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War, Women, and Language Change: A Corpus-Based Study of Ukrainian Military-Related Feminine Terms – Decolonial Implications

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving use of military-related feminine personal nouns in Ukrainian, driven by the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war (since 2014), with roots traced back to World War II and World War I. Using data from the Web Dictionary of Ukrainian Feminine Personal Nouns (r2u.org.ua, 2022) and the General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian (GRAC), the study analyzes 132 feminine terms for military roles, comparing them with Soviet-era entries from the 11-volume dictionary of the Ukrainian language (SUM-11, 1970–1980) and Ukrainian periodicals. A diachronic corpus analysis of Ukrainian media discourse reveals a sixfold increase in the frequency of feminine terms used in military reference since 2013 and a threefold growth in their diversity, signaling significant linguistic adaptation. Their comparative analysis with corresponding masculine forms shows a clear trend toward both gender parity and de-Russification. The traditionally masculinized and Russified military sector is undergoing significant feminization in the media, reflecting efforts toward de-Russification and the promotion of gender parity and inclusivity in language – developments that carry clear decolonial implications.

Keywords: feminine personal nouns; military ranks; masculinization; language change; decolonization; Web Dictionary of Ukrainian Feminine Personal Nouns; General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian (GRAC)

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1. Introduction: The Impact of War on Language Change

War serves as a catalyst for powerful decolonizing processes, pushing Ukrainian society to protect its language and culture from Russian influence while confronting its colonial past. Although Ukraine's decolonization process began with the collapse of the USSR, it gained momentum during the 2013 Euromaidan, 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the following Russo-Ukrainian war. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, an intensified movement to distance Ukraine from Russian imperial legacies has emerged (Kotubeĭ-Heruts′ka, 2023). This shift is reflected in the Law on the Prohibition of Russian Imperial Propaganda and the Decolonization of Toponymy (2023), regulating geographical names in Ukraine,[1] and the 2019 language law, which mandates Ukrainian in official contexts.[2] Together, these represent some of Ukraine's most concrete legal steps toward decolonization, as many linguistic remnants of Soviet rule remain unaddressed. This article explores how the war has impacted the system of military designations for women in Ukrainian, analyzing these changes through a decolonial lens.

The 2022 invasion has profoundly affected the Ukrainian language, impacting its lexicon, usage domains, and social status (Taranenko, 2023). Rapid linguistic innovations are emerging, particularly in military contexts (S. Hrytsenko, 2022), while media discourse increasingly features expressions of verbal aggression directed at the aggressor (Kovalchuk & Litkovych, 2022). Several Ukrainian linguists document these changes in the *Slovnyk ukraïns′koho sprotyvu* [Dictionary of the Ukrainian Resistance] (see Adakh & Vokal′chuk, 2024). Moreover, the war has accelerated the expansion of the Ukrainian language into new social and cultural spheres, reinforcing its role and presence in the public domain (Kulyk, 2023; Racek et al., 2024).

This is not the first time that linguists have observed that war, despite all horror, devastation, and dehumanization, sparks a revival of linguistic creativity. Indeed, a century ago, Ukrainian linguist Ievhen Hrytsak, who disappeared under unclear circumstances in 1944 at the Oremlaz displaced persons camp, noted in his book *Neolohizmy v suchasniĭ ukraïns′kiĭ literaturniĭ movi* [Neologisms in the Modern Ukrainian Literary Language] (1935) that linguistic creativity surges during turbulent times. By examining neologisms in Ukrainian media from the 1920s and 1930s, he identified key wartime factors driving language change: transformative historical events, advances in science and technology, and a remarkable cultural flourishing. These forces, he argued, catalyze linguistic innovation and expansion in response to societal shifts (Hrytsak, 1935).

1 *Zakon Ukraïny "Pro zasudzhennia ta zaboronu propahandy rosiĭs′koï impers′koï polityky v Ukraïni i dekolonizatsiiu toponimiĭ"* (2023).

2 *Zakon Ukraïny "Pro zabezpechennia funktsionuvannia ukraïns′koï movy iak derzhavnoï"* (2019).

In addition to influencing the lexical level, war also affects language standardization processes. Since the 1930s, Russian aggression has forced diaspora Ukrainians to reevaluate their language planning and standardization efforts. Michael Moser's (2016) study of the diaspora standard in the newspaper *Svoboda* [Freedom] (issued in the United States) during the interwar period and World War II illustrates how Stalinist terror, repression, and assimilation policies led to a split in the Ukrainian language: a Soviet-influenced version within Ukraine, and a diaspora standard that opposed it. As George Yurii Shevelov (Shevel′ov, 2009) noted, this internal "conflict" had sparked ongoing debates about Ukrainian language norms, crystallizing two approaches: acceptance of the Soviet legacy or outright rejection. The Ukrainian diaspora chose the latter, reverting to pre-Soviet practices and embracing various dialects (Azhniuk, 1999).

Until 2019, language practices in Ukraine largely adhered to Soviet-era standards, but that year brought a pivotal update to Ukrainian orthography. This revision incorporated elements from both Soviet and pre-Soviet (or diaspora) standards, allowing for more linguistic variation (e.g. both *радості* (*radosti*) and *радости* (*radosty*) are now accepted genitive forms of 'joy'). The official orthography rules also explicitly codified feminine personal nouns, listing four suffixes for their derivation: *-иц(я) (-yts(ia))*, *-ин(я) (-yn(ia))*, *-к(а) (-k(a))*, and *-ес(а) (-es(a))* (§32, Point 4). The most pronounced shift away from Russian influence, however, began after February 24, 2022, when associations with Russia took on renewed significance, symbolizing terror for the second time in a century.

This pivotal moment has intensified a strong drive to decommunize public space and decolonize linguistic practices in Ukraine. A key issue within the decolonizing movement is the debate over using feminine versus masculine terms to refer to women across various professions. The newly established National Commission for the Standards of the State Language aimed to address this by regulating the use of feminine terms in official documents and the Classification of Occupations. In 2021, the commission introduced feminine terms for medical and diplomatic fields (Decisions No. 238, No. 339). This effort, aimed at aligning with European language and gender equality standards, seems partly superficial, merely adding suffixes without comprehensive corpus and lexicographical research. Following the Russian full-scale invasion, however, the initiative's leaders were dismissed, halting its progress. Today, this debate is heightened by the growing presence of women in various fields, including the military, as the war has created a labor shortage due to the mobilization, injury, or loss of men.

Ukrainian media are currently witnessing a significant rise in the use of feminine derivatives to refer to women. Media monitoring reports indicate that since 2019, the use of feminine terms in regional Ukrainian media has doubled,[3] reflecting a shift toward greater gender sensitivity. Expanding on a recent publication on the topic (Synchak, 2023),

3 Monitoring of gender sensitivity in regional media showed an increase in feminine forms from 49% in Western Ukrainian media (2019) to 82% across all regions (2023), based on data published on Povaha (2023).

this article explores Ukrainian terms referring to women in the military through a decolonial lens. It investigates how the current Russia's war against Ukraine impacts the system of feminine personal nouns related to the military in Ukrainian, comparing these terms to those from World War II and World War I. The analysis focuses on three main areas: first, it investigates military-related feminine terms in Soviet-era dictionaries to trace Soviet language ideology and its evolution; second, it explores the dynamics of these terms' usage in a journalistic corpus; and third, it examines the competition between feminine and masculine designations for women. Framed within a decolonial perspective, this approach offers valuable insights into the ongoing transformation of Ukrainian military discourse.

2. Background: Feminization at the Crossroads of Language Standardization

Decolonial theory often critiques "Western-ness" as an episteme that sustains colonial thought (Albrecht, 2020, p. 10), but it frequently neglects the imperial oppression faced by Central and Eastern Europe. Ukraine, like Poland, which Hanna Gosk (2014) describes as an "ex-subject of a peculiar type of Eastern-Western domination", grapples with the legacy of Russian and Soviet imperialism. Seeking to escape what Myroslav Shkandrij metaphorically calls Russia's "suffocating embrace" (Shkandriĭ, 2004), Ukraine actively reorients itself toward Europe and aligns with Western values.[4]

The ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine amplifies calls for emancipation, with scholars like Tomasz Kamusella (2024) framing Russia's aggression as neo-imperialism. Kamusella critiques Western academia for obscuring the colonial nature of Soviet and Russian dominance, especially its reliance on language and culture as tools of imperial oppression (Kamusella, 2024, pp. 295–296). Conversely, Dirk Uffelmann (2020) cautions against the misuse of postcolonialism in the post-Soviet context to advance nationalist agendas. However, such a critique obscures the fundamentally inclusive and multi-ethnic nature of Ukraine's resistance to Russian neo-imperialism, a protest-driven form of anti-imperial nationalism shaped by the imperative of survival.

