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Forced Migration and Family Language Policy: The Ukrainian Experience of Language

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of forced migration on family language policy among Ukrainian families, with a particular focus on women who have relocated to Poland with their children due to the war in Ukraine. Utilizing data from in-depth interviews, it explores the language situation in refugee families. The analysis concentrates on changes in language behaviour caused by shifts in emotional attitudes towards their language repertoire, due to the traumatic experience of war. It is noteworthy that there has been an increase in the use of the Ukrainian language in family communication, an intentional familiarization of children with the linguistic situation in Ukraine, and a conscious avoidance of the Russian language in public places abroad. Despite these trends, some families continue to predominantly use Russian at home as the primary language for family communication, or they frequently engage in language code-switching. The study examines patterns of changes in language behaviour resulting from the rejection of the Russian language in daily communication, highlighting politically motivated decisions to alter language use and the corresponding strategies of language behaviour. These changes in adults' speech behaviour significantly affect the speech practices of children, one manifestation of which is language attrition. Special attention is given to the phenomenon of language shame and self-shame associated with the use or non-use of the Russian language, the evolution of language attitudes, and their influence on language choice in family language practices.
Keywords: bilingualism; multilingualism; family language policy; language behaviour; language shift; language attitudes; language shaming

1 Background

The Russian aggression and full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022 triggered one of the largest migration crises in Europe in recent decades. This conflict has forced millions of Ukrainians, primarily women and children, to seek temporary protection within the European Union. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of mid-2023, over 8 million Ukrainians had fled to various European countries, making it one of the most significant refugee movements in Europe since World War II (UNHCR, 2023). The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) also reported that the majority of those displaced were women and children, who accounted for approximately 90% of the registered refugees (EUAA, 2023). As a result, the displaced population has faced significant linguistic challenges that have affected their language adaptation, behaviour, and the expansion of their language repertoire, subsequently influencing family language policy and family communication practices. Research has shown that language adaptation for migrants often involves the necessity to learn and use the language of the host country, which can lead to shifts in language use within the family (Pauwels, 2016; Yağmur et

al., 2012). This process can be particularly challenging for families as they navigate new social and educational systems, where language plays a key role in integration and access to services (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Esser, 2006). Research indicates that migrant children's language adaptation is crucial for their integration into new schools and communities (Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014).

The study of family language policy (FLP) gained prominence in the early 2000s as researchers recognized that language decisions extend beyond formal institutions to the actions of communities and individuals. This shift emphasized that while institutional policies play a role, language choices are often shaped by everyday interactions and the unique contexts of family life. Early research (King & Fogle, 2006; King et al., 2008; Okita, 2002; Schwartz, 2010) highlighted how families create and implement their own language policies at the micro level. Spolsky's (2004) influential model of language policy has since been widely adopted to explore family language practices, outlining three key components: language beliefs (ideologies), language management, and language practices. Language beliefs include ideas about language use and the expectations surrounding who should speak which language. Language management involves efforts taken to influence these practices, such as fostering a conducive environment for using a particular language at home, enrolling children in language classes, or encouraging interactions with speakers of the desired language. Parents employ various techniques, such as paraphrasing or providing equivalents in their native language (Aksinovits & Verschik, 2024), to guide their children's language use. According to Curdt-Christiansen (2018), language practices refer to how language is used in everyday life. Discrepancies often arise between a family's beliefs, management efforts, and actual practices (Verschik & Argus, 2023). For instance, parents might aspire to maintain consistent language choices but find themselves naturally switching between languages in different contexts. As a result, scholars have called for integrating Spolsky's (2004) FLP model into broader discussions of the sociolinguistic, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political influences on family language practices.

Recent studies have drawn attention to the evolving language ideologies within Ukrainian families affected by forced migration, particularly those characterized by Russian–Ukrainian bilingualism. Research on migration and bilingualism (Montrul, 2016; Pavlenko, 2005) suggests that migration often leads to shifts in language attitudes as families reassess their linguistic practices. For many Ukrainian families, what was once a flexible use of both Ukrainian and Russian has increasingly shifted towards a deliberate effort to prioritize Ukrainian, especially in response to the socio-political pressures brought about by the war. Parents are consciously adopting strategies to promote Ukrainian within the household, aiming to strengthen their children's identification with Ukrainian culture and reduce the use of Russian. These strategies are not necessarily aimed at inducing the linguistic attrition of Russian, but as Grosjean (2008) notes, such shifts in language practices can unintentionally lead to a reduction in proficiency in the lesser-used language over time.

