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The Vocabulary Skills of Ukrainian Pre-schoolers in Poland

Abstract

This article presents an interim report on a study conducted in Krakow to investigate the bilingual/multilingual development of Ukrainian children in the context of forced migration. This project has been supported by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange under the NAWA Urgency Grants and aims to assess language competence in Ukrainian and Polish among 4- and 5-year-old children who have migrated from Ukraine to Poland due to Russia's armed aggression starting 24 February 2022. In this article, the authors present the results of a vocabulary test conducted with 100 children in 2022. The authors highlight the methodology of the vocabulary tests conducted with bilingual preschool children, which shed light on the complexity of learning Polish in the context of forced migration. The results showed that the majority of Ukrainian pre-schoolers had limited knowledge of spoken Polish. On the other hand, the analysis revealed a considerable ability to understand Ukrainian words but a lower mastery of their use, possibly due to the primary use of Russian as a mother tongue. The study contributes to the understanding of bilingual/multilingual development under conditions of forced migration and offers valuable insights into the linguistic competences of Ukrainian preschool children, especially in Ukrainian and Polish. These findings can inform educational strategies and facilitate the integration of migrant children into the host society. Further research is needed to investigate long-term language development and its impact on the well-being and academic performance of Ukrainian children affected by forced migration to Poland.
Keywords: bilingualism; language learning; language acquisition; sequential bilingualism; learning Polish as another language; child language development

1 Background

Following the events of 24 February 2022, when Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine, a significant flow of forced migrants (mainly women with children) sought temporary refuge in Poland. Poland then offered its support by providing shelter to these displaced persons. Among them were Ukrainian children of various ages who had to start their education in Polish educational institutions. The Polish education system rose to the challenge and made efforts to quickly integrate a large number of Ukrainian children. The main focus of these efforts was the accelerated teaching of Polish as the language of the host country.

The settlement of people from Ukraine in Poland has led, among other things, to sudden and significant changes in the functioning of many preschools in Poland. For children coming from Ukraine, Polish is another learned language, but it takes time to master. They now represent a kind of sequential bilingualism. In Poland, there are not many methodological solutions for teaching Polish to preschool children with refugee experience. The proposed textbooks mainly focus only on the development of lexical competence and largely omit the programmed teaching of

grammar and phonology (see Jędryka, 2015) or are designed for children who can read and write (see Kołak et al., 2022; Rostek, 2023; Smirnow, 2022; Stempek et al., 2015). Ukrainian children aged 4–5 attending preschools in Poland are encouraged to learn Polish quickly, both in systematic lessons and in direct contact with native speakers.

In the context of involuntary displacement, children may face numerous obstacles in developing their language skills. These challenges can be attributed to various factors, including language barriers, traumatic experiences, cultural adjustment difficulties and limited access to educational and language resources. Pawel Levchuk (2016, 2023), Katarzyna Stankiewicz and Anna Żurek (Stankiewicz & Żurek, 2022), among others, have written about the educational difficulties of children of Ukrainian origin in Poland with migration and refugee experiences. Being bilingual does not harm language or conceptual development (Bialystok, 2001), but usually the language skills of adults who acquired two languages as children are passive bilingualism, i.e. the ability to understand two languages but speak only one of them (Hoff et al., 2014, p. 13). The vocabulary of the heritage language is usually markedly low and often limited to the sphere of family life and to phenomena directly related to family life (Cieszyńska-Rożek, 2018; Laskowski, 2009). To address this limitation, especially in the critical circumstances of forced migration, it is essential to explore the existing scholarly literature that addresses the particular features of lexical system development in children as a whole, as it can offer insights and solutions to this dilemma.