At its core, decolonization asserts the right of oppressed people to self-determination, social justice, and solidarity against oppressors, as articulated by Prasenjit Duara (2003). The Russian Empire and its Soviet successor colonized not only Ukrainian territory but also its education, publishing, lexicography, and linguistic practices, severely limiting the nation's

4 Ukraine's orientation toward Europe has deep historical roots, drawing on ancient Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast and cultural milestones such as the Renaissance and the Reformation. In the twentieth century, this European alignment is epitomized by Mykola Khvylovyi's slogan, "Get away from Moscow! Give [us] Europe!" – a resolute call for cultural and political independence from Russian influence. However, during Soviet rule, European heritage was systematically suppressed, with Ukrainian translations of classical works often censored or outright banned, underscoring the extent of imperial cultural erasure.

ability to assert linguistic autonomy and achieve self-determination. Russification policies established Russian as the normative model for the Ukrainian language, embedding Soviet-era mechanisms of language assimilation and hybridization into the processes of codification and standardization (Masenko et al., 2005). These influences continue to shape contemporary efforts to codify and standardize Ukrainian, leaving a lasting imprint on current linguistic practices.

Notably, the Soviet legacy remains deeply ingrained in Ukraine's Classification of Occupations (DK 003:2010), where prescriptive norms established during that era persist. While the Ministry of Economy's Order No. 1410 (January 16, 2024) introduced amendments to align the classification with international market demands, particularly in IT, it still lists only 38 feminine occupational titles – just 0.6% of the 7,000 entries. These titles predominantly denote low-paid and less prestigious roles. The feminine terms in the classification show minimal deviation from the Soviet-era All-Union Classification of Occupations (*Obshchesoiuznyĭ klassifikator professii rabochikh, dolzhnosti sluzhashchikh i tarifnye razriady*, 1986), a framework drafted in Russian to serve the planned economy of the 1960s and the two following decades. Remarkably, this outdated classification remained *de jure* in official use in Ukraine until 1995. Yet, *de facto*, it has not been fully dismantled, reflecting the persistent influence of colonial-era structures on contemporary standardization efforts.

The lack of a comprehensive list of feminine professional and occupational titles impedes the feminization of the Ukrainian professional language, discouraging gender-specific terms for women across various fields. In contrast, Germany's Classification of Occupations – issued in 2010 and updated in 2020 – achieves gender parity by listing both male and female titles for all occupations (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2021). This stark disparity highlights the lingering impact of Soviet labor policies and public-sphere ideologies on Ukraine's approach to gender representation and language standardization. Thus, Russification extended beyond overt restrictions on Ukrainian language use, embedding Russian norms as the template for Ukrainian standardization. This enduring legacy continues to shape linguistic practices in Ukraine, obstructing efforts to achieve gender equality.

Simultaneously, legislative changes in Ukraine are increasingly aligning with Western legal standards, particularly concerning the prohibition of discrimination against women in various professional and occupational fields, including the military (Martsenyuk, 2022). For instance, Ukraine ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and regularly reports on its implementation. In the ninth periodic report submitted in 2021, a chapter was dedicated to "Women, Peace, and Security", highlighting significant systemic changes in the security and defense sector since the adoption of the first National Action Plan for the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. This includes improved access for women to military occupations, including combat positions (Ukraine CEDAW, 2021, pp. 5–6). Before that, in 2018, President Petro Poroshenko signed a law

ensuring equal rights for women and men serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations. This law guarantees equal opportunities for military service, access to positions and ranks, and equal responsibilities in the performance of military duties.[5] Despite regulations on women's legal status in the army, the standardization of professional titles for their positions remains unresolved.

Both examples highlight Ukraine's ambivalent position: on one hand, it perpetuates Soviet-era gender discrimination against women in the occupational and professional spheres through its mechanisms of language standardization, while on the other hand, it endorses internationally recognized documents aimed at combating such discrimination. In other words, while legislative initiatives act as legal instruments for decolonizing Ukrainian language and broader social practices, the mechanisms of language standardization in Ukraine – and the scientific linguistic institutions responsible for them – remain rooted in colonial frameworks.

3. Context: Soviet-Era Masculinization

Discussions of linguistic decolonization and de-Russification in Ukraine have often overlooked the feminization of language. Ukrainian research has identified terms suppressed under Soviet rule (Masenko et al., 2005), though whether feminization was explicitly banned remains debated (Arkhanhel′s′ka, 2019). Notably, as early as 1935, Hrytsak observed World War I's impact on the rise of feminine personal nouns, noting a "distinct tendency toward feminization" tied to women's increased roles during and after the war (Hrytsak, 1935). It follows that feminization in the Ukrainian language is not a new phenomenon; it has a long-standing tradition, with notable peaks in word-formation emerging at least twice in the last century during periods of war and the ensuing sociopolitical transformations.

Nevertheless, one of the most heated debates in Ukrainian society and linguistics today centers on the use of feminine professional and occupational titles to refer to women across various fields. Some consider these terms an "artificial intervention" driven by gender equality movements (Arkhanhel′s′ka, 2019), while others see them as a "revival of Ukrainian identity and originality", contributing to the broader decolonization of Ukrainian from Russian linguistic norms (Styshov, 2020).

Scholars argue that the norm established by the Classification of Occupations to avoid feminine professional and occupational titles in Ukrainian official documents is a remnant of Soviet-era practices. Despite the rich variety of feminine terms in

5 *Zakon Ukraïny "Pro vnesennia zmin do deiakykh zakoniv Ukraïny shchodo zabezpechennia rivnykh prav i mozhlyvosteĭ zhinok i cholovikiv pid chas prokhodzhennia viĭs′kovoï sluzhby u Zbroĭnykh Sylakh Ukraïny ta inshykh viĭs′kovykh formuvanniakh"* (2018).

Ukrainian – around 9,000 terms representing women in professional and occupational roles[6] – their use in official documents has long been considered a stylistic error. This convention, rather than reflecting the intrinsic logic of Ukrainian, stems from a language assimilation policy aimed at aligning Russian and Ukrainian standards more closely (Overchuk & Maĭboroda, 2020, pp. 283–284). In Russian, feminine forms are typically confined to colloquial speech and excluded from formal language. Similarly, in Ukrainian, as in Bulgarian (Bocale, 2010), Russian influence has restricted the use of feminine terms to informal contexts, despite their long-standing tradition of use across various contexts and styles (Brus, 2019).

Feminists assert that, in Slavic languages, feminization advances gender-fair language by increasing the visibility of women, whereas masculinization contributes to their linguistic invisibility (e.g. Bogetić, 2022; Đorđević et al., 2022). Feminization was actively promoted in the 1920s and 1930s during the wave of political mobilization of women in both Soviet Eastern Ukraine and pre-Soviet Western Ukraine, as noted by Hrytsak[7] (1935). Dennis Scheller-Boltz and Ursula Doleschal trace the rise of masculinization in Soviet public discourse, which became widespread after 1945, to the Soviet *kul′tura-rechi* movement. This movement, adopting a normativist stance in the late 1930s, shaped language policies in Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, and, to a lesser extent, other Slavic languages (Scheller-Boltz & Doleschal, in press). Researchers link this shift to a broader transformation in Soviet gender politics in the 1930s, when the focus shifted from women's political mobilization to the promotion of "total androgyny" and the construction of the *sovetskiĭ chelovek* 'Soviet person' (Puškareva, 2012, as cited in Scheller-Boltz & Doleschal, in press).

This trend toward masculinizing administrative language paralleled the rollback of indigenization policies, especially Ukrainianization, and the onset of mass repressions of dissidents, often labeled as "enemies of the people". In the Stalinist era, this shift toward a masculinized public discourse became a hallmark of totalitarianism, reflecting the regime's consolidation of power around the leader's cult[8] and its suppression of political, gender, and ethnic diversity. Similarly, the Kremlin's neo-imperial policy today is marked by intensified repression of dissidence, targeting both gender minorities and inclusive language. In January 2024, for instance, the Russian Supreme Court banned feminine terms, associating them with the LGBT movement and designating it as extremist (*Razrushenie traditsionnykh tsennosteĭ i feminitivy*, 2024).