In the specific context of Ukrainian migration, the linguistic background of many migrants introduces an additional layer of complexity. A significant number of Ukrainians are Ukrainian–Russian bilinguals, with Russian historically serving as the dominant language in both functional and personal domains. This bilingualism reflects broader patterns in Ukraine, where regional and socio-political factors have long influenced language use and preferences (Bilaniuk, 2010; Kulyk, 2018). The shift in language ideologies and the re-evaluation of Russian's role within the family have intensified in the wake of forced migration, as families reassess their language practices amid new cultural and political environments (Nedashkivska, 2018; Pavlenko, 2008). However, the ongoing war has prompted a re-evaluation of language attitudes, particularly regarding the continued use of Russian. For many Ukrainian migrants, the conflict has heightened the need to regulate their language choices more carefully, especially in public settings, where language has taken on stronger political and emotional significance. As Kulyk (2018) and Pavlenko (2021) point out, language in post-war Ukraine has become a marker of national identity, and the use of Russian is now closely tied to perceptions of loyalty and identity. This reassessment significantly influ-

ences parental strategies, as families navigate the socio–political landscape and aim to reinforce a Ukrainian identity in response to aggression from a Russian-speaking adversary. Parents are reconsidering their language practices, particularly when it comes to decisions about the use or non-use of Russian in interactions with their children and in public spaces. This process is complex and involves balancing a variety of factors, including the desire to maintain Ukrainian as a central part of the family's identity while navigating bilingualism. While earlier research (Bilaniuk, 2010; Pavlenko, 2008) provided insights into the nature of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism before the war, the current context introduces new challenges, particularly regarding how families reevaluate their language practices considering socio-political changes. The evolving socio-political situation, as Kulyk (2018) notes, has led to heightened awareness about the symbolic power of language, turning what was once a flexible coordination of Ukrainian and Russian into a more deliberate effort to prioritize Ukrainian. Although this shift in language practices is still largely in the phase of re-evaluation, it reflects a growing desire to assert a stronger Ukrainian identity. This process is not only shaped by personal choices, but is also deeply influenced by external political pressures and societal expectations. For many families, the act of reducing the use of Russian is seen to distance themselves from the aggressor and to strengthen their connection to Ukrainian culture. These decisions are not simply pragmatic; they are also symbolic, reflecting a complex interplay between language, identity, and national loyalty during a time of war.

Language attitudes – the beliefs and feelings individuals hold about different languages and their speakers – play a crucial role in this re-evaluation process. These attitudes can influence language choices, preferences, and policies within families, shaping how languages are maintained or shifted in different contexts (Garrett, 2010). In the case of Ukrainian migrants, positive attitudes towards the Ukrainian language are often reinforced by the current socio-political climate, which associates the use of Ukrainian with national solidarity and resilience. As a result, many families prioritize Ukrainian in their communication and educational practices, viewing it as a means of fostering cultural identity and strengthening ties to their homeland. Conversely, negative attitudes toward the use of Russian, exacerbated by the aggression, contribute to significant changes in language use within families and in public interactions. These shifts are part of a broader phenomenon in which language choices are influenced by socio-political factors, as observed in cases of language shift due to conflict and migration (Kulyk, 2018; Makarova & Morozovskaia, 2023). Recent research indicates that language adaptation among refugees not only involves acquiring the host country's language, but also potentially expanding their linguistic repertoire to include additional languages due to interactions within diverse migrant communities (Gazzola et al., 2018; Makarova & Morozovskaia, 2023). These dynamics highlight the complexity of language practices for migrants who must navigate multiple linguistic and cultural settings. For Ukrainian families, this might mean learning languages prevalent in their new environments. The complexity of this process is compounded by the need to maintain Ukrainian as a means of preserving cultural identity and heritage. In conclusion, the Ukrainian experience of forced migration underscores the intricate relationship between migration, language policy, and identity. As millions of Ukrainians navigate their new lives in the EU, the re-evaluation of their language practices will play a critical role in shaping their integration and cultural preservation efforts. This unique situation highlights the need for comprehensive support mechanisms that consider the multifaceted nature of language adaptation in forced migration contexts.

The study aims to investigate the linguistic changes occurring within multilingual Ukrainian migrant families, focusing on their FLP and educational strategies. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following question: How does forced migration influence language behaviour, family language policy, and language attitudes among multilingual Ukrainian families, particularly regarding the use of Ukrainian, Russian, and the host country's language? Understanding these linguistic shifts is vital for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on how forced migration impacts language choices, behaviours, and ideologies within families. Secondly, it provides insights into the parenting strategies adopted by families to balance the acquisition of the host country's language, the maintenance of Ukrainian, and the re-evaluation of Russian use. This understanding is es-

sential for developing effective support systems for migrant families, helping them navigate their new linguistic environments while preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage. Understanding these linguistic shifts is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights how forced migration influences not only the family's use of Ukrainian and Russian, but also their acquisition of Polish and other foreign languages. Secondly, it provides insights into the parenting strategies employed by families to balance the acquisition of the host country's language, the maintenance of Ukrainian, and the re-evaluation of Russian in light of current socio-political contexts. This understanding is essential for developing effective support systems for migrant families, helping them navigate their new linguistic environments while preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage.