In Poland, there is almost no experimental research on bilingual education in preschools or on language acquisition among children from Ukraine. There still has not been any comprehensive analysis of how the linguistic competence of Ukrainian preschool children is formed, what influence teaching strategies have on it (monolingual vs. bilingual), and which linguistic phenomena are typical and atypical for the formation of the Polish language system by Ukrainian children. A. Żurek (2023) has published an article on the state of research into the Polish language of Ukrainians of non-Polish origin who have come to Poland. The author emphasises that the interdisciplinary research perspective is still not much in evidence in previous texts on this topic and that research is mainly concerned with Polish. One of the first publications on Ukrainian–Polish bilingualism is an article by K. Dzierżawin (2009), which describes the Polish and Ukrainian language of schoolchildren of Ukrainian origin. There are publications dealing, for example, with Polish–Ukrainian bilingualism in Ukraine (Levchuk, 2015; Shevchuk, 2021), with Polish–Ukrainian contacts (Kostecka-Sadowa, 2019; Warchoł, 2002), with the sociolinguistic situation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland (Levchuk, 2019), with lexical errors of Ukrainian adolescents learning Polish (Czapla, 2020) or with lexical and grammatical errors of adults learning Polish as a foreign language[1] (Izdebska-Długosz, 2021; Krawczuk, 2006). As there are numerous studies demonstrating the difference in the process of second language acquisition between children and adults (Muñoz, 2008; Suryantari, 2018), it is therefore not possible to transfer the findings from studies on Ukrainian-speaking adults to the process of acquisition of Polish as a second language by children from Ukrainian families. Previous attempts to analyse the language development of Ukrainian–Polish children have focused only on selective language skills, e.g., phonology (see Dębski et al., 2020). There have also been studies on the acquisition of clitics versus full pronouns by Polish and Ukrainian children (Mykhaylyk & Sopata, 2015). The vocabulary of pupils from Ukrainian Saturday schools in Poland and pupils learning Polish in Ukraine has also been analysed (Jędryka, 2021). Two case studies of two Ukrainian students attending an elementary school in Poland have been described by P. Levchuk (2016) and B. Kyrc (2019).

The linguistic background of Ukrainian children, especially those in special educational situations such as preschools in Poland, requires special attention due to the particular challenges they face. Factors such as bilingualism, language transfer and cultural adaptation have a profound impact on language acquisition and vocabulary development. By exploring the linguistic background

[1] A foreign language is a non-native language learned at universities, schools, in language courses at home country or abroad. A second language is another language learned by a child/adult with migration experience (see Gębal, 2016; Miodunka, 2010, 2013).

of Ukrainian children in this context, we can gain insights into their language learning strategies, identify potential obstacles and formulate appropriate interventions to facilitate their successful integration into the Polish education system.

2 The Methodology of Testing the Vocabulary of Ukrainian Children

The aim of the study was to investigate the language skills of Ukrainian migrant children in both Ukrainian and Polish. The article presents partial results of the study. It uses data on the vocabulary skills of children who came to Poland from Ukraine after 24 February 2022 as a result of the war in Ukraine. The researchers used a combined approach to study the vocabulary of children in a situation of forced migration. The vocabulary of migrant children was assessed through a detailed analysis of the lexical skills of a group of children from Ukraine who were learning in preschools in Poland. In developing the research protocol, we took into account the age of the children and their stage of language development. The research methodology complied with ethical guidelines, including obtaining appropriate consent from the participants' parents or guardians. The confidentiality of the participants' data was maintained throughout the study. The data obtained through the tests were analysed using statistical methods. The analysis made it possible to estimate the mean in terms of comprehension and vocabulary use and to compare the results obtained in the different languages. Mean and standard deviation were used as statistical measures to summarise the data.

Assessing the vocabulary of children in bilingual and multilingual situations, especially children from Ukraine enrolled in Polish preschools, is a major challenge. To meet this challenge effectively, the use of a testing procedure is essential. The use of such a procedure is of great importance for the accurate measurement of the vocabulary of Ukrainian preschool children with refugee experience, as it allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding of their language skills. The use of a testing procedure ensures fairness and consistency in the evaluation. By using a uniform approach, we can eliminate possible biases and discrepancies that may arise from using different methods or instruments. This uniformity allows for a more reliable and objective assessment of children's vocabulary and ensures that their language skills are assessed fairly. The vocabulary testing procedure promotes comparability and benchmarking and allows for the establishment of a baseline for assessing the vocabulary of bilingual and multilingual children. This comparison can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of language support and training programmes and enable educators to make informed decisions. However, there is no standardised diagnostic tool for examining the vocabulary of Ukrainian preschool children who acquire Polish as a second language. The use of tools to diagnose the acquisition of vocabulary by pre-schoolers is important for initial literacy in primary school, and this is the age at which vocabulary becomes important for the development of phonological awareness and reading comprehension (Marcotte et al., 2014). A lack of vocabulary screening tools has been identified in both the international and Polish literature. One of the research tasks was to develop a tool for testing the vocabulary of children aged 4–5 years, taking into account the similarities and differences between the Polish and Ukrainian languages. A lexicon-based approach was used to develop the tool. The database of words for children aged 4–5 included different semantic categories (such as food, toys, animals, clothes, furniture and others) and covered both expressive and receptive skills.