6 These figures are based on approximate estimates by the National Commission for State Language Standards in 2021. By contrast, the 11-volume Soviet dictionary of the Ukrainian language (SUM-11, 1970–1980) includes only 3,500 feminine terms.

7 The main difference lies in the longer tradition of feminization in Western Ukraine, shaped by the late-nineteenth-century feminist movement and strong interlingual contacts within a multicultural environment. In contrast, Eastern Ukraine, influenced by Russification since the late eighteenth century, has developed a more negative perception of feminization.

8 The cult of personality surrounding Stalin, historian Archie Brown suggests, began with the celebration of his 50th birthday on December 21, 1929 (Brown, 2009).

Researchers note that a key result of Soviet-era masculinization was the compensatory use of the noun *жінка* (*zhinka*) 'woman' in binomials like *жінка-генерал* (*zhinka-heneral*) 'woman-general' and *жінка-депутат* (*zhinka-deputat*) 'woman-deputy' (Scheller-Boltz & Doleschal, in press). Here, *жінка* specifies gender, while the masculine term denotes the profession, aiming to dissociate female identity from socially significant roles. These forms appear exclusively in formal writing and are not acceptable in spoken language, whether describing a woman or addressing her directly.

Another outcome was semantic agreement with masculine nouns referring to women, as in *генерал сказала* (*heneral skazala*) 'the general (m) said (f)'. This naming practice combines a masculine noun with feminine grammatical indicators, such as a feminine adjective or verb form, thereby violating the gender agreement rules typical of Ukrainian, a language with rich inflectional morphology.

Both masculinization methods were widely employed in Soviet public discourse to avoid feminine derivatives typical of the Ukrainian language. While intended to eliminate gendered language from the public sphere, this practice actually reinforced the use of masculine terms to refer to women, implying their generic or neutral status (Taranenko, 2020, p. 26). In the early post-Soviet period and into the late twentieth century, the generic masculine continued to be perceived as neutral, with its totalitarian history remaining largely unaddressed.

The central debate, then, is whether the use of feminine terms today can promote gender equality in Ukrainian society and contribute to the decolonization of language norms. In this context, there is a significant need to further explore feminine terms in various spheres, examining their evolution, usage dynamics, competition with masculinized forms, and broader implications against Russification. To this end, a diachronic corpus-based approach is employed to analyze shifts in the use of feminine terms referring to women in the military in modern Ukrainian – a change influenced by the Russian war in Ukraine since 2014, with roots traceable to World War II and World War I.

4. Dictionary Investigation

4.1. Method and Material

This study draws on data from dictionaries, an online archive of periodicals, and a linguistic corpus. Military-related feminine terms were sourced from two dictionaries. The first is the Web Dictionary of Ukrainian Feminine Personal Nouns (*Vebslovnyk zhinochykh nazv ukraïns'koï movy*, hereafter WDUF), launched in January 2022 on the r2u.org.ua platform. This resource addresses a significant gap in Ukrainian linguistics by providing detailed definitions, corpus-based examples, and insights from expert surveys (Synchak & Starko, 2022). Feminine terms referring to women in the military constitute

3.8% of WDUF's entries (76 lexical items). The second source is the 11-volume dictionary of the Ukrainian language (*Slovnyk ukraïns'koï movy*, hereafter SUM-11), published in Soviet Ukraine between 1970 and 1980. Feminine terms for military roles make up a mere 0.017% of its entries. Reflecting its Soviet-era context, SUM-11 embodies the linguistic policies of the time.

Additional terms were gathered from the online archive of periodicals Libraria.ua and the electronic library Chtyvo. New words were also identified through searches in the General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian (*Heneral'nyĭ rehional'no anotovanyĭ korpus ukraïns'koï movy (HRAK)*, hereafter GRAC) (see below for further details). A total of 132 military-related feminine derivatives were extracted from these sources. The usage of these terms was then compared across two selected dictionaries to examine patterns and variations. To explore the ideological dimensions of Soviet lexicography, historical research on the role of Ukrainian women in World War II was incorporated to reconstruct the broader sociocultural context. Additionally, lexicographic data was supplemented with an analysis of periodicals to provide further insight into the representation and evolution of these terms.

4.2. Military-Related Feminine Terms: Definition, Soviet Language Ideology, and Evolution

The data collected refine the definition of military-related feminine terms as lexical items that denote women serving in combat or holding military ranks, those in support roles within the armed forces, and women participating in or affected by war. Most of the terms (97%) refer to Ukrainian women, while only 3% describe women involved in the conflict on the Russian side (e.g. *окупантка* (*okupantka*) 'female occupant'). The terms also predominantly depict Ukrainian women as active social actors who bear the hardships of war, rather than, much less frequently, as victims of war (e.g. *заручниця* (*zaruchnytsia*) 'female hostage', *полонянка* (*polonianka*) 'bondswoman').

A recent semantic analysis of feminine terms referring to women in the military identifies five key lexico-semantic groups (Synchak, 2023). The largest of these, accounting for 54% of terms, includes *nomina agentis* – terms referring to women based on their actions or roles within the military. The second-largest group (25%) comprises terms for women affiliated with military or paramilitary groups, while the third group (12%) categorizes women by military rank. (For further details, see Synchak, 2023).

Strikingly, 67.4% of these military-related feminine terms were developed between 2014 and 2022, with only 32.6% appearing in standard Ukrainian dictionaries, including the Soviet-era SUM-11 (1970–1980). Examples include *адміралка* (*admiralka*) 'female admiral', *аеророзвідниця* (*aerorozvidnytsia*) 'female air-scout', and *миротворка* (*myrotvorka*) 'female peacemaker'. This significant growth suggests that feminine terms are not merely trends, as

Arkhanhel′s′ka (2019) argues, but rather a systematic response to societal needs – a view shared by other researchers (Karpilovs′ka, 2017, p. 382). As Ukrainian women increasingly participate in military roles, the language adapts to accurately represent them.

A comparison of SUM-11 and the WDUF reveals a stark neglect of military-related feminine terms in the former. While the WDUF contains 58% of the feminine terms used in military reference, SUM-11 includes only 18% of them. For instance, SUM-11 includes no feminine forms for the highest military ranks or positions. Instead, it features a few andronymic terms for women, derived from their husbands' military roles and marked as colloquial, such as *полковниця* (*polkovnytsia*) 'wife of a colonel' and *солдатка* (*soldatka*) 'wife of a soldier'.

SUM-11 (1970–1980) includes several Soviet-era feminine terms for military roles, such as *льотчиця* (*l′otchytsia*) 'female pilot', *радистка* (*radystka*) 'radiowoman', *кулеметниця* (*kulemetnytsia*) 'female machine gunner', *зенітниця* (*zenitnytsia*) 'female anti-aircraft gunner', and *фронтовичка* (*frontovychka*) 'frontwoman'. However, this list provides a selective portrayal of women's participation in the Soviet army during World War II, omitting key roles such as *танкістка* (*tankistka*) 'female tank crew member' and *снайперка* (*snaĭperka*) 'female sniper', despite clear historical evidence of their presence (Pastushenko, 2015, p. 103). This omission likely reflects an ideologically motivated gender bias, shaping a narrative that minimizes women's direct engagement in combat. The dictionary aligns with the broader gender policy of late Soviet Ukraine, which sought to redefine women's roles – shifting them away from military service and framing them primarily as workers in industrial and domestic spheres, distancing them from wartime contributions (Kobchenko, 2015).

Due to ideological factors, SUM-11 also fails to represent women's roles in underground armies during World War I and World War II, omitting key titles used in the resistance forces, such as *усусівка* (*ususivka*) 'servicewoman in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen Legion'[9] or *оунівка* (*ounivka*) 'servicewoman in the OUN'.[10] In contrast, modern media are actively reviving historical feminine titles, especially when highlighting pioneering women in the Ukrainian military. Titles like *січовичка* (*sichovychka*) 'servicewoman in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen Legion', *хорунжа* (*khorunzha*) 'female standard-bearer', etc. are re-emerging, reflecting a broader recognition of women's historical and contemporary contributions to military service. Additionally, today's media are promoting new feminine forms of military ranks and titles, correcting the Soviet-era practice of applying only masculine forms to women.