2 The State of Research

The linguistic landscape of independent Ukraine has been shaped by a complex sociolinguistic environment, heavily influenced by historical legacies and fluctuating language policies. Over time, the relative dominance of Ukrainian and Russian has shifted significantly due to these factors. Despite continuous efforts to promote Ukrainian as the state language, Russian has retained substantial communicative power, particularly in urban centres. For example, a 2022 study conducted in Kyiv, involving over 22,000 families, found that nearly half of the parents reported Russian as their children's native language (Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, 2023). However, this trend is not uniform across the country. Research has shown that language practices vary significantly across regions, with eastern Ukraine demonstrating stronger Russian language use, while Ukrainian predominates in the west (Hentschel & Palinska, 2022; Levchuk, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2020; Masenko, 2010, 2011; Pidkuimukha, 2022). This regional variation underscores the need for a more comprehensive analysis of language use, particularly in the context of forced migration due to the ongoing war.

The war has notably accelerated changes in language dynamics, with an increasing shift toward the use of Ukrainian in both public and private spheres. Scholars have long examined the sociolinguistic dynamics of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism, code-switching, and language mixing over extended periods, but recent developments have intensified these trends. The political scientist Kulyk (2024) has explored how negative perceptions of the Russian language, driven by its association with the aggressor, are fostering a shift towards Ukrainian. As a result, many bilingual Ukrainians are deliberately choosing Ukrainian to express national solidarity, making it the preferred language in public life, and this shift is beginning to influence private language use as well.

The state's approach to managing this bilingualism has often been viewed as a transitional phase that requires active intervention. This perspective is reflected in the State Target National and Cultural Program for Ensuring the Comprehensive Development and Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language in All Spheres of Public Life for the Period until 2030 (*Kabinet Ministriv Ukraïny: Rozporiadzhennia vid 15 bereznia 2024 r. № 243-r Kyïv*, 2024), adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in March 2024. The program aims to rectify the long-term effects of Russification by fostering the use of Ukrainian in all public spheres and promoting the language globally. Crucially, the program recognizes the need for changes in family language policy, as it emphasizes that Ukrainian should be the primary language of communication in everyday life and the language of interethnic communication in Ukraine. However, the program highlights a significant gap: although 77.8% of Ukraine's population is ethnically Ukrainian, only 58% of the total population speaks Ukrainian at home and in everyday life. The document stresses that this situation needs to be changed, yet it does not specify how the state will influence the sphere of private communication in order to encourage the use of Ukrainian within the family.

This ambiguity regarding the influence on private communication makes the study of FLP crucial, particularly in refugee families in which the interplay between languages is often more complex due to external pressures and sociopolitical circumstances. Despite substantial legislative support for Ukrainian, family language practices are shaped by a range of factors, including

personal identity, regional context, and socio-political events. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the goals set by the state program and for recognizing the challenges faced by multilingual families in adjusting their language use.

The study of FLP – the ways in which families manage and negotiate their language use – remains an area requiring deeper exploration. Family language practices play a critical role in shaping language ideologies and everyday communication within multilingual households (Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, 2020, 2022, 2023). This article builds on Spolsky's (2004, 2009) foundational work on family language policy, which identifies three core components: language ideologies, language management, and language practices. These components provide a useful framework for examining how families navigate the complexities of maintaining Ukrainian, reconsidering the use of Russian, and learning new languages in migration contexts. While King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (King et al., 2008) have also explored these components, this study emphasizes Spolsky's framework to contextualize the unique linguistic dynamics of Ukrainian migrant families.

During the war, researchers began to study FLP more actively, particularly in relation to changes in language attitudes and usage within bilingual and multilingual Ukrainian families (see Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2024).

The linguistic shifts resulting from forced migration are especially evident in the language strategies employed by Ukrainian families who have relocated to Poland. These families are not only navigating the acquisition of Polish, the host country's language, but are also reassessing their use of Russian and Ukrainian within the family. By focusing on how multilingual families manage these changes, this research contributes to a better understanding of the evolving language practices and policies at both the family and societal levels.

3 Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, drawing from in-depth in-person interviews to explore the language behaviours and family language policies among Ukrainian refugee families who have relocated to Poland due to the ongoing war. The methodology is designed to capture the emotional, social, and linguistic dimensions of forced migration, focusing particularly on women raising children under these conditions. Given the complexity of family language policy and the personal nature of language use, a qualitative research design was deemed the most appropriate. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, capturing the nuances of how forced migration influences language choices, behaviours, and policies within families. The study adopts a phenomenological approach in order to understand the lived experiences of Ukrainian women navigating the challenges of migration while managing their children's language development and education. Phenomenological studies are well-suited for research that seeks to understand individuals' lived experiences in relation to a specific phenomenon. This design has been widely used in sociolinguistics to explore language attitudes, identity, and behaviours under circumstances of sociopolitical upheaval (Cummins, 2000; Pavlenko, 2005). The current study builds upon this tradition, examining how migration-related trauma and identity re-evaluation influence language choices within families.

The study involved semi-structured interviews with 10 Ukrainian women between the ages of 27 and 43 who have relocated to Poland with their children. Recruitment was conducted through a Ukrainian preschool group chat in Krakow, where participants were invited to voluntarily share their experiences. All interviews were conducted in Ukrainian, and participants were informed of their right to anonymity. These women currently reside in Krakow (as of spring 2023) and are raising preschool children attending kindergarten, with some also caring for younger and older children (see Table 1).

The interviews were designed to explore several key themes: family language policy before and after migration, language behaviours in public and private contexts, emotional attitudes towards language use (especially regarding Ukrainian and Russian), and strategies for children's language

Table 1. Information about the participants. Own research.

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Residence in Ukraine	Year of moving to Poland	Number of Children	Children's Age
A01	F	39	BA	Kherson	2022	2	5, 12
A02	F	31	MA (two different higher education degrees)	Dnipro	2022	1	6
A03	F	43	PhD	Kyiv	2022	3	5, 9, 15
A04	F	29	BA	Mykolaiv	2022	1	5.5
A05	F	42	MA	Kyiv	2023	2	6, 9
A06	F	34	MA (two different higher education degrees)	Zaporizhzhia	2022	2	2.5, 6
A07	F	35	MA	Zhytomyr	2023	3	3, 6, 10
A08	F	27	MA	Lutsk	2022	1	5
A09	F	32	BA	Chervonohrad, Lviv region	2022	1	6
A10	F	36	MA	Kharkiv	2022	2	5.5, 9

education. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with a total of 11 hours of recorded and transcribed data. This interview-based design is consistent with best practices in sociolinguistic research on language behaviour and migration (García, 2009; King & Fogle, 2006).

The participants were selected based on two criteria: they had to be Ukrainian women with children who had migrated to Poland as a result of the war, and they needed to have experience managing family language practices in this context. The women in the study came from various regions of Ukraine (e.g., Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia), reflecting a diversity of sociolinguistic backgrounds. They had varying educational levels, from Bachelor's degrees to PhDs, and their children's ages ranged from preschool to school age (see Table 1 for demographic details). By focusing on mothers, the study centres on those most responsible for managing family language policy in the migration context. Research shows that women, especially mothers, often play a crucial role in determining language practices at home (Spolsky, 2004). In forced migration contexts, mothers also bear the brunt of emotional and practical challenges related to their children's integration into new linguistic environments (García & Wei, 2014).

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes related to language behaviour, family language policy, and the emotional aspects of language use. The analysis was grounded in Spolsky's (2004) model of family language policy, which emphasizes three core components: language beliefs (ideologies), language management, and language practices. Special attention was given to the emotional responses related to the rejection or retention of the Russian language, shifts in language ideologies, and the phenomenon of "language shame."

The analysis process involved several key steps to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Firstly, all interviews were transcribed verbatim using professional transcription software, followed by a manual review to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the participants' responses, including any significant pauses or emphases. This careful transcription process aimed to preserve the nuances of spoken language, which are essential for understanding the participants' experiences. Following transcription, the data were analysed using a thematic approach. The

transcripts were read multiple times, and themes relevant to the study's research question were identified. This process included both pre-identified themes, such as language behaviour, family language policy, and language ideologies, as well as new themes that emerged during the analysis, like language shame and emotional reactions to migration. Themes were then reviewed and refined to capture the main patterns in the participants' experiences.

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. No personal identifying information was collected or published. The recordings and transcripts were securely stored in an encrypted database, with access restricted to the research team. To protect participants' privacy, the data will not be made publicly available.

4 Results

The data show that these families, predominantly using Ukrainian and Russian, have experienced shifts in language usage patterns influenced by migration experiences and the current sociopolitical climate. The experience of war and the associated emotional impact have affected the activity of language use in the speakers' repertoires. All respondents are bilingual or multilingual, with proficiency in various languages: Ukrainian and Russian as the first and second languages, respectively, and vice versa for some respondents; additionally, during the interviews, the women mentioned their proficiency in other languages – varying levels of English and Polish (see Table 2 for details). Responding to questions, the respondents self-identified their speech behaviour and provided detailed information on the family language policy strategy they apply within their families, particularly with their children.

Table 2. Language use and language attitudes.

Participants	**Which languages does the respondent speak?**	**Respondents' first language**	**Home language**	**Do family members use code-switching during their conversations?**	**Has your language use within the family changed since moving to Poland?**
A01	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (fluently), Polish (A2)	Russian	Ukrainian and Russian	+	+
A02	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (fluently), English (C1), Polish (B1)	Russian	Ukrainian and Russian	+	+
A03	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (fluently), English (C1), Polish (B1)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	+	+
A04	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (fluently), Polish (A1), Ukrainian (fluently)	Russian	Ukrainian and Russian	+	+
A05	Russian (fluently), English (B1), Polish (A1)	Russian	Ukrainian and Russian	+	+
A06	Russian (fluently), Ukrainian (B1), English (B1), Polish (A1)	Russian	Russian	+	+
A07	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (B1), English (B1), Polish (A1)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	−	+

A08	Ukrainian (fluently), Polish (A1)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	−	−
A09	Ukrainian (fluently), Polish (A1)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	−	−
A10	Ukrainian (fluently), Russian (fluently), English (B2), Polish (A2)	Russian	Ukrainian	+	+

4.1 Home Language Practices

In this study, the term home language is used to highlight the significant influence of the language spoken within the family on personal identity and psychological well-being (Berry et al., 2006). The home language forms the foundation of an individual's language development, and research consistently shows that strong support for a child's native language leads to improved overall language abilities. This, in turn, enhances academic achievement and cognitive skills (Cummins, 2000; Heller, 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), while also preserving cultural diversity within society (García, 2009). Heritage language, often used in migration contexts, refers to the language spoken at home by individuals who belong to a linguistic minority in the country of residence (Valdés, 2005). It typically signifies a connection to cultural roots and is passed down through generations, even if it is not the dominant language of the wider society. While this term is applicable to many refugee families, we chose to use the term home language in our study to more precisely reflect the current language dynamics of Ukrainian families who have been forced to migrate due to the war. By focusing on home language, we emphasize the active language repertoire within the family, including questions about which languages are used, their frequency of use, and the occurrences of code-switching. This approach allows us to explore language upbringing strategies, which are particularly important in forced migration contexts, in which communication dynamics have shifted. In these families, maternal communication often dominates due to restrictions on men leaving Ukraine.

In contrast, while the term heritage language carries historical and socio-cultural connotations, it may not fully capture the present-day realities of language use within these Ukrainian families. Heritage language typically reflects long-standing traditions and the intergenerational transmission of language, which, although relevant, does not entirely align with the urgent and evolving language dynamics resulting from forced migration. Therefore, we prefer home language to more accurately represent the current linguistic practices and challenges faced by Ukrainian refugee families. This distinction contributes to a nuanced understanding of language behaviour, preferences, and ideologies in this context.

According to the dominant family language, respondents can be divided into two groups based on their primary language practices at home. The first group is identified as predominantly Ukrainian-speaking families – those for whom Ukrainian is the main home language. This classification was determined by examining the language used most frequently in daily family interactions and for important communication within the household, such as during meals, bedtime, and family discussions. The families in this group included participants A03, A07, A08, A09, and A10, who predominantly used Ukrainian for all family communication. These families are geographically located in Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Lutsk, Chervonohrad (Lviv region), and Kharkiv. For the families from Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Lutsk, and Chervonohrad, the use of Ukrainian as the primary home language was already a well-established practice before forced migration, even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Their choice to continue using Ukrainian as the main language was rooted in longstanding cultural and linguistic practices. In contrast, the family from Kharkiv experienced a significant shift in language use due to the circumstances of forced migration. This family made a deliberate decision to change their speech practices, particularly in communication with their children, as a form of political resistance. They consciously refused to use Russian in family communication, despite it being the first language for all family members. This decision

was motivated by the desire to reinforce a Ukrainian identity and distance themselves from the language associated with the aggressor state. The criteria used to establish these distinctions included the primary language spoken at home, the consistency of language use in various daily activities, and any explicit decisions made by families to change their language practices. These criteria allowed for a nuanced understanding of how forced migration influenced family language policy and how respondents navigated language choices in response to the war.

Therefore, for the group of families identified as Ukrainian-speaking, the responses to the question *"Has your language use within the family changed since moving to Poland? If yes, how?"* were as follows:

(1) *"No, it hasn't changed, we have always spoken Ukrainian in the family, Russian was never a language of family communication for us"* (A03);

(2) *"Not much has changed. We started to control ourselves more about Russian, so as not to say anything... because now it somehow feels wrong. We speak Ukrainian at home, and we did so before the war, but we could say something in Russian, now we don't"* (A07);

(3) *"We are a Ukrainian-speaking family, it has always been like that. Now the little one has started inserting Polish words, but that's probably normal in this situation. And I'm not too worried about Russian, because Maks knows that this is how the enemies speak"* (A08);

(4) *"Nothing has changed, we speak Ukrainian at home'"* (A09);

(5) *"Everything changed when we moved to Poland. We completely switched to Ukrainian. We are from Kharkiv, for us, Russian was the norm, but after what we went through, never, at least not with the children… It's hard, we try, not everything works out, but we see that the children now understand how important it is to speak Ukrainian… We used to speak it before, but less, not at home"* (A10).

The second group of families, by language use activity (languages used), i.e., by home language, can be defined as bilingual families, in which both Ukrainian and Russian are used simultaneously or alternately during daily speech practices. These families (A01, A02, A04, A05, A06) represent localities such as Kherson, Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, and Zaporizhzhia, traditionally considered places where Russian was more commonly used in everyday life. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents mentioned that their family communication practices were exclusively Russian speaking. Clearly, the ratio of Ukrainian to Russian use in the families, as well as the balance of introducing Ukrainian where Russian predominates, varies in quantity and quality. Still, a notable fact in this context is the change in language practices, as each respondent noted an increase in the use of Ukrainian in family communication, which was not previously the case. The responses to the same question about home language were as follows:

