

HOME LANGUAGE AND FORCED MIGRATION: COMMUNICATION PRACTICES OF UKRAINIAN PRESCHOOLERS IN POLAND

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This article investigates the communication practices of Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland, with a focus on the impact of forced migration on their acquisition and use of their native language. The research highlights that Ukrainian preschoolers who have experienced refugee status in Poland encounter significant obstacles in learning and utilizing their native language in preschool educational settings, especially when it comes to literacy education in Ukrainian. The situation is further complicated by the fact that a substantial proportion of Ukrainian families use Russian as their primary language, as evidenced by a sociolinguistic survey of Ukrainian parents with preschool-aged children in Krakow, Poland. This phenomenon is rooted in the complex language landscape of Ukraine, which is characterized by widespread forms of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism. The findings underscore that some Ukrainian children whose families prefer Russian for everyday communication lack access to Ukrainian, leading to difficulties in mastering Ukrainian as the official language of their homeland and hindering their reintegration into the Ukrainian educational system after the end of the conflict. Additionally, the study reveals that the recommended approach to teaching Polish as a foreign language to Ukrainian children is not well-suited to the linguistic needs of Ukrainians.

The study emphasizes the importance of promoting and supporting the learning of home languages, particularly for forced migrant children, but at the same time not to break ties with the homeland, because most of the migrants are going to return after the end of the war. It also highlights the need for developing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching methods that are tailored to the needs of migrant children with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the communication practices of Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland and contributes to the growing body of research on language and forced migration.

Key words: bilingualism, multilingualism, family language policy, refugee families, language socialization, early childhood education, home language, first language, second language, target language.

Шевчук-Клюжева О. В. Сімейна мова та вимