural dialogue, and challenging hegemonic narratives. These dimensions are particularly relevant to those pursuing careers in diplomacy, international education, and intercultural cooperation, as they underscore the practical significance of linguistic and cultural competence in global affairs.

Moreover, Ukraine's efforts to promote its language under conditions of conflict illustrate critical themes in multilingual societies: language rights, cultural resilience, and the political dimensions of linguistic identity. These considerations are highly applicable to curricula in higher education and can enhance students' capacity for critical engagement with regarding the ethical and sociopolitical stakes of language use and preservation.

Importantly, this research is also valuable in the context of teaching Ukrainian as a foreign or second language to higher education students. It provides methodological and conceptual foundations for educators designing courses that integrate not only linguistic instruction but also cultural and civic education. Emphasizing the role of the Ukrainian language as a vehicle of national memory and cultural diplomacy can foster learner engagement and encourage sustained linguistic immersion. Integrating this content into Ukrainian language education contributes to the broader mission of fostering cultural understanding and international solidarity through language.

Initiatives such as the establishment of Ukrainian Studies programs at foreign universities further reinforce the pedagogical importance of the topic. As Ukrainian policymakers increasingly emphasize the development of such academic partnerships as a form of "knowledge diplomacy", educational institutions themselves become active agents of cultural diplomacy. The involvement of First Lady Olena Zelenska in initiatives such as Ukrainian-language audio guides in global museums and international academic collaboration illustrates how educational outreach is integrated with national diplomatic strategy.

In sum, this research illuminates the role of language in statecraft and cultural transmission, equipping students and scholars alike to better understand its function both as an academic object and as a vehicle of sociopolitical influence.

Recent platform data, such as those published by Duolingo (2023), indicate exponential growth in Ukrainian language acquisition since 2022, yet scholarly analysis of learner motivations and pedagogical efficacy is still limited. This gap underscores the need for integrated research at the intersection of linguistics, media studies, and international communication, – a gap this article aims to address through a synthesis of linguistic, communicative, and cultural perspectives.

The findings of this study confirm that the Ukrainian language has acquired a newly reinforced status as a central component of Ukraine's cultural diplomacy strategy, particularly following the full-scale invasion of 2022. The analysis of selected multimedia platforms – Duolingo, Ye-Mova, and Ukraїner – demonstrates that digital tools not only facilitate access to the language but also cultivate deeper, emotionally grounded engagement with Ukrainian identity and cultural heritage.

Duolingo, for instance, has emerged as a powerful indicator of international solidarity, with the number of Ukrainian learners rising exponentially. Beyond symbolic support, however, the platform serves a strategic communicative function: users become acquainted with the structure, phonetics, and semantics of the Ukrainian language, which often leads to further cultural exploration. These findings confirm and expand upon previous observations by Samoilova (2021) and Ivashchuk (2024) regarding the dual role of language as both a practical skill and a symbolic medium in public diplomacy.

The case of Ye-Mova, a volunteer-driven digital education platform, illustrates how grassroots initiatives can achieve global reach. Its accessible structure, interactivity, and cultural sensitivity contribute to high levels of learner engagement and retention, especially among displaced Ukrainians and international supporters. Nevertheless, the study reveals a persistent gap in institutional support: Ye-Mova remains largely dependent on civil society actors and donor funding. This observation reflects Filatova's (2021) critique of the still-fragile infrastructure of Ukraine's official cultural diplomacy.

Ukraїner, by contrast, exemplifies a multimedia storytelling approach that integrates linguistic exposure with immersive cultural experience. Through high-quality translations, regional diversity, and the inclusion of local voices, the project stands as a leading example of digital cultural diplomacy. Users are not merely passive recipients but become co-participants in Ukraine's narrative construction, especially through subtitled video content and bilingual publications. These results are consistent with Ivashchuk's (2024) call for participatory, polyphonic approaches to national branding in the digital age.

The examination of state-led initiatives – such as the Ukrainian Institute's translation grants and the implementation of Ukrainian-language audio guides in prominent international museums – reveals both symbolic visibility and institutional ambition. However, the

coordination between governmental and non-governmental actors remains inconsistent, and there is a notable absence of systematic evaluation tools to measure the actual impact of these efforts on language acquisition or international public opinion. These shortcomings point to the need for a more integrated strategic framework and robust monitoring mechanisms, as previously emphasized by Manor (2019) and Bjola & Pamment (2018) in broader discussions on digital diplomacy.

Importantly, the findings underscore the educational relevance of Ukrainian language promotion on a global scale. Incorporating language diplomacy themes into higher education curricula – particularly within Ukrainian Studies, philology, and international relations – could significantly enhance students' critical awareness of language as a political, symbolic, and pedagogical force. Furthermore, the development of bilingual or multilingual academic materials that combine linguistic instruction with cultural-political context would provide learners with holistic, engagement-oriented learning experiences.