(6) *"Probably more has changed than hasn't changed. I now pay more attention to explaining the importance of the language, that we need to speak more Ukrainian, but it's not easy to change everything. I understand that we often make mistakes when we speak Ukrainian. But we started watching more cartoons in Ukrainian, I read books to my little one. Especially now in Poland, I understand that it's more my responsibility than the kindergarten or school"* (A01);

(7) *"We speak Russian, I speak with my mom and with Liza… But we can also speak Ukrainian, we just got used to speaking Russian at home, it's easier, although now it's not very good to speak Russian. We also speak Ukrainian, but less. For example, I read the news in Ukrainian, Liza got books in Ukrainian, we read…"* (A02);

(8) *"I would probably say that we are bilingual because my husband, well, he's from a village in the Odesa region, so he spoke Ukrainian with his mom, more Russian with me, and when Danya was born, we decided to speak Ukrainian with him. To be honest, it's hard for me sometimes, so I speak both Russian and Ukrainian with him"* (A04);

(9) *"Nothing much has changed for us because my husband and I spoke Ukrainian with the kids before the war, but also Russian. Our grandmothers speak Russian, and they help us with the kids, and the older ones at school spoke Russian with some of their friends before the war, now the problem is Polish. So I don't even know how to properly characterize our family in language terms, everyone supports the Ukrainian language, but sometimes we speak Russian. I understand it's not right now, but for us, it's more of a habit than a position"* (A05);

(10) *"Oh, it's a difficult question for us, we understand everything, but everyone speaks Russian – the whole family, it's impossible to completely refuse"* (A06).

The description of home language practices in refugee families from Ukraine reveals notable changes in the use of Ukrainian, primarily in terms of frequency (as reported by respondents). These changes reflect a deliberate effort to expand the use of Ukrainian, influenced by socio-political circumstances and the desire to preserve cultural identity. The concept of home language emerges as a crucial element in understanding these changes. In this study, home language refers to the primary language spoken within the family, significantly impacting personal identity and psychological well-being. For predominantly Ukrainian-speaking families, the use of Ukrainian as the home language remained stable despite migration. These families continued to use exclusively Ukrainian at home. For instance, one family from Kyiv maintained their practice of speaking only Ukrainian at home, considering Russian to be an unused language in family communication. Conversely, a family from Kharkiv consciously switched to using only Ukrainian after emigrating, motivated by political reasons and a desire to distance themselves from Russian due to the war. In bilingual families, both Ukrainian and Russian were used simultaneously or alternately during daily interactions. Despite their prolonged and active use of Russian, these families reported an increase in the use of Ukrainian at home, highlighting a shift in language dynamics prompted by their migration experience and the emotional aspect of language use. For example, a family from Kherson began incorporating more Ukrainian into their daily routine, such as watching cartoons and reading books in Ukrainian, recognizing the importance of language for cultural identity and educational development. Home language captures the active use of languages in the family setting, including frequency of use and instances of code-switching. This focus allows for a detailed exploration of language upbringing strategies, which are particularly relevant in situations where forced migration shapes communication dynamics, often leading to predominantly maternal communication due to the frequent separation of families from Ukraine and the remote involvement of men in child-rearing.

The interview data reveal diverse language practices among Ukrainian refugee families, reflecting both continuity and change in their language behaviour, preferences, and ideologies. The findings highlight the complexity of language adaptation in the context of forced migration, in which families navigate the use of multiple languages to maintain personal and collective identity. Specifically, the data show that while some families have continued using Ukrainian as their primary home language, others have made deliberate efforts to shift away from Russian, motivated by socio-political factors and a desire to strengthen their Ukrainian identity. These adaptations underscore the critical role of home language in responding to the challenges of displacement and preserving cultural ties.

4.2 Language Behavior and Attitudinal Shifts

The study of language behaviour among Ukrainian migrants in Poland reveals important shifts in response to the war and their forced migration. A key aspect of these changes is the clear demarcation of language use between public and private spaces. Many families, who primarily spoke Russian before the war, now consciously use Ukrainian in public contexts to assert their national identity and distance themselves from the language associated with the aggressor. As one respondent stated, *"In public places, I deliberately switch to Ukrainian. I don't want Polish*

people to think that I'm Russian. Poles understand Russian – maybe not all of them, but many do' (A01). This sentiment is echoed by others, such as a participant who shared: *"Now it's more convenient for me to speak Ukrainian in public. It's a form of support for Ukraine. I really control myself when I realize I can be heard"* (A04). These examples illustrate how participants navigate the social pressures and symbolic weight of language in their daily lives.

In addition to public language use, changes in family language practices are equally noteworthy. Many parents are actively introducing more Ukrainian-language content into their children's lives. This includes choosing Ukrainian-language cartoons, books, and other media to foster a stronger connection with Ukrainian heritage. As one mother explained, *"Now we watch cartoons only in Ukrainian, at least when I choose them for her. I believe this helps maintain a connection with Ukraine"* (A02). Another respondent reflected on the use of Ukrainian bedtime stories to strengthen cultural ties: *"All our bedtime stories are in Ukrainian. It helps the children learn about our culture. We did this with all our children. Now, of course, the older one no longer wants it, but the younger one enjoys it"* (A03). These examples show how parental language strategies aim to blend language acquisition with cultural education, reinforcing not only linguistic competence but also national identity.

