

UDC 81'42:316.75(477)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2410-0927-2025-23-13>

Olena MOROZOVA

Doctor of Sciences (Philology), Professor, Professor at the Department of English Philology and Foreign Language Teaching Methods, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 4 Svobody Sq., Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61022

Lecturer at the Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies

University of British Columbia, 1873 East Mall 928, Vancouver BC, Canada, V6T 1Z1

ORCID: 0000-0002-7223-0337

Scopus Author ID: 57197715302

Natalya OLIYNYK

PhD (Philology), Associate Professor, Associate Professor at the Department of Business Foreign Language and Translation V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 4 Svobody Sq., Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61022

ORCID: 0000-0001-8650-8646

To cite this article: Morozova, O., Oliynyk, N. (2025). Discursive practices of cultural heritage in shaping Ukrainian national identity. *Current Issues of Foreign Philology*, 23, 96–102, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2410-0927-2025-23-13>

DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SHAPING UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

This article examines how discursive practices surrounding cultural heritage contribute to shaping national identity in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. The conflict extends well beyond the physical battlefield, unfolding across cultural, linguistic, and symbolic domains that shape present realities through the selective elements of cultural heritage. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, the study argues that Ukrainian identity is formed and reinforced through shared language, collective memory, and symbolic representation. Within this process, the legacy of Taras Shevchenko plays a defining role as both a cultural symbol and an iconic marker of Ukrainian national identity, as well as a site of resistance and an object of ideological contestation. The article analyzes how discursive practices around Shevchenko's tangible and intangible heritage – monuments, texts, public rituals, and linguistic practices – have been reframed in competing political narratives. Russian discourse employs symbolic appropriation, selectively reinterpreting biographical facts and cultural meanings to position Shevchenko within a narrative of Slavic unity. Examples from Crimea and occupied territories demonstrate how staged commemorations and controlled representations serve to legitimize imperial narratives and suppress Ukrainian cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, Ukrainian communities mobilize Shevchenko's heritage as a tool of resilience and cultural sovereignty. Actions such as protecting monuments, restoring suppressed inscriptions, transforming Soviet memorials, and rejecting falsified attributions illustrate ongoing acts of symbolic reclamation. These practices reveal cultural heritage as an active arena of meaning-making rather than a static inheritance. Through case studies and discourse analysis, the article demonstrates that Shevchenko's legacy functions as both a target of manipulation and a catalyst of national self-definition. The findings reveal that cultural heritage in wartime serves as a powerful medium through which identity is resisted, defended, and reimagined.

Key words: cultural heritage, discourse practice, metaphor, national identity, symbolic appropriation, Taras Shevchenko.

Олена МОРОЗОВА

доктор філологічних наук, професор, професор кафедри англійської філології та методики викладання іноземної мови Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна, 4 площа Свободи, м. Харків, Україна, 61022, та викладач кафедри центрально-, східно- та північнослов'янських студій Університету Британської Колумбії, 1873 Іст Молл, Ванкувер, Британська Колумбія, Канада, V6T 1Z1

ORCID: 0000-0002-7223-0337

Scopus Author ID: 57197715302

Наталя ОЛІЙНИК

кандидат філологічних наук, доцент, доцент кафедри ділової англійської мови та перекладу Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна, 4 площа Свободи, м. Харків, Україна, 61022

ORCID: 0000-0001-8650-8646

Бібліографічний опис статті: Морозова, О., Олійник, Н. (2025). Дискурсивні практики культурної спадщини у творенні національної ідентичності українців. *Актуальні питання іноземної філології*, 23, 96–102, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2410-0927-2025-23-13>

ДИСКУРСИВНІ ПРАКТИКИ КУЛЬТУРНОЇ СПАДЩИНИ У ТВОРЕННІ НАЦІОНАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ УКРАЇНЦІВ