Various vocabulary tests are used to measure the level of language proficiency of preschool children. One of the most popular tests used to assess, among other things, a child's vocabulary in the early years is the *MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (MB-CDIs)*. It is also used to compare the vocabulary of monolingual and bilingual children (see Armon-Lotem & Ohana, 2017; Core et al., 2013). The CDIs are a pair of instruments used by parents to assess infants' and toddlers' communicative abilities (Fenson et al., 2007). However, the study of bilingual children's language development cannot be limited to parent-report tools, especially when it comes to distinguishing errors due to the influence of the second language from those

due to a language disorder. Therefore, studies by speech-language pathologists themselves are also necessary in order to increase knowledge about the typical language development of bilingual children and about developmental disorders.

It is clear that the level of mastery of the first language(s) at age 4–5 and the level of mastery of a second language are not equivalent and these results cannot be compared as a standard. However, we believe that the results of vocabulary tests in each of the languages the child is learning should be taken into account when formulating educational goals in a general way. Lexical and grammatical tests as linguistic indicators of quantitative and qualitative language acquisition should be conducted with a clear understanding of the specifics of ontogenetic language development as a process of building a language system and a meaningful understanding of the status-role characteristics of contact languages.

We believe that language development reflects the interaction between a child's inner abilities and the context in which they develop (Thomas, 2010), and are aware of the importance of measuring Ukrainian children's active speaking and oral language skills as bilinguals and multilinguals. In order to achieve educational goals, it is important that psychologists, speech and language therapists, specialist teachers and researchers are able to assess language skills and understand the strengths and limitations of the instruments they use. In addition, effective and targeted interventions and monitoring of progress require tools that are reliable, valid and appropriate. It is important to distinguish between communication and language. Communication is the transmission of information, and infants communicate from the minute they are born. Language, on the other hand, is primarily a representational system that develops as the child's cognitive abilities help them understand and organize the world. Children are born with a variety of cognitive abilities that support language learning (Moll & Tomasello, 2010). Together, these skills help children work out the rules of language, recognize the meaning of new words, and understand the demands of social situations and the views of others. These skills do not function in isolation; language development is a subtle interaction between the contexts in which children develop and the cognitive skills they bring to the language learning process (for reviews, see Brooks & Kempe, 2012; Saxton, 2010). Following J. Dockrell and C. Marshall's (Dockrell & Marshall, 2015) approach that the language system itself consists of a number of subcomponents that are important for effective understanding and communication, we define the purpose of our study of Ukrainian children's vocabulary in a Polish-speaking environment as a measure of communicative competence. The lexicon (vocabulary) and syntax (rules for combining words into phrases and sentences) are among the subcomponents of the language system that we seek to analyse (e.g. using picture tests). These subcomponents work together in a dynamic and evolving way. During language acquisition, children develop sophisticated and coherent oral narratives that enable them to communicate effectively and efficiently with others.

In 2022 we started a study on the language development of Ukrainian children in preschools in Krakow in Poland.[2] The aim of the study is a basic research approach to better understand the specificity of the bilingual development of closely related languages (Polish and Ukrainian) in a very specific context (sudden forced migration). This study examined the vocabulary of children of Ukrainian origin with refugee experience, who came to Poland after February 24, 2022 as a result of the war in Ukraine and were enrolled in Polish preschools. Considering the controversy over the use of tests to reliably isolate various vocabulary and grammar factors in the first years of life, as well as the importance of reliable and valid methods for testing children's language competence, we had proposed a simplified and quick self-prepared test[3] to study the development of Ukrainian children's vocabulary competence in the first language (the child's

[2] This project has been supported by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange under the NAWA Urgency Grants (BPN/GIN/2022/1/00013).

[3] There is no standardized test to measure the vocabulary of children with Ukrainian–Polish bilingualism or Ukrainian–Russian–Polish multilingualism that takes into account the difference in vocabulary between the languages.