9 Ukrainian Sich Riflemen Legion. A military unit formed during World War I, composed mainly of Ukrainian volunteers in the Austro-Hungarian army, regarded as the first modern Ukrainian military formation (*Entsyklopediia Ukraïny v interneti / Internet encyclopedia of Ukraine*, n.d.).

10 Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). A Ukrainian political and military organization founded in 1929 that aimed to establish an independent Ukrainian state, known for its nationalist ideology and complex role during World War II (*Entsyklopediia Ukraïny v interneti / Internet encyclopedia of Ukraine*, n.d.).

A comparison of women's military titles over time, based on an analysis of lexicographical sources and material from periodicals (see 4.1 above), is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of selected women's military titles from World Wars to the present

World War I	World War II	2014–2024
воячка 'female warrior'	*солдатка* 'female soldier' *фронтовичка* 'frontwoman' *зв'язкова* 'signalwoman' *зв'язківка* 'signalwoman'	*воякиня* 'female warrior' *бійчиня* 'female fighter' *армійка* 'army woman' *військовослужбовиця* 'servicewoman'
стрілкиня 'riflewoman'	*кулеметниця* 'female machine-gunner' *зенітниця* 'female anti-aircraft gunner'	*стрільчиня* 'riflewoman' *кулеметниця* 'female machine-gunner' *зенітниця* 'female anti-aircraft gunner' *танкістка* 'female tank crew member'
січовичка 'servicewoman in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen Legion'	*оунівка* 'servicewoman in the OUN'	*спецназівка* 'servicewoman in a special forces unit'
усуска, *усусівка* 'servicewoman in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen Legion'	*упівка* 'servicewoman in the UPA[11] and its underground movement'	*айдарівка* 'servicewoman in the "Aidar" military battalion'
санітарна дружинниця *сестра жалібниця* 'junior nurse; first-aid nurse'	*санітарка* 'sanitary nurse'	*парамедикиня* *парамедичка* 'female paramedic'
хорунжа 'female standard bearer' *чотарка* 'female squad commander'	*поручниця* 'female guarantor, lieutenant'	*лейтенантка* 'female lieutenant' *офіцерка* 'female officer' *полковниця* 'female colonel'
	летунка 'female pilot' *льотчиця* 'female pilot '	*льотчиця* 'female pilot ' *летунка* 'female pilot ' *пілоткиня* 'female pilot '

The analysis of women's military titles over time (see Table 1) reveals two key conclusions. First, since World War I, the Ukrainian language had increasingly developed specific terms for women in the military, such as *воячка* (*voiachka*) 'female warrior' and *стрілкиня* (*strilkynia*) 'riflewoman'. This trend continued as women's military roles expanded, as evidenced by terms like *кулеметниця* (*kulemetnytsia*) 'female machine-gunner' and *зенітниця* (*zenitnytsia*) 'female anti-aircraft gunner', which emerged during World War II, and continues today, with terms such as *штурманка* (*shturmanka*) 'female navigator' and *дешифрувальниця* (*deshyfruval′nytsia*) 'female decipherer', which appeared after 2014.

11 The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukraïns′ka povstans′ka armiia, UPA) was a Ukrainian partisan military formation active from 1942 to 1949, primarily in Western Ukraine. It fought against both German and Soviet occupational regimes, aiming to defend the Ukrainian population and achieve an independent Ukrainian state. Although it lacked external support and relied on seized supplies, the UPA maintained extensive military activity until its demobilization in 1949, with underground resistance continuing until 1954 (*Entsyklopediia Ukraïny v interneti / Internet encyclopedia of Ukraine*, n.d.).

Second, with each war, the range of women's military titles has broadened, with older titles often replaced by new ones. For example, *санітарна дружинниця* (*sanitarna druzhynnytsia*) and *сестра жалібниця* (*sestra zhalibnytsia*) 'junior nurse; first-aid nurse' from World War I evolved into *санітарка* (*sanitarka*) 'sanitary nurse' during World War II, and *парамедикиня* (*paramedykynia*) or *парамедичка* (*paramedychka*) 'female paramedic' during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

Despite the expanded military lexicon today, the practice of forming feminine titles using specialized suffixes remains unchanged, as does the tradition of naming both women and men by their respective military units (see Table 1). Soviet dictionaries deliberately excluded terms identifying women as members of the anti-Soviet underground, erasing their roles as opponents of Soviet imperialism in Ukraine. Today, however, feminine titles denoting affiliation with military groups are formed using the same word-formation models as those used in the anti-Soviet underground. For example, *оунівка* (*ounivka*) 'servicewoman in the OUN' and *айдарівка* (*aĭdarivka*) 'servicewoman in the "Aidar" military battalion'.

5. Corpus Investigation

5.1. Method and Data

This section analyzes the dynamics of Ukrainian military-related feminine personal nouns in newspaper texts since the early 2000s. The list of terms was compiled using two methods: manually, by referring to the aforementioned lexicographic sources and online archives of Ukrainian periodicals, and automatically, through the GRAC corpus (Shvedova et al., 2017–2025).

In this study, Version 16 and 18 of the GRAC corpus were used. Version 16 was chosen for the charts due to its extensive collection of media texts, comprising over 140,000 texts across various styles and nearly 1.8 billion tokens. Version 18 was used to trace historical shifts in the frequency of specific words. GRAC, integrated with an NLP package and the Large Electronic Dictionary of Ukrainian (*Velykyĭ elektronnyĭ slovnyk ukraïns'koï movy*, VESUM), enables precise searches of feminine personal nouns using CQL queries with morphological tagging. Since most of these terms are recorded in VESUM, the following CQL lemma query was constructed for them:

```
[lemma="айдарівка|…|фронтовичка"]
```

New lexical items were classified as out-of-vocabulary (OOV), and regular expressions were used to identify them, for example:

```
[word=".*медсанбатів(ка|ку|кою|ки|ок|кам|ками|ках)"]
```

For some feminine derivatives that appear in multiple compound nouns and vary in spelling, regular expressions of the following type were added to the query:

```
[word=".*розвідниц.*|.*розвідниц.*"]
```

To exclude settlement names that overlap with feminine terms, two additional queries with morphological tags were created to enhance the dataset's accuracy:

([lemma="майорка"][tag="noun:anim.*"])
([lemma="воїнка"][tag="noun:anim.*"])

Detailed methods of word extraction and corpus analysis are available in previous studies (Starko & Synchak, 2023; Synchak, 2025).

GRAC's rich metadata and its capacity to create custom subcorpora make it an invaluable tool for diachronic analysis. This study focuses on newspaper texts from 2000 to 2022, using 23 subcorpora labeled JOU_2000 to JOU_2022, created by Vasyl Starko as part of our joint research (Starko & Synchak, 2023). The subcorpora range from 2.3 million tokens in 2000 to 255 million tokens in 2022.

A consolidated CQL query was run across each subcorpus (JOU_2000 to JOU_2022) within GRAC (see the results in Figure 1). To account for variations in subcorpus sizes, relative frequencies were calculated by dividing absolute frequencies by corpus size in tokens, ensuring consistent comparison across time.

5.2. Results

5.2.1. The Rise of Military-Related Feminine Titles

The frequency trends of military-related feminine titles in journalistic texts from the GRAC corpus are illustrated in Figure 1 below.[12]

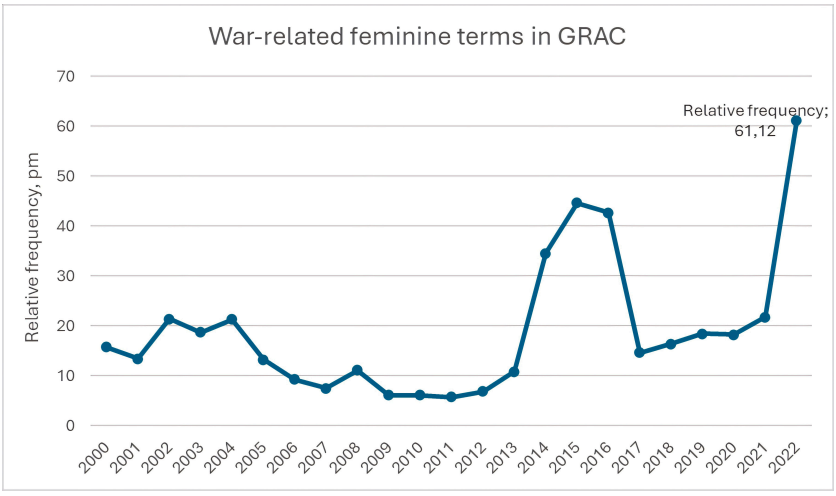


Fig. 1. Dynamics of 132 war-related feminine derivatives in GRAC

12 In a 2023 article on this topic (Starko & Synchak, 2023), growth dynamics was analyzed using a smaller set of military titles. This study, with a broader dataset, reveals slightly higher growth indicators.