У статті досліджено, як дискурсивні практики, пов'язані з культурною спадщиною, сприяють формуванню національної ідентичності в умовах російсько-української війни. Конфлікт виходить далеко за межі фізичного поля бою, розгортаючись у культурних, мовних та символічних вимірах, де елементи культурної спадщини конструюють сучасні уявлення про реальність. Спираючись на концепт уявлених спільнот Бенедикта Андерсона, у статті обґрунтовується, що українська ідентичність формується та зміцнюється через спільну мову, колективну пам'ять і символічні репрезентації. У цьому процесі спадщина Тараса Шевченка відіграє ключову роль як культурний символ і знаковий маркер української національної ідентичності, а також як простір спротиву та об'єкт ідеологічного переосмислення. У статті продемонстровано, як дискурсивні практики навколо матеріальної та нематеріальної спадщини Шевченка – пам'ятників, текстів, публічних ритуалів і мовних практик – були переінтерпретовані в конкуруючих політичних наративах. Російські дискурси застосовують символічну апропріацію, вибірково переосмислюючи біографічні факти та культурні сенси, щоб вписати Шевченка в наратив «слов'янської єдності». Приклади з Криму та окупованих територій демонструють, як режисовані комеморації та контрольовані репрезентації слугують легітимації імперських смислів і витісненню української культурної специфіки. Водночас українські спільноти мобілізують спадщину Шевченка як інструмент стійкості та культурного суверенітету. Дії, такі як захист пам'ятників, відновлення прихованих написів, трансформація радянських меморіалів та викриття фальшивих атрибуцій, засвідчують тривалі практики символічного повернення й переозначення. Ці процеси засвідчують, що культурна спадщина є не статичним надбанням, а активною сферою творення смислів. Шляхом дискурсивного аналізу кейсів продемонстровано, що спадщина Шевченка виступає одночасно як об'єкт маніпуляції та каталізатор національного самовизначення. Отримані результати показують, що у воєнний час культурна спадщина перетворюється на потужний засіб опору, захисту та конструювання національної ідентичності.

Ключові слова: культурна спадщина, дискурсивна практика, метафора, національна ідентичність, постколоніальний контекст, символічна апропріація, Тарас Шевченко.

Rationale. The Russian war against Ukraine is not only a geopolitical conflict; it is also a struggle over meaning, memory, and culture. As in many postcolonial contexts, the battlefield extends beyond territory into the realms of language, education, and heritage. Ukrainian cultural symbols, particularly those associated with the renowned national poet Taras Shevchenko, have become deeply ingrained in this cultural confrontation.

In the framework of modern nationalism, Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) remains particularly relevant. Anderson argues that a nation is not a physical entity but a socially constructed community – imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of it. Ukrainian identity, like any other, is constituted through shared language, historical narratives, customs, and symbols. Among these, the Ukrainian language occupies

a foundational role, functioning as both a practical tool and a symbolic cornerstone of nationhood.

This article focuses on the heritage of Taras Shevchenko to illustrate how cultural figures and symbols are used in constructing identity and resisting ideological colonization. We examine how Shevchenko's legacy has been manipulated in Russian propaganda, reinterpreted by communities under occupation, and embraced as a symbol of national resilience.

Theoretical tools. The term "heritage" encompasses both material and immaterial inheritances. In English, the term originates from legal language concerning property and inheritance, expanding over time to include cultural artifacts, traditions, and shared values. The Ukrainian notion of "спадщина" reflects similar dual meanings, referring both to inherited rights and to cultural legacies passed down through generations.

According to Hewison, “The impulse to preserve the past is part of the impulse to preserve the self. Without knowing where we have been, it is difficult to know where we are going” (Hewison, 1987, P. 47). This relationship between past and present highlights the crucial role of cultural heritage in shaping collective identity.

Cultural heritage can be broadly categorized into two forms:

Tangible heritage encompasses physical manifestations, including monuments, buildings, artifacts, artwork, and historical sites. For example, statues of Taras Shevchenko, manuscripts of his poetry, and architectural spaces named in his honor serve as material anchors of cultural memory.

Intangible heritage refers to non-physical traditions and expressions such as language, oral literature, music, performing arts, and social practices. In the case of Shevchenko, the continued recitation or singing of his poetry, the use of the Ukrainian language he championed, and commemorative rituals held in his memory all contribute to the preservation and transmission of intangible heritage.

Shevchenko’s legacy exemplifies the dynamic interplay between the two forms. His presence is felt not only in stone and bronze, but also in the enduring rhythms of language, song, and civic ritual that continue to shape Ukrainian identity today. This understanding aligns with Čeginskas and Lähdesmäki’s (2023, P. 2) conclusion that *cultural heritage* is not an inherent or fixed entity, but is constructed through acts of narration – or, in the terms used in this article, through discursive practice.

The aim of this article is to shed light on how discursive practices surrounding cultural heritage, with a focus on the legacy of Taras Shevchenko, contribute to the construction and negotiation of Ukrainian national identity in the context of Russia’s ongoing information and cultural aggression.

Results and discussion. Taras Shevchenko occupies a deeply contested place in the postcolonial struggle over Ukraine’s cultural heritage. Within Ukrainian narratives, he is revered as the voice of national awakening and a powerful symbol of anti-imperial resistance. However, Russian discourse has persistently sought to appropriate and reframe his identity to align with broader narratives of Slavic unity and a “shared” cultural past.