Despite these efforts to promote the use of Ukrainian, the persistence of Russian in family interactions remains. Participants acknowledged that Russian continues to play a significant role in their daily communication due to ingrained habits and ease of use. One parent noted, *"We speak Ukrainian on public transport. When we ride the tram to preschool, I speak Ukrainian with my little one. He doesn't always switch; sometimes he speaks Russian. I understand that it's not ideal, but at least he practices the language with me"* (A06). Similarly, another respondent described the gradual nature of this shift, explaining, *"I ask the children to switch to Ukrainian, especially when we go outside the house, like in a store or at additional classes. I won't say we've reached full automatism, but we are trying to make a change"* (A03). These reflections indicate that while there is a conscious effort to increase Ukrainian use, the shift is not yet complete, with Russian still occupying a significant place in family interactions.

The evolving language attitudes among Ukrainian migrants are closely tied to broader socio-political dynamics. The increased use of Ukrainian, both in public and private spheres, reflects not only a shift in language practices but also a re-evaluation of linguistic identity in response to the war. For many families, adopting Ukrainian has become a symbolic act of resistance, a way to distance themselves from Russian and assert their Ukrainian identity in their new social environment. The adoption of new language practices, such as the more frequent use of Ukrainian, highlights the migrants' navigation of complex sociolinguistic dynamics.

Nonetheless, code-switching between Ukrainian and Russian remains a common feature of family language behaviour, as evidenced by most respondents (see Table 2). Of the 10 families interviewed, 7 engage in regular code-switching between the two languages, depending on factors such as the conversation context and the interlocutor. Fatigue, convenience, and ease of communication often lead families to revert to Russian, illustrating how bilingualism continues to shape their language choices. While the shift towards increased use of Ukrainian is apparent, the flexibility offered by bilingualism ensures that both languages remain central to family life, reflecting the ongoing complexity of language attitudes among Ukrainian migrants.

5 Discussion

One significant driver of the language shift observed among the participants in this study, as well as in broader Ukrainian society, is the phenomenon of language shame. In Ukraine, a segment of the politically-active community has been appealing to bilingual Ukrainians, particularly those who predominantly speak Russian, to alter their speech behaviour and reduce or abandon the use of Russian. The war has heightened negative attitudes towards the Russian language, leading to a more conscious effort among some individuals to minimize its use. This shift is reflected both

in the national context of Ukraine, where social media and government policies actively promote the use of Ukrainian, and in the experiences of the study's participants in Poland, who described feeling pressure to switch to Ukrainian in their daily interactions. Thus, the evolving language attitudes seen in Ukraine are also influencing the behaviour of Ukrainian migrants abroad. In this study, we also explore the concept of language shaming as a form of stigma (Piller, 2017) from two main perspectives: 1) understanding the motivations behind individuals who engage in language shaming within society, and 2) analysing the experiences and emotions – such as disrespect, humiliation, and alienation – of those targeted by such actions. We particularly focus on the phenomenon of self-shaming, where individuals apologize for their language use within a group experiencing shame due to their speech behaviour. The notion of 'language shame' is framed within the broader context of emotions associated with languages, especially concerning language choice in bilingual or multilingual settings. Bloom and Beckwith (1989) examined socialization during primary language acquisition, suggesting that the first language often carries more emotional significance than subsequent languages due to the intertwining of emotional regulation and linguistic systems. This emotional significance may stem from highly emotional early childhood experiences, potentially related to caregiver bonding (Harris et al., 2006). Pawliszko (2022) investigates the complex emotional dimensions of first and second languages, noting that bilingual individuals often switch languages based on the ease of expressing specific content. However, the critical question remains: what factors influence the choice of a language associated with emotions? Research indicates that code-switching frequently occurs in emotional contexts, described as emotion-related language choice by Kim and Starks (2008). Bilinguals select a language based on their subjective preferences rather than their immediate environment of work, study, or residence. This analysis offers a foundational understanding of the role of emotions in bilingualism and multilingualism.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of language shame among Ukrainian refugees from two perspectives: those who promote the shift away from Russian and those who experience feelings of shame regarding their language use. By analysing responses to the question, *"How would you describe your attitude towards the Russian language before and after the onset of the war?"* the study reveals a notable shift in attitudes among some respondents. Russian-speaking Ukrainians, particularly in the migration context, expressed a growing awareness and conscious effort to reduce their use of Russian. Specific responses illustrate this transition and the emotional complexity surrounding language choices during wartime:

(11) *"I have already explained my position, everything has changed for us and, first of all, we reconsidered the language issue. So now, after my efforts to give up Russian, I expect others to do the same… I can say, for example, speak to me in Ukrainian, or say something to me in English or Polish, but not in Russian."* (A10)

(12) *"It happened several times that when someone spoke to me in Russian, or rather asked me something (here in Poland) and I knew they were Ukrainians, it was in kindergarten, I didn't respond… But maybe that was just my mood. I usually try to avoid conflict. However, when I read stories on Facebook about the number of Russians in Kyiv in the third year of the war, how many children speak Russian, and that, unfortunately, Ukrainian-speaking children (permanently Ukrainian-speaking children who do not switch) are still a minority, I am indignant. How can that be?! Why do Poles understand the importance of language, but we don't? It's upsetting."* (A05).