The findings reveal a marked increase in the use of military-related feminine terms in the media, with two distinct growth spikes: the first from 2013 to 2015, followed by a decline until 2017, and the second – from 2021 to 2022. Both spikes correspond to periods of Russian aggression: the initial invasion in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022. Between 2013 and 2022, the frequency of feminine military-related terms in Ukrainian increased sixfold. Specifically, there was a threefold rise from 2013 to 2014, followed by a nearly twofold increase from 2014 to 2022. This substantial growth reflects shifting linguistic trends, likely driven by the increasing inclusion of women in military discourse. These changes are closely tied to broader sociopolitical transformations and the evolving sense of national identity, particularly in the context of the ongoing war with Russia. Furthermore, this trend corresponds to the broader expansion of military vocabulary during the same period, as outlined in the introductory section of this article.

The connection between the rise in feminine terms and turbulent events, such as the Russian invasion and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, is further supported by analyses of other thematic groups of feminine derivatives, including political, legal, and other occupational titles (Starko & Synchak, 2023; Synchak, 2025). This rise in feminization reflects broader societal shifts toward gender equality and pro-European political alignment. However, growth trends vary between thematic groups. For instance, legal feminine terms show a steady, gradual increase, while political feminine terms surged fivefold after 2015 (Synchak, 2025). Military titles, as demonstrated here, have grown in two rapid waves.

The lemma count for each subcorpus was determined by sorting concordance results in GRAC, with manual verification. To enhance our comprehension of the usage of feminine personal nouns for military roles, it is crucial to consider both their relative frequencies and the variety of terms, as indicated by the number of distinct lemmas. Figure 2 illustrates the use of military-related feminine terms in the newspaper corpus, highlighting the number of distinct lemmas.

While the use of military-related feminine terms in the media has grown in waves (Figure 1), the diversity of their lemmas increased steadily from 2000 to 2022, as shown in Figure 2. By 2022, the diversity of lemmas had increased more than fivefold compared to 2000 and threefold compared to 2014. This increase in the diversity of titles reflects the gradual rise in the number of women in the Ukrainian army. According to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, as of January 2024, the total number of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine reached 66,900, a fourfold increase since 2014 (Ministerstvo oborony Ukraïny, 2024). Thus, the increasing presence of women in the military appears to have contributed to the growing use and diversity of feminine terms referring to them in the media. However, further research is necessary to substantiate this connection.

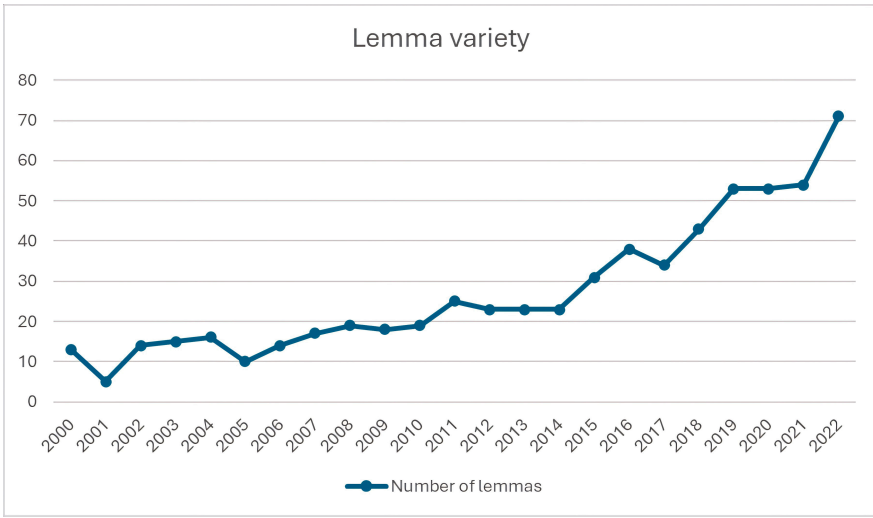


Fig. 2. Lemma variety among war-related feminine derivatives in GRAC

5.2.2. Specific Case: Exploring Military Ranks in GRAC

Since the Soviet era, the military in Ukraine has been one of the most masculinized and Russified sectors. Despite 127,000 Ukrainian women serving in various roles in the Red Army during World War II, their contributions were largely silenced afterward (Kobchenko, 2015). This erasure is evident not only in historical records but also through a quantitative analysis of feminine terms in dictionaries. The postwar focus on boosting the birth rate relegated women to reproductive roles, while the army became an exclusively male domain (H. Hrytsenko, 2019).

The Soviet army also played a key role in Russification. Even in predominantly Ukrainian-speaking cities, top military positions were mostly held by Russian-speaking men. The language of command and training was Russian, and soldiers were often deployed to remote regions to further enforce Russification (Wimbush & Alexiev, 1982, pp. 31–32). The Rand report illustrates how the Soviet armed forces strategically employed the Russian language as a means of subordinating and marginalizing national minorities. This linguistic imposition served not only to erase cultural identities but also to establish dominance, framing Russian as the superior language and other languages as inferior or irrelevant (Wimbush & Alexiev, 1982, pp. 31–32).

Given this context, it is expected that military ranks and titles will both resist feminization and show traces of Russification. For example, newly coined feminine military-related terms, such as *полковниця* (*polkovnytsia*) 'female colonel' and *офіцерка* (*ofitserka*) 'female officer', are fundamental in news reporting. However, they remain uncommon in official Ukrainian military discourse, where the previously mentioned masculinized alternatives still prevail. Further analysis will explore these dynamics in more detail.

Preliminary observations lend support to this hypothesis. Many media outlets refer to Olena Stepaniv (1892–1963) using masculinized binomials, such as *перша жінка-офіцер у світі* (*persha zhinka-ofitser u sviti*), lit. 'the first (f) woman-officer (m) in the world'. Only a few sources use feminine terms, describing her as one of the first Ukrainian female soldiers (*одна з перших українських воячок* (*odna z pershykh ukraïns'kykh voiachok*)) or as Ukraine's first female officer (*перша в історії України офіцерка на військовій службі* (*persha v istorii Ukraïny ofitserka na viis'kovii sluzhbi*)). This tendency suggests that women in the military, particularly in senior roles, may be more commonly referenced by masculinized titles than by feminine ones.

To test the hypothesis regarding resistance to feminization and traces of Russification in military ranks, I created two CQL queries: one for all feminine forms of military ranks and titles (18 in total), and the other for their masculinized alternatives (see Figure 3). The second query includes expressions such as *жінка-лейтенант* (*zhinka-leĭtenant*) 'woman-lieutenant', *пані лейтенант* (*pani leĭtenant*) 'madam lieutenant', and syntactic constructions that combine a grammatically masculine noun with a feminine past tense form, e.g. *лейтенант зазначила* (*leĭtenant zaznachyla*) 'lieutenant (m) noted (f)'. To search for these variations, I used a query with morphological tagging:

```
[word="жін.*-лейтенант.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="лейтенант"])|([lemma="лейтен
ант"] [tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])
```

CQL

```
[lemma="солдатка | офіцерка | полковниця | лейтенантка | генералка | сержантка | капітанка | артилеристка | хорунжа | підполковниця | поручниця | підпоручиця | прапорщиця"] | [word=".*адміралк.* | .*адміралок.*"] | ([lemma="майорка"][tag="noun:anim.*"]) | ([lemma="воїнка"][tag="noun:anim.*"])
```