Russian sources frequently emphasize biographical facts that lend themselves to reinterpretation. For example, they highlight that Shevchenko was born in the Kyiv Governorate, then part of the Russian Empire, and that he wrote prose in both Ukrainian and Russian. The *Great Russian Encyclopedia* presents him as a Ukrainian poet and painter who wrote “in Russian and Ukrainian”, while the website *Ruxpert* describes him as a “Russian-speaking prose writer and great Ukrainian poet”. Although these descriptions appear neutral, they subtly position Shevchenko within a Russian cultural framework, thereby blurring the boundaries between linguistic and national affiliation.

Such framing exemplifies symbolic appropriation – the selective use of factual elements to assert ideological ownership. As Azoulay notes, imperial systems often reinterpret colonized figures to reinforce narratives of benevolence and legitimacy (Azoulay, 2019). By co-opting Shevchenko’s identity, Russian discourse attempts to obscure the historical context of imperial domination and recast the poet as a bridge between nations rather than a critic of empire.

This appropriation is reinforced through metaphorical reframing. A striking example is drawn from a well-known childhood anecdote in Shevchenko’s biography, in which he attempted to walk to the horizon “to see where the sky meets the earth” (Біографія ..., 1958: n. p.). In a propagandistic reinterpretation, this act is transformed into a symbolic gesture of inevitable unity between Ukraine and Russia. As an article published in Interunion.org in 2024 declares: “You have reached the horizon, Taras Grigorievich – where Ukraine merges with Russia. And this is a very bright page in our shared history”.

At first glance, the metaphor appears harmonious, casting Ukraine as sky – open, imaginative, aspirational – and Russia as land – stable, grounded. But beneath this dichotomy lies a narrative of subordination: Ukraine is portrayed as incomplete without Russia’s “solid” historical identity. Within this framework, the conceptual metaphors “country is sky” (Ukraine) and “country is land” (Russia) suggest that Ukraine must be anchored in Russian historical and cultural reality. This framing masks colonial ambition as spiritual integration, transforming a relationship of dominance into one of alleged destiny.

The rhetorical strategy extends beyond metaphor into carefully staged public commemorations. In 2019, during Shevchenko Day in Russian-occupied Simferopol, pro-Russian activists organised a performance at the monument to Taras Shevchenko to mark the 205th anniversary of his birth. Participants carried Russian flags and banners of the so-called “Russian Community of Crimea”, visually reframing the event within a Russian nationalist context. Readings of Shevchenko’s poetry were performed in Russian, while stylised costumes imitating Ukrainian embroidery diluted the authenticity of traditional cultural markers and stripped them of their national specificity.

During the same gathering, a Russian activist publicly claimed that Shevchenko “called for peace and friendship with Russia” and “belonged not only to Ukraine but also to Russia and Belarus”, and he was presented in speeches as a “Russian writer”. These statements, widely circulated in occupation-era public communications, attempt to recast Shevchenko as a panslavist aligned with imperial unity. Such rhetorical reframing not only distorts the historical record but also seeks to neutralise the anti-colonial dimension of his literary and political legacy.

These appropriative narratives are not limited to symbolic reinterpretation; they extend to interventions in public commemorative space, where cultural meaning is renegotiated through orchestrated performances and selective historical messaging.

In Balakliia (Kharkiv region), a public banner quoting Shevchenko’s Caucasus poem – “Fight, and you shall overcome. God helps you. Truth and glory and holy freedom are with you” – was



Fig. 1. Banner Replacement in Balakliia Reveals Suppressed Shevchenko Quote

Source: Novynarnia, 2022.

replaced during the Russian occupation with a sign proclaiming: “Ukraine and Russia are one people”. After liberation, the original Ukrainian quote was discovered intact beneath the imposed propaganda. This illustrates both cultural censorship and resistance: while occupiers sought to overwrite Ukrainian meaning, the foundational narrative remained preserved beneath the surface.

In Kharkiv, the monument to Shevchenko, erected in 1935 as part of Soviet monumental architecture, has become a site of contemporary resilience. To protect it from shelling, volunteers and municipal workers fortified it with sandbags in March 2022.

By 2025, the monument’s 90th anniversary, it was decorated with a banner featuring a Shevchenko quote and a Ukrainian flag bearing the names of fallen soldiers. As a Kharkiv resident noted, “This is not just a monument. This is our symbol of defiance” (Суспільне Харків, 2022).

Other communities have undertaken more direct acts of cultural transformation. In the village of Kotliarka, Zhytomyr Oblast, residents lacking resources for a new monument repurposed a Soviet-era statue of Lenin into a likeness of Shevchenko, as shown in Figure 5.