Concerning the attitudes of Russian-speaking Ukrainians in forced migration and their experiences with language shame, all respondents, despite primarily speaking Russian, emphasized rethinking their personal language use and public speech behaviour. When asked, *"Do you feel any pressure or shame regarding the use of Russian? Can you describe these feelings and their sources?"* interviewees provided detailed accounts. Here are some brief notes on language shaming:

(13) *"… It's clear that I feel ashamed to speak Russian in public, so I don't speak it in situations where it's possible and convenient for me. For example, in Polish courses, we have a family from Crimea who find it very difficult to speak Ukrainian, but they still don't speak Russian, at least in the lessons. It's not that difficult for me, I'm just used to Russian; it's somehow faster, but I don't want anyone on the tram to think that it's Russian."* (A02).

(14) *"There is no direct pressure on me specifically, I don't seek it out, I don't particularly communicate. With the mothers of other children on the playground, we speak differently – some in Russian, some in Ukrainian, each of us has our own way, and that's fine. Although they speak Russian more. By the way, I was indignant because of the story with Farion and the soldiers, that she accused them of not speaking Ukrainian… This is unacceptable for me; they are defenders."* (A06).

This study reveals the complex dynamics of language shame among Ukrainian refugees, highlighting the tension between the use of Russian and Ukrainian. Respondents report a conscious effort to abandon Russian, driven by a desire to assert Ukrainian identity, and express feelings of shame and conflict over language use. These insights reflect broader societal pressures and the evolving attitudes towards language in the context of the war.

6 Conclusion

This study explored the impact of forced migration on FLP within Ukrainian families, focusing on how war and displacement have influenced language behaviours. The research aimed to understand the shifts in language use and ideologies, particularly regarding Ukrainian and Russian, in the context of forced migration. The findings indicate that external socio-political pressures and internal family dynamics significantly shaped the language practices of respondents, leading to distinct changes in family communication.

The study revealed several key findings. Firstly, many respondents reported an intentional shift towards the Ukrainian language in family communication, actively involving their children in the linguistic realities of Ukraine. This shift reflects a broader desire to foster a strong Ukrainian identity and maintain cultural ties amid the challenges of displacement. Families emphasized the importance of using Ukrainian as a form of national solidarity, especially for younger generations, and encouraged their children to be conscious of their language choices.

Secondly, a politically motivated shift away from Russian was observed, particularly in public spaces, where respondents deliberately avoided its use. This change illustrates evolving language ideologies, with Ukrainian being favoured in both public and private domains. However, the study also found that some families continue to engage in code-switching between Ukrainian and Russian, using both languages in different contexts and with various family members. This bilingualism reflects the complex nature of language practices within the family, where emotional ties to both languages persist despite the shifting ideologies.

The study categorized families into two groups based on their dominant home language: predominantly Ukrainian-speaking and bilingual. While predominantly Ukrainian-speaking families largely maintained their linguistic habits from before migration, bilingual families – who used both Ukrainian and Russian – reported an increased use of Ukrainian at home, though they have not completely abandoned Russian. This nuanced language shift underscores the dynamic interplay between personal identity, family cohesion, and socio-political factors.

Thirdly, the phenomenon of language shame and self-shame emerged as significant influences on language behaviour. Many respondents expressed discomfort or guilt when using Russian, which was tied to broader societal trends in which language is closely linked to loyalty and national identity. The pressure to minimize Russian use represents a conscious attempt to align with the emerging national discourse that emphasizes the role of Ukrainian in shaping collective identity.

The findings contribute to existing literature by demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of Ukrainian refugees in navigating complex linguistic landscapes. The study provides new insights

into how FLP shapes language ideologies and practices under conditions of displacement, showing that language choice is not merely a matter of communication but is deeply connected to identity, belonging, and socio-political circumstances.

In connection with existing research, the study aligns with broader trends observed in migrant communities. For instance, research by Makarova and Hudyma (2015) and Nedashkivska (2018) on Ukrainian migrants in Canada highlights similar tensions between maintaining heritage languages and adapting to new environments. Likewise, Makarova and Morozovskaia (2023) explore the evolving language ideologies of Russian-speaking immigrants, offering comparative insights into the relationship between language, identity, and migration. These studies support the idea that language use is not only a means of communication but also a cultural and political tool during crises.

By examining the family as a critical site for language transmission and adaptation, this study underscores the need for policies and support systems that facilitate both linguistic integration and the preservation of cultural heritage. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies to support the linguistic resilience of migrant families while respecting their cultural identities.

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