CQL

```
[word="жін.*-солдат.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="солдат"])|
([lemma="солдат"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*-офіцер.*"]|
([lemma="пані"][lemma="офіцер"])|([lemma="офіцер"][tag="verb.*:
past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*-полковник.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma=
"полковник"])|([lemma="полковник"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])|
[word="жін.*-лейтенант.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="лейтенант"])|
([lemma="лейтенант"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])|
[word="жін.*генерал.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="генерал"])|
([lemma="генерал"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])|
[word="жін.*сержант.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="сержант"])|
([lemma="сержант"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*-
капітан.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="капітан"])|([lemma="капітан"]
[tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*підполковник.*"]|
([lemma="пані"][lemma="підполковник"])|([lemma="підполковник"]
[tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*адмірал.*"]|([lemma="пані"]
[lemma="адмірал"])|([lemma="адмірал"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])|
[word="жін.*прапорщик.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="прапорщик"])|
([lemma="прапорщик"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*-
майор.*"]|([lemma="пані"][lemma="майор"])|([lemma="майор"]
[tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])[word="жін.*-воїн.*"]|([lemma="пані"]
[lemma="воїн"])|([lemma="воїн"][tag="verb.*:past:f:.*"])
```

Fig. 3. Exploring military ranks in GRAC-16

5.2.3. Assessing the Use of Alternative Forms

The comparison of feminized and masculinized military ranks used to refer to women in the media revealed surprising results. As shown in Figure 4, there has been a fierce competition between feminine terms and their masculinized counterparts. From 2002 to 2018, masculinized terms consistently dominated, with notable peaks, except during the Orange Revolution in 2004. However, since 2018, the trend has shifted significantly in favor of feminine military terms for women in the armed forces. This shift indicates that feminization has gradually overtaken the Soviet-era practice, at least in media discourse. It is worth noting, however, that an analysis of actual military documentation might produce different findings.

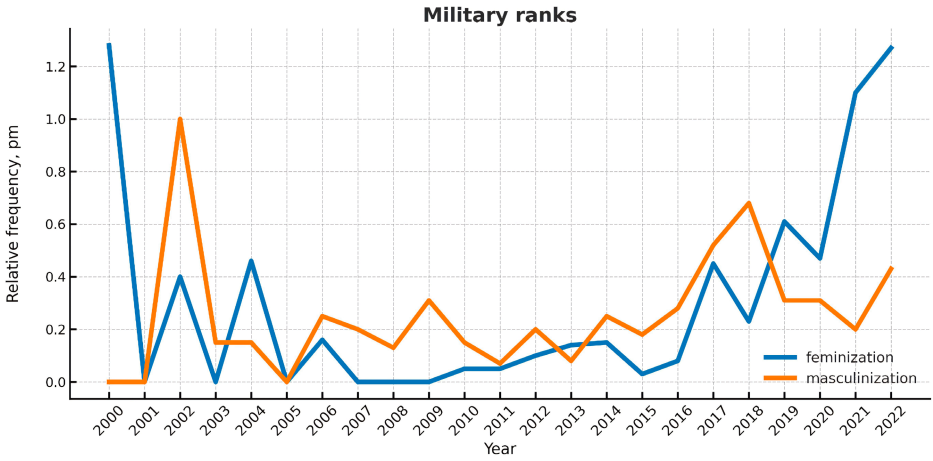


Fig. 4. GRAC usage: assessing the use of alternative forms in military ranks in the media

The struggle for appropriate forms varies across each military title. As shown in Figure 5, the dynamics differ for senior military positions. Specifically, for the rank of general, the debate is still ongoing. Until 2022, masculinized forms gained ground, but in 2022, their prevalence leveled off, matching that of the feminine term.

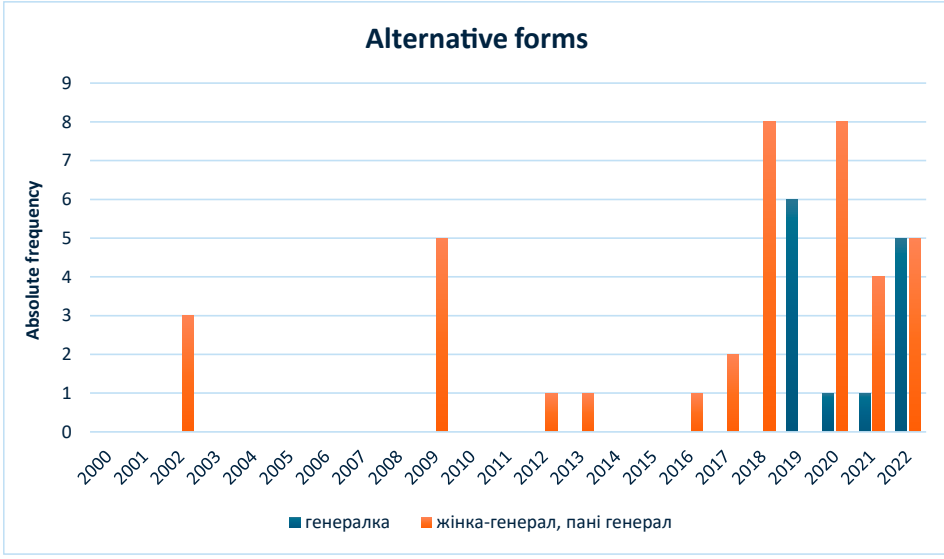


Fig. 5. GRAC usage: assessing the use of alternative forms for *генералка* (*heneralka*) 'female general'

Analyzing Figures 4 and 5, it is important to highlight the significant competition between feminized and masculinized terms used in the media to refer to women in the military.

As shown in Figure 4, feminized forms have been used more frequently than their masculinized counterparts, with this trend steadily increasing since 2018. This linguistic shift is a significant marker of the decolonization of military terminology in Ukraine, driven by the increasing influence of gender-sensitive media policies.

A detailed analysis of the context reveals that media texts frequently intertwine feminized and masculinized forms within the same report. Notably, feminine titles are often strategically used in headlines to capture attention, while the body of the text tends to adhere to the Soviet-era convention of masculinizing official military positions and ranks.

For instance, the headline *47-річна львів'янка стала першою бригадною генералкою ЗСУ* (*47-richna l'vivianka stala pershoiu bryhadnoiu heneralkoiu ZSU* '47-Year-Old Lviv Woman Becomes the First (f) Brigadier (f) General (f) in the Armed Forces of Ukraine') employs feminized forms to emphasize the groundbreaking nature of the promotion. However, the accompanying text reverts to the traditional masculinized terminology: *Президент Володимир Зеленський присвоїв командувачці Медичних сил Збройних сил України Тетяні Остащенко чергове військове звання вищого офіцерського складу – бригадний генерал* (*Prezydent Volodymyr Zelens'kyĭ prysvoïv komanduvachtsi Medychnykh syl Zbroĭnykh syl Ukraïny Tetiani Ostashchenko cherhove viĭs'kove zvannia vyshchoho ofitsers'koho skladu – bryhadnyĭ heneral*) 'President Volodymyr Zelenskyi has promoted Tetiana Ostashchenko, Commander (f) of the Medical Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, to the senior officer rank of Brigadier (m) General (m)'.

This pattern highlights the tension between emerging gender-sensitive language practices and deeply rooted Soviet-era standardization, reflecting broader sociopolitical shifts in Ukrainian public discourse. The strategic use of feminized forms in headlines signals an effort to recognize and legitimize women's roles in the military, while the continued use of masculinized terms in formal descriptions underscores the persistence of Soviet-era conventions. This dynamic illustrates how the decolonization of military discourse in Ukraine is not only a linguistic shift but also a broader ideological renegotiation, where efforts to challenge colonial legacies coexist with deeply ingrained institutional norms.

5.2.4. Political Inclination toward De-Russification

The feminization of military ranks not only breaks from the Soviet tradition of masculinization but also signifies a shift toward de-Russification at the level of individual titles. Previous fieldwork on the language of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States reveals that Ukrainians who fled Soviet occupation after World War II associated *солдат* (*soldat*) 'soldier' and *солдатка* (*soldatka*) 'female soldier' with Soviet forces, perceiving these terms negatively as 'Russian (female) soldier'. As one respondent noted, "We didn't really use *солдат* 'soldier' – in my time, it was considered a Soviet word" (Dobko, 2023).