A local artist reshaped the face, removed the military cap, and added a copy of the Kobzar. This act of re-signification demonstrates how material heritage can be reclaimed and reinterpreted. As Lowenthal (1998) observed, “heritage is not a test of accuracy but a declaration of identity”. The transformation from Lenin to Shevchenko is not merely aesthetic – it is ideological, asserting the continuity of Ukrainian culture in defiance of imperial legacy.



Fig. 2. Kharkiv residents reinforcing the Taras Shevchenko monument with sandbags

Source: Suspilne Kharkiv, 2022.



Fig. 4. Commemoration of Taras Shevchenko in Kharkiv on his birthday

Source: *Suspilne Kharkiv*, 2025.



Fig. 4. Repurposed Lenin Monument Transformed into Shevchenko in Kotliarka

Source: *TSN*, 2023.

A striking example of disinformation is illustrated in Figure 6, which depicts a falsified poem that circulated on social media in 2023 under the false attribution to Taras Shevchenko. The poem, designed to evoke populist resentment, reads: “The poor man cries, the rich man rejoices, and the government robs. Poor people bury sons killed in the war. A rich man who is full and proud makes a wedding”. The post criticized Ukraine’s leadership and war effort while masquerading as patriotic dissent rooted in classical national literature.

This fabricated quote was disseminated by a pro-Russian social media account using the pseudonym “Solomiia Ukrainianets”. As writer Ostap Ukrainianets publicly clarified, the poem is not Shevchenko’s. He cautioned readers: “If you see a new, perfectly topical quote from Shevchenko or Franko – it’s probably anonymous or FSB-written”.

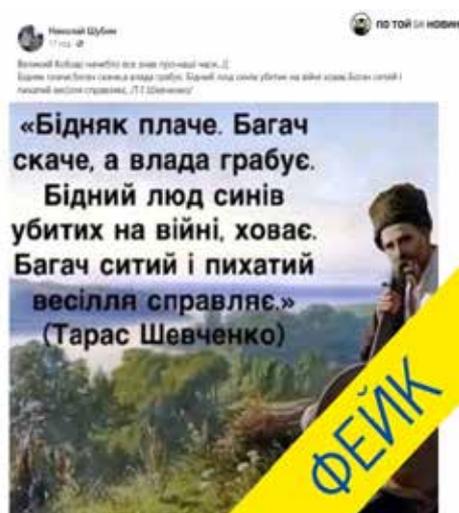


Fig. 5. Fact-checking post debunking a fake “Shevchenko poem”

Source: *Po toi bik novyn (Facebook)*, 2023.

By falsely invoking cultural authority, such digital fabrications aim to destabilize national trust in iconic figures and reframe Ukrainian resistance as internal betrayal. This form of “information occupation” reflects the subtler dimensions of the cultural war, where heritage becomes a tool not only for remembrance but also for manipulation.

Conclusions. This article has explored how Ukraine’s cultural heritage – and the legacy of Taras Shevchenko in particular – serves as both a tool of resistance and a target of colonial appropriation. Drawing on examples from occupied territories, manipulated narratives, and acts of symbolic reclamation, we have shown that cultural symbols are not passive relics but dynamic sites of struggle, especially in times of crisis.

From the metaphorical reframing of Shevchenko’s imagery to the censorship of his words in Balakliia, from the ideological repurposing of his monuments in Crimea to their transformation in Kotliarka, the contested legacy of Shevchenko illustrates how heritage is continuously reinterpreted, resisted, and revived in response to oppression – it is not static. These cases reveal the strategic function of heritage not only in shaping collective memory but in defending cultural sovereignty.

Russia’s ongoing attempts to appropriate, distort, or erase Ukrainian cultural identity highlight the enduring power of heritage to mobilize civic consciousness and sustain national resilience. As Shevchenko famously declared, «Борітеся – поборете» – «Fight, and you shall overcome». His words resonate today not only as a call to action, but as a call to remember, to preserve, and to define who we are – and who we choose to become.