dominant language) and in a second language (the majority language). This test is adapted to the age-specific characteristics of the group of children being tested. It includes visual support, which is important because of the subjects' limited knowledge of Polish and their lack of reading skills. The words shown in the pictures were taken out of context, e.g. one illustration showed only one object. The pictures used in the test stimulate the children's active speaking and encourage them to describe the pictures in more detail and to use a larger vocabulary. An important aspect of the test is its cultural relevance to the group of children studied. The vocabulary selected for the test is culturally relevant to the experiences of children from Ukraine who now live in a Polish-speaking environment. The pictures in the test are grouped thematically (e.g. furniture, toys, body parts, clothes animals, food, professions) and there is also a division into groups based on their general grammatical meaning and formal indicators (nouns, verbs, adjectives). Our vocabulary test for Ukrainian children contains a series of tasks that assess the ability to understand and name, so it consists of two parts: "Understanding" and "Naming". With "Understanding" part we examined the receptive vocabulary of the children, and with the "Naming" part we examines their expressive vocabulary. Each part of the test contains 50 words visualized with pictures. The vocabulary was deliberately selected on the basis of dictionaries and frequency corpora of Polish (Kurcz et al., 1990; Święcicka, 1998, 2022; Zarębina, 1971, 1985; Zgółkowa, 2016; Żmigrodzki, n.d.) and Ukrainian (*GRAC: General Regionally Annotated Corpus of Ukrainian*, n.d.; *Korpus ukraïns'koï movy*, n.d.; *Mova.info: Linhvistychnyĭ portal*, n.d.). We selected terms that have different names in Ukrainian and Polish, e.g. *черепаха – żółw*, *холодильник – lodówka*, *штани – spodnie*, *чай – herbata*, *гратися – bawić się*. The Polish vocabulary largely overlaps with the Ukrainian vocabulary, so that intercomprehension can be realized as a result of positive transfer. In addition, there exists the ability to understand languages without learning them beforehand, because some features of the target language are already known to the learners. This means that speakers of different languages are able to understand each other's words, sentences and expressions because the languages they speak have similarities. Therefore, in order to assess competence in one language and the other and to be able to compare the results, we chose words with a common meaning but different structure. Both parts of the test ("Understanding" and "Naming") contain a total of 100 words, of which 70 are nouns, 24 are action verbs, and 6 are adjectives. The number of individual word classes was determined by knowledge of the grammatical structure of colloquial Polish. The proportion of nouns in the Polish vocabulary is 75%, that of verbs 20% and that of adjectives 5% (Markowski, 1992). This is the order in which children most often acquire words. First children acquire primary words: nouns and verbs, then secondary words: adjectives and adverbs (Zarębina, 1994, pp. 109–111). The data on the percentage of word classes in children's speech are consistent with those on colloquial vocabulary. For example, M. Zarębina (1994) reports that in the second stage of development (24–36 months), 54.1% of all word classes are nouns, 23.47% are verbs and 5.4% are adjectives, while the vocabulary of a 6-year-old child consists of about 50% nouns, 25% verbs and 13% adjectives and adverbs. Most of the words in the test are nouns, which reflect the meaning of concrete concepts (Porayski-Pomsta, 2015, p. 140). Nouns mainly stand for concrete objects and concepts, which children usually learn as their first words. They are often easier to understand and associate with corresponding pictures, making them suitable for assessing vocabulary development in young children. Pictures of everyday objects and actions are also more likely to consist of nouns. By using familiar and relevant vocabulary, the test aims to assess a child's ability to understand and communicate about their immediate environment and experiences. Nouns form the core vocabulary of any language and are essential for effective communication. Noun vocabulary provides the foundation for further language development, as children can build on their knowledge of nouns to expand their language skills and express more complex ideas. The inclusion of verbs (the second largest word group) is related to children's activities and corresponds to their everyday experiences. Thus, we can assess their familiarity with words that are commonly used in their environment, such as "play"," "eat" and "sleep". These verbs reflect their active participation and help assess their language development in an appropriate context. Verbs are also action words that demonstrate a child's ability to communicate

and describe their actions effectively, expand their language repertoire and articulate a wider range of language experiences. The target words for the receptive and expressive activities were randomly selected based on the general educational competence acquired in a preschool educational institution and the knowledge of the respective age group under typical conditions. While working with the test, the child is familiarized with the parts step by step. In the "Understanding" part, the child has to choose the correct option after hearing a word, and in the "Naming" part he has to say what he sees in the picture. One point was awarded for each correct answer, while wrong answers and non-answers were awarded zero points. The maximum possible score was 50 for "Understanding" and 50 for "Naming". Before the test, the examiner presented the child with a sample task and explained how to do it. There was no time limit for completing the task.

Two linguists carried out the research by talking to the children exclusively in either Ukrainian or Polish, without switching languages during a single test. The first session was conducted exclusively in one language, while the second session was conducted in the other language, in a separate room and with a different tester.