Nevertheless, data from the GRAC-18 corpus show that the feminine equivalent *солдатка* (*soldatka*) appears in two senses: predominantly as 'soldier's wife' (89%) and, less frequently, as 'female soldier' (11%). The former meaning, attested since 1860, aligns with Soviet dictionary entries, while isolated instances of the latter emerged in 1930–1970 (15%).

However, since 2015, usage in the 'female soldier' sense has surged (85%), indicating that the term has undergone a semantic shift, with its feminization increasingly associated with women's active military roles rather than traditional spousal identity. For example, *солдатка Ярина Чорногуз видала збірку поезій прямо з передової* (*soldatka Iaryna Chornohuz vydala zbirku poezii priamo z peredovoi*) 'female soldier Iaryna Chornohuz published a collection of poetry right from the front line' (*Ukraïns'ka Pravda*, 2023).

As shown in Figure 6, the term *солдатка* (*soldatka*) is now less frequently used than the broader *військовослужбовиця* (*viis'kovosluzhbovytsia*) 'servicewoman', which applies to women in military service regardless of rank or role, including *артрозвідниця* (*artrozvidnytsia*) 'female artillery scout' and *адміралка* (*admiralka*) 'female admiral' (see WDUF, 2022). The term *військовослужбовиця* first appeared in media texts in 2015 and had surpassed *солдатка* in frequency by 2017–2018. In media texts, both terms sometimes function as contextual synonyms but also differ stylistically: *солдатка* appears primarily in fiction and academic discourse, while *військовослужбовиця* is more common in media and non-fiction. Official documents continue to favor masculinized forms for women in the army, while media reports often quote them but use feminized titles, e.g. *старша солдатка* (*starsha soldatka*) 'senior female soldier' instead of the original *старший солдат* (*starshyi soldat*) 'senior soldier'.

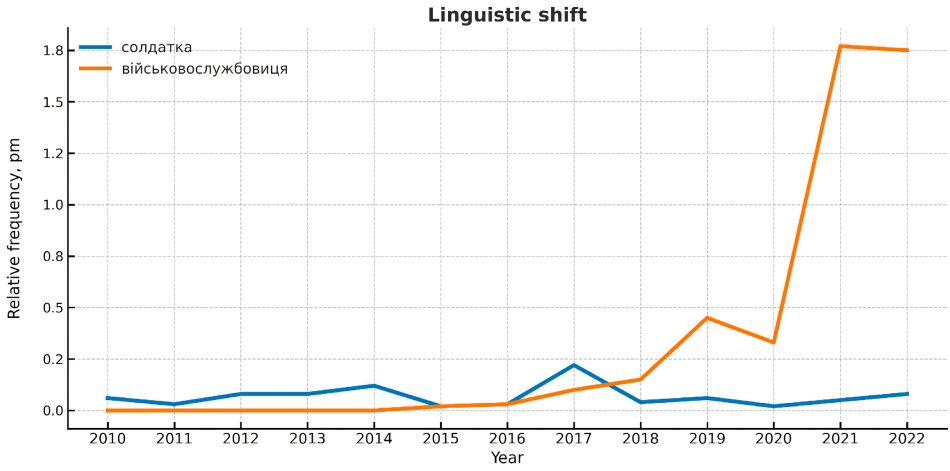


Fig. 6. GRAC usage: *солдатка* (*soldatka*) 'female soldier' vs. *військовослужбовиця* (*viis'kovosluzhbovytsia*) 'servicewoman'

Both terms in Figure 6 underscore the role of feminization in the decolonization of military terminology. The emergence of *військовослужбовиця* signals a departure from the Soviet-era masculine *військовослужбовець* 'serviceman', reflecting the growing visibility of women in the armed forces. Likewise, the revival of *солдатка* as a term for a female soldier – rather than as an andronymic form – illustrates broader linguistic and social shifts toward gender inclusivity. In both cases, feminization serves as a mechanism of decolonization.

An interesting example of (de-)Russification is the case of the terms *навідниця* (*navidnytsia*) and *наводчиця* (*navodchytsia*), both referring to a female gunner. From a modern perspective, *навідниця* represents de-Russification, while *наводчиця* (comparable to the Russian *наводчица*, *navodchitsa*) reflects Russification. The fact that both terms are included in SUM-11 suggests that the compilers navigated the tension between party mandates to align Ukrainian with Russian and their goal of preserving a distinct Ukrainian term. By including both words, they effectively balanced these competing priorities. Another lexicographical strategy was to label certain terms as colloquial or dialectal, thereby allowing them to remain in the lexicon (Karavans′kyĭ, 1992).

The current corpus data in Figure 7 demonstrate that the de-Russified term *навідниця* (*navidnytsia*) has significantly overtaken the Russified form *наводчиця* (*navodchytsia*) for referring to a 'female gunner'. Since these terms are polysemous – denoting both a female gunner and a traitor who guides enemy attacks – the military-related meanings were manually identified and separated from other uses for each year represented in the chart. This process was manageable due to the limited sample size. The findings illustrate how the authentic Ukrainian military term has come to dominate over its Russified counterpart.

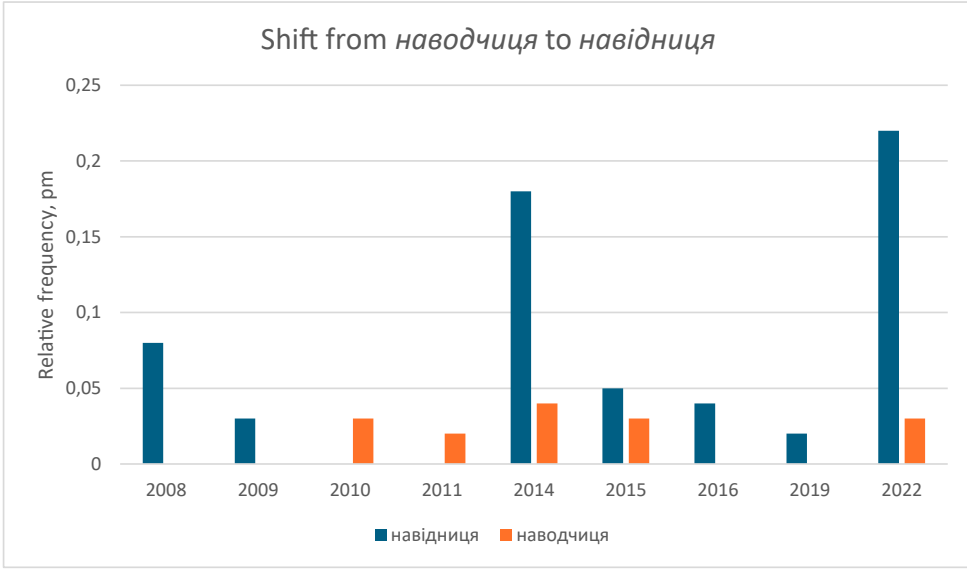


Fig. 7. GRAC usage: *навідниця* (*navidnytsia*) vs. *наводчиця* (*navodchytsia*) 'female gunner'

However, de-Russification is not always the dominant trend. For instance, between the feminine derivatives *летунка* (*letunka*) and *льотчиця* (*l′otchytsia*) for 'female pilot', the Soviet-era term *льотчиця* remains dominant, despite *летунка* being more commonly used in nationally oriented media from 1926 to 1966.

An automated search of the online archive of Ukrainian periodicals Libraria.ua revealed that from 1926 to 1966, several Lviv-based periodicals (such as *Dilo* [The Deed], *Ukraïns′ki visti* [Ukrainian News], *Pravda* [Truth], *Pratsia* [Labor] (the organ of the Ukrainian Labor Party), and *Do peremohy* [To Victory] (a weekly issued by the Military Administration of Galicia for Volunteers of the Rifle Division Galicia)), as well as the first Ukrainian-language newspaper in Odesa, *Narodnia sprava* [People's Cause], used the term *летунка* to refer to 'female pilot'. The search identified 778 instances of the term, including occasional misprints.

In contrast, a search for the term *льотчиця* on this resource yielded fewer, yet more accurate results, with only 41 instances. These occurrences span from 1937 to 1987, primarily in publications from Central, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine, including cities like Kyiv, Nizhyn, Smila, Kharkiv, Poltava, Kirovohrad, and Voznesensk. Notably, the term was predominantly used in publications aligned with Soviet party propaganda, such as *Literaturna hazeta* [Literary Newspaper] (the official organ of the union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine), *Sportyvna hazeta* [Sports Newspaper], *Radians′kyĭ sport* [Soviet Sport], and *Molodniak* [The Young Generation] (a literary and artistic magazine staffed by party functionaries).