Conclusion. In summary, the analysis demonstrates that Ukrainian linguistic diplomacy has evolved beyond symbolic affirmation into a realm of pragmatic, digitally enabled cultural action. To ensure sustainability and long-term effectiveness, it will be essential to secure stronger institutional support, encourage pedagogical innovation, and foster interdisciplinary academic collaboration.

This study has examined the Ukrainian language as an emerging instrument of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the digital era shaped by geopolitical instability, hybrid warfare, and the accelerated adoption of media technologies. Through the analysis of platforms such as Duolingo, Ye-Mova, and Ukraïner, as well as state-led initiatives, the research has demonstrated that the Ukrainian language is no longer merely a marker of national identity but has become a strategic asset in Ukraine's global positioning efforts.

The findings reveal that multimedia platforms contribute not only to language acquisition, but also to cultural immersion and narrative alignment. The Ukrainian language functions simultaneously as a communicative tool, a cultural symbol, and a medium of political messaging. This is particularly significant given Ukraine's imperative to differentiate itself from Russian-centric narratives and to reinforce its sovereignty in both tangible and symbolic dimensions. Digital

platforms have emerged as pragmatic venues for language-based engagement, transcending geographic limitations and connecting global audiences to Ukrainian voices, values, and lived experiences.

The study also identifies ongoing challenges: the fragmentation of efforts between governmental and grassroots actors, the underfunding of volunteer-driven initiatives, and the absence of evaluative tools to measure effectiveness. Despite these obstacles, Ukraine's experience reflects a unique convergence of civic innovation, institutional diplomacy, and digital transformation – offering a compelling case study for scholars and practitioners engaged in cultural diplomacy, language policy, and international communication.

The study confirms that the Ukrainian language has evolved into a functional instrument of soft power, shaping international perceptions of Ukraine and fostering symbolic diplomacy, emotional resonance, and intercultural dialogue through digital platforms such as Duolingo, Ye-Mova, and Ukraïner. While grassroots and state-led initiatives complement one another, their long-term integration and sustainability require more coherent strategic coordination. The global promotion of the Ukrainian language also demonstrates considerable educational relevance, particularly within higher education, where it bridges linguistic instruction with civic engagement and global citizenship development.

The prospect of further research. Future research should include quantitative evaluations of language-learning outcomes on digital platforms, comparative studies of language diplomacy in other postcolonial or post-conflict contexts, interdisciplinary investigations into emerging models of language-based diplomacy, pedagogical approaches to incorporating Ukrainian language and culture into international curricula, and impact assessments of how increased Ukrainian-language visibility in cultural institutions influences global public opinion and cross-cultural empathy.

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КУЛЬТУРНА ДИПЛОМАТІЯ ЧЕРЕЗ МОВУ В ЦИФРОВУ ДОБУ: УКРАЇНСЬКА МОДЕЛЬ І ПОТЕНЦІАЛ МУЛЬТИМЕДІЙНИХ РЕСУРСІВ

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У статті досліджується українська мова як ключовий інструмент культурної дипломатії в умовах цифрової доби, зокрема в контексті гібридної війни, геополітичних трансформацій і глобального медіарозширення. Наголошено на зростанні ролі мови як носія національної ідентичності, символічного спротиву та проєкції «м'якої сили» в умовах затяжної кризи. Використовуючи якісний кейс-метод, автор дослідження аналізує, як сучасні мультимедійні платформи (глобальний застосунок для вивчення мов Duolingo, волонтерський онлайн-курс української мови Ye-Mova та етнографічно-документальний проєкт Ukraïner) сприяють міжнародній популяризації української мови, формуванню позитивного образу України та зануренню іноземної аудиторії в український культурний контекст. Також розглянуто державні ініціативи, реалізовані за участі Міністерства закордонних справ України та Українського інституту, зокрема проєкти україномовних аудіогідів у провідних музеях світу. Результати демонструють, що цифрові інструменти ефективно працюють на міжкультурний діалог і глобальну солідарність, хоча досі існують проблеми з координацією між різними суб'єктами культурної політики. У статті зазначено можливості інтеграції тем мовної дипломатії до навчальних програм з метою підвищення ефективності освітнього процесу у ЗВО та запропоновано напрями для подальших досліджень у галузях цифрової гуманітаристики, педагогіки та міжнародної комунікації.

Ключові слова: *культурна дипломатія, міжкультурна комунікація, мовна політика, платформи цифрового навчання Duolingo, Ukraïner, Ye-Mova, українська мова.*

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