3 Participants

The study focused on a sample of Ukrainian children attending preschools in Krakow (Poland) who were displaced after 24 February 2022 due to the war in Ukraine. All the children were born in Ukraine and came to Poland as forced migrants. A total of 100 children (52 boys and 48 girls) took part in the study. Their average age was 59.5 months (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. The age of the children.

	Age in months
N	100.00
Mean	59.50
Median	58.00
Standard deviation	6.86
Minimum	48
Maximum	71

The age of about five years old is a crucial developmental period when children experience cognitive and neurological growth. This stage is vital for language acquisition and vocabulary expansion. Extensive scientific research has explored this topic, with notable contributions from scholars such as E. Hoff (2006), V. C. M. Gathercole & E. M. Thomas (Gathercole & Thomas, 2009). These studies have emphasized the importance of studying language development and vocabulary acquisition during this period. By examining the vocabulary development of Ukrainian children in this age group, particularly within the context of forced migration, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how the refugee experience impacts early-stage language development. Investigating the language abilities of these children and measuring their vocabulary growth in a situation of systemic disruption provides valuable insights into the broader effects of displacement on linguistic development. Also, the study of early speech development in children, particularly those with refugee experiences, is of significant importance due to the critical nature of early language acquisition and its impact on lifelong communication skills.

4 Results

After a few months of living in Poland and learning in preschools in Poland, a quantitative analysis of the vocabulary assessment results showed differences in vocabulary development between Ukrainian and Polish at the early stages of sequential bilingualism. Table 2 shows the exact mean, median, standard deviation, minimum and maximum of receptive and expressive vocabulary in Ukrainian and Polish. Vocabulary skills in Ukrainian and Polish are represented by the number of words produced and understood in both languages.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for vocabulary scores in two languages (Ukrainian and Polish).

	Ukrainian receptive vocabulary	Ukrainian expressive vocabulary	Polish receptive vocabulary	Polish expressive vocabulary
2-5 N	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Mean	45.74	24.33	2.34	0.16
Median	47.00	25.00	2.00	0.00
Standard deviation	3.54	18.50	2.45	0.49
Minimum	34	0	0	0
Maximum	50	48	9	3

Most of the children who participated in the study did not speak Polish and could not name the pictures presented to them in Polish. The average ability to use Polish words was 0.16 (the median was 0.0) and the ability to understand Polish words was 2.34 (the median was 2.0). In contrast, the children showed a better ability to understand Ukrainian words; the average score was 45.74 (the median was 47.0). For the ability to use Ukrainian words, the average was much lower, with a mean score of 24.33 (the median was 25.0). This is due to the fact that the children also used Russian when naming objects, features and activities on the pictures (see Table 3). The high value of the standard deviation in the case of expressive Ukrainian vocabulary (18.02) proves that the values of the variables are strongly scattered around the mean (high differentiation of the results). Low differentiation of results occurred in the case of receptive Ukrainian vocabulary (3.54), where we can observe low values of standard deviation, proving low dispersion of values.

Table 3 clearly shows how the Ukrainian families in which the children grow up have a bilingual family language policy. The indicators of the children's expressive vocabulary in both Ukrainian and Russian demonstrate active bilingualism within the group studied. For the ability to use Ukrainian words, the average was 24.33 (the median was 25.0) and for Russian 18.0 (the median was 13.0). It is important to note that since 2014, the Ukrainian education system no longer supports the development of the Russian language, except in cases involving representatives of national minorities. Ukrainian legislation gives priority to the Ukrainian language as the official state language. It can be concluded that some Ukrainian families use Russian as a mother tongue in their families.

Table 3 contains indicators of the use of Russian expressive vocabulary among Ukrainian children with refugee experience, reflecting the complicated linguistic landscape in Ukraine. Upon their arrival in Poland as forced migrants, a number of Ukrainian children were identified as active bilinguals, proficient in both Ukrainian and Russian (see Table 3). The data in Table 3 show that not only Ukrainian, but also Russian is spoken in the family. It is likely that the prevalence of Russian among some Ukrainian children does not have a significant impact on their mastery of Polish, but it does on their mastery of Ukrainian. Active support and reinforcement of Ukrainian in the family and at school is essential to counteract children's reduced language use. It is important to recognise that the most effective language acquisition occurs through communication with

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for expressive vocabulary scores in two languages (Ukrainian and Russian).