These examples illustrate two distinct standards of the Ukrainian language. The Western Ukrainian standard preserved authentic Ukrainian words, often resembling cognates in other Slavic languages (e.g. Polish *lotniczka*, Slovak *letkyňa*, and Czech *letkyně* share a similar root with *летунка*). In contrast, the Central or Southeastern standard, influenced by Soviet language policies in the 1930s, began to align more closely with Russian. Notably, the Western Ukrainian tradition, as reflected in the use of *летунка*, persisted until 1966, with its decline likely linked to the repression of the Sixtiers (*shistdesiatnyky*),[13] which began in 1965. Obviously, further research is needed to confirm these suggestions and timeframes.

The data from the GRAC-18 corpus confirm that since the 1930s, the term *льотчиця* began to dominate. Specifically, in texts of various styles up to 2023, it records 5,556 absolute occurrences (3.05 pm). In contrast, the term *летунка* (29 absolute occurrences, 0.02 pm) appears only a few times in publications from the 1940s, and then reappears from 2013 to 2018, mainly to refer to the Ukrainian pilot Nadiia Savchenko, who was captured by Russian forces. Moreover, more than half of these occurrences are found in the diaspora newspaper *Svoboda*. These examples demonstrate that the language of Ukrainian diaspora periodicals in the United States has preserved certain feminine terms from the pre-Soviet Western Ukrainian standard. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that *летунка* will regain widespread use alongside the dominant Soviet-era term *льотчиця*. This could only occur if the Ukrainian standard more closely aligned with the diaspora standard.

13 "The Sixtiers" (*шістдесятники*) designates a Ukrainian literary generation that emerged during Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and peaked in the early 1960s. Its prominent figures included Lina Kostenko, Vasyl Symonenko, Ivan Drach, Valerii Shevchuk, and Ivan Dziuba. The movement opposed the socialist realist dogma through formal experimentation, thematic renewal, and the moral critique of Stalinism. The movement was repressed from the mid-1960s and later contributed significantly to underground publishing activity (*samvydav*) and cultural opposition (*Entsyklopediia Ukraïny v interneti / Internet encyclopedia of Ukraine*, n.d.).

The prevalence of *льотчиця* over *летунка*, despite the latter's historical usage in nationally oriented media, underscores the enduring influence of Soviet-era terminology. This contrast between Western Ukrainian and Soviet-influenced standards reflects broader tensions in Ukrainian linguistic development, where ideological and political factors have shaped vocabulary choices. While recent efforts to restore pre-Soviet linguistic traditions continue, the historical suppression of certain terms has left a lasting imprint. Further research is needed to explore whether contemporary language policies and sociopolitical shifts might facilitate the reintegration of historically authentic Ukrainian terms into modern usage.

6. Concluding Remarks

This article addresses military-related language within the framework of Ukraine's linguistic decolonization solely because Russia's war against Ukraine renders this dimension unavoidable. The war highlights the urgency of reassessing the legacy of Russian linguistic dominance and Soviet-era language policy in Ukraine's language planning and standardization.

The evolving use of feminine terms for women in military discourse, such as those seen in official presidential addresses like *Захисники та захисниці України!* (*Zakhysnyky ta zakhysnytsi Ukraïny!*) 'Defenders (m) and defenders (f) of Ukraine!' (*Novorichne pryvitannia Prezydenta Ukraïny*, 2021), represents significant progress in the country's efforts toward gender equality. Despite this, Ukraine's national Classification of Occupations remains significantly behind in addressing gender parity, especially within the armed forces, underscoring the challenge of dismantling Soviet-era linguistic norms. By redefining language norms, Ukraine is not only reclaiming its linguistic autonomy from Russian imperial influence but also promoting values of equality and dignity, central to decolonial thought. The integration of feminine terms into military and strategic communications is a step forward, but continued progress is necessary, particularly in the aftermath of the war, to prevent historical setbacks.

Language reform alone is insufficient to achieve gender equality. It must be part of a broader systemic approach, integrating institutional and societal changes to ensure women's full participation and visibility across all sectors, including the military. Linguistic reforms should complement wider social and legal transformations to drive meaningful progress.

Preparations for European Union accession have accelerated decolonization in the legal field more than in language standardization. Legal reforms, particularly those advancing gender equality, are moving toward greater autonomy. In contrast, language standardization remains hindered by Soviet-era norms, slowing the redefinition of Ukraine's linguistic identity. This disparity underscores the complexity of decolonization, where legal progress often outpaces the gradual dismantling of entrenched colonial linguistic structures.

The media emerges as an exception, leading the feminization of language across domains and building on the advances of the legal field. By assuming a norm-defining role traditionally reserved for literary language, Ukrainian media has become a key driver of

gender-sensitive language, facilitating its practical adoption. This shift positions the media as a pivotal force in shaping linguistic norms and fostering societal transformation toward inclusivity.

The growing inclusion of women in military discourse reflects shifting linguistic trends closely tied to Ukraine's sociopolitical transformation and evolving sense of national identity, particularly in the context of the ongoing war with Russia. A comparison of feminized and masculinized military ranks used to designate women in media discourse reveals a complex evolution. From 2002 to 2018, masculinized terms dominated, reflecting Soviet-era language norms. However, since 2018, feminized military terms have gained prominence, signaling a gradual departure from these practices in media discourse.

This shift highlights broader sociopolitical changes, where gender-sensitive language practices challenge long-standing conventions. The use of feminized forms in headlines represents a deliberate effort to recognize and legitimize women's roles in the military, while the continued use of masculinized terms in formal contexts reflects the lingering influence of Soviet norms. Ultimately, this dynamic illustrates Ukraine's ongoing decolonization of military discourse, where the push to dismantle colonial legacies intersects with the persistence of institutional norms, reflecting a broader ideological renegotiation in the nation's evolving public and political landscape.

Abbreviations

SUM-11 – *Slovnyk ukraïns′koï movy* (1970–1980) (Vols. 1–11).

WDUF – *Vebslovnyk zhinochykh nazv ukraïns′koï movy* (Synchak, 2022).

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Wojna, kobiety i zmiany językowe. Badanie korpusowe ukraińskich żeńskich terminów związanych z wojskiem – implikacje dekolonialne

Abstrakt

W artykule przeanalizowano ewolucję użycia ukraińskich żeńskich rzeczowników osobowych związanych z wojskiem, które wzmogło się w czasie trwającej od 2014 roku wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej, choć korzenie tego zjawiska sięgają I i II wojny światowej. Korzystając z danych z Internetowego Słownika Ukraińskich Żeńskich Rzeczowników Osobowych (r2u.org.ua, 2022) oraz z Ogólnego Korpusu Języka Ukraińskiego z Adnotacjami Regionalnymi (General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian, GRAC), w pracy przeanalizowano 132 terminy żeńskie odnoszące się do ról wojskowych, porównując je z hasłami z jedenastotomowego słownika języka ukraińskiego z czasów radzieckich (SUM-11, 1970–1980) i czasopismami ukraińskimi. Diachroniczna analiza korpusowa ukraińskiego dyskursu medialnego wskazuje na sześciokrotny wzrost częstotliwości występowania żeńskich terminów w odniesieniu do wojska od 2013 roku i trzykrotny wzrost ich różnorodności, co świadczy o znacznej adaptacji językowej. Ich analiza porównawcza z odpowiadającymi im formami męskimi pokazuje wyraźną tendencję zarówno do uzyskania parytetu płci, jak i derusyfikacji. Tradycyjnie zmaskulinizowany i zrusyfikowany sektor wojskowy ulega znaczącej feminizacji w mediach, co odzwierciedla wysiłki na rzecz derusyfikacji i promowania parytetu płci i inkluzywności w języku – zjawiska, które niosą ze sobą wyraźne implikacje dekolonialne.

Słowa kluczowe: żeńskie rzeczowniki osobowe; stopnie wojskowe; maskulinizacja; zmiana językowa; dekolonizacja; Internetowy Słownik Ukraińskich Żeńskich Rzeczowników Osobowych; Ogólny Korpus Języka Ukraińskiego z Adnotacjami Regionalnymi (GRAC)

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