ЛІТЕРАТУРА:

1. Біографія Т. Г. Шевченка за спогадами сучасників. Київ : Вид-во Академії наук УРСР, 1958. 439 с.
2. Вражаюче відео від ЗСУ: на білборді в Балаклії замість «одного народу с Росією» проявилися рядки Шевченка. Новинарня. 11.09.2022. URL: <https://novynarnia.com/2022/09/11/billboard-balakli/> (дата звернення: 05.07.2025).
3. На Житомирщині пам'ятник Леніну перетворили на Шевченка: який вигляд він тепер має (фото). ТСН. 20.10.2023. URL: <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/na-zhitomirschini-pam-yatnik-leninu-peretvorili-na-shevchenka-yakiy-viglyad-vin-teper-maye-foto-2633187.html> (дата звернення: 05.07.2025).
4. Спростування фейкового «вірша Шевченка». *По той бік новин*. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/behindtheukrainenews/posts/1051276279167380/> (дата звернення: 05.07.2025).
5. У Харкові вшанували пам'ять Тараса Шевченка в день його народження. Суспільне Харків. 09.03.2025. URL: <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/966391-u-harkovi-vsnuvali-pamat-pro-tarasa-sevcenka-v-den-jogo-narodzenna/> (дата звернення: 05.07.2025).
6. У Харкові укріплюють пам'ятник Тарасу Шевченку мішками з піском. Суспільне Харків. 23.03.2022. Відео. YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZFcecvvhQ8> (дата звернення: 05.07.2025).
7. Anderson B. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London : Verso Books, 1983. 160 p.
8. Azoulay A. *Potential history: Unlearning imperialism*. London : Verso Books, 2019. 656 p.
9. Čeginskas V., Lähdesmäki T. Introduction: reflecting on heritage diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. 2023. Vol. 29, no. 1. P. 1–8. DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2022.2141730.
10. Darnton R. *Censors at work: How states shaped literature*. New York : W. W. Norton, 2014. 304 p.
11. Hewison R. *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline*. London : Methuen, 1987. 160 p.
12. Lowenthal D. *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1998. 338 p.
13. Oxford English Dictionary. Heritage. Oxford University Press, n.d. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6071824639> (Last accessed: 09.09.2025).

REFERENCES:

1. Biohrafia T. H. Shevchenka za spohadamy suchasnykiv. (1958) [Biography of T. H. Shevchenko based on contemporaries' memories] Vyd-vo Akademii nauk URSR, Kyiv. 439 s. [in Ukrainian].
2. Novynarnia. (2022). Vrazhaiuche video vid ZSU: na bilbordi v Balaklii zamist «odnoho naroda s Rossyiei» proiavylysia riadky Shevchenka. [Striking video from the Armed Forces of Ukraine: lines from a Shevchenko poem appeared on a billboard in Balakliia instead of the slogan “one people with Russia”] URL: <https://novynarnia.com/2022/09/11/billboard-balakli/> (Last accessed: 05 July 2025). [in Ukrainian].
3. TSN. (2023). Na Zhytomyrshchyni pamiatnyk Leninu peretvoryly na Shevchenka: yakiy vyhliad vin teper maie (foto). [In Zhytomyr region, a Lenin monument was transformed into Shevchenko: what it looks like now (photo)] URL: <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/na-zhitomirschini-pam-yatnik-leninu-peretvorili-na-shevchenka-yakiy-viglyad-vin-teper-maye-foto-2633187.html> (Last accessed: 05 July 2025). [in Ukrainian].
4. Po toi bik novyn. (2023). Sprostuvannia feikovooho «virsha Shevchenka». [Debunking the fake “Shevchenko poem”] URL: <https://www.facebook.com/behindtheukrainenews/posts/1051276279167380/> (Last accessed: 05 July 2025). [in Ukrainian].
5. Suspilne Kharkiv. (2025). U Kharkovi vshanuvaly pamiat Tarasa Shevchenka v den yoho narodzhennia. [Kharkiv commemorated Taras Shevchenko on his birthday] URL: <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/966391-u-harkovi-vsnuvali-pamat-pro-tarasa-sevcenka-v-den-jogo-narodzenna/> (Last accessed: 05 July 2025). [in Ukrainian].
6. Suspilne Kharkiv. (2022). U Kharkovi ukripluiut pamiatnyk Tarasu Shevchenku mishkamy z piskom. Video. [In Kharkiv, the monument to Taras Shevchenko is being reinforced with sandbags] YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZFcecvvhQ8> (Last accessed: 05 July 2025). [in Ukrainian].
7. Anderson B. (1983) *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London : Verso Books. 160 p.
8. Azoulay A. (2019) *Potential history: Unlearning imperialism*. London : Verso Books. 656 p.
9. Čeginskas V., Lähdesmäki T. (2023) Introduction: reflecting on heritage diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 29(1), 1–8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2022.2141730>
10. Darnton R. (2014) *Censors at work: How states shaped literature*. New York : W. W. Norton. 304 p.
11. Hewison R. (1987) *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline*. London : Methuen. 160 p.
12. Lowenthal D. (1998) *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press. 338 p.

13. Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Heritage. Oxford University Press. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6071824639> (Last accessed: 09 September 2025).

Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 14.11.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 11.12.2025

Дата публікації: 30.12.2025