	Ukrainian expressive vocabulary	Russian expressive vocabulary
N	100.00	100.00
Mean	24.30	18.00
Median	25.00	13.00
Standard deviation	18.02	17.38
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	48	49

native speakers and not through didactic teaching alone. The linguistic environment in which a child develops language skills is of paramount importance (Smith-Christmas, 2020).

The children's bilingual practises involve code-switching in various communicative situations, which is evident in the receptive vocabulary of some individuals. Code-switching is an indicator of bilingual activities. Through such language practise, children develop active bilingualism at an early age, especially between closely related languages. Frequent code-switching often leads to a blending of languages, especially in young children, resulting in a period of varying intensity. Understanding this aspect is crucial when it comes to the acquisition of Polish by Ukrainian children. The age-specific nature of early bilingualism and multilingualism influences the language codes acquired by the child. Multilingual children may hybridise lexical items and syntactic structures due to their limited vocabulary, which they sometimes borrow from another language. These children typically exhibit an underdeveloped grammatical system and a lack of understanding of grammatical forms and categories (King & Fogle, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesise that Ukrainian children who are already bilingual may encounter additional challenges in distinguishing between language codes when learning another language such as Polish, the language of their host country and the primary language of the educational process. Therefore, it is likely that these children will develop a trilingualism that includes Ukrainian, Russian and Polish. The trilingualism of Ukrainians in Poland, including in adulthood, has been closely studied from a sociolinguistic perspective by Polish researcher P. Levchuk (2019). The multilingualism of Slavic languages in early childhood needs to be further extensively researched and described, especially in the context of studying the linguistic mechanisms of lexeme hybridisation.

5 Conclusions and Discussion

The research findings provide valuable insights into the language skills of Ukrainian children living and receiving education in a Polish-speaking environment. The study focused on the language situation of Ukrainian preschool children in Poland who, as refugees, have access to education in Polish preschools. The research shows the importance of finding appropriate educational solutions for Ukrainian children of different age groups, with a special focus on preschool children, as their language development at this critical stage significantly influences their future success in host country school curriculums. The analysis of language competence in Ukrainian and Polish based on vocabulary tests with Ukrainian children aged 4 and 5 shows, on the one hand, the difficult language situation in Ukraine before the war. The complexity of the Ukrainian language situation is shown in the use of Russian expressive vocabulary by Ukrainian children, which points to their bilingualism. Clearly, the language experiences of Ukrainian children in European countries, especially in Poland, require further research and sociolinguistic characterisation, as these experiences and family language practises influence the overall level of language competence of bilingual and multilingual children. However, based on the data of this study, it can be said that Ukrainian children who are forced migrants are often active Ukrainian–Russian bilinguals, and that when

they learn the language of their country of temporary residence (Polish), there arises an active trilingualism of Slavic languages, as Ukrainian and Russian are the home languages (with different intensity of use), and Polish is the language of the country of residence. Secondly, it should be noted that despite the active use of Russian by Ukrainian children, the quantitative indicators of the tests point to the highest possible level of understanding of Ukrainian (Ukrainian receptive vocabulary) and active use of Ukrainian in Ukrainian families. Thirdly, the lexical tests show that the Ukrainian children do not speak Polish, although it is the language of their new environment and the language of systematic learning. This is due to the short period of time in which Polish has been learned (a few months) and to the fact that Ukrainian children have the opportunity to communicate with their peers in other languages. We believe that a longer stay of Ukrainian preschool children with refugee experience in Poland correlates positively with their level of vocabulary knowledge and that more active communication in Polish leads to an improvement in vocabulary skills. A longer period of time during which Ukrainian children systematically learn Polish and prepare for school with corresponding language requirements in the host country is likely to show different results in Polish learning, which will be reflected in the overall results of the project, as the tests are planned to be repeated after 6 months. When describing the speed and quality of the language adaptation of Ukrainian children with refugee experience in the Polish-speaking environment, it is important to take into account different situations that can both accelerate and slow down the acquisition of third language competence. We expect that further detailed analysis of the sociolinguistic parameters of the communication situation, including the linguistic environment in which Ukrainian bilingual children practise speaking a third language, the ratio and activity of use of all contact languages, and the characteristics of family language policies, will inform the conclusions of the project, which were not considered at this stage of the study.

Points for further research and public debate include the question of how long the stay in the host country can last in order to reach the language level required for a full education, and how this language acquisition can be accelerated. An equally important issue that needs further research is an in-depth analysis of family language policies and practises that affect the development and language skills of Ukrainian pre-school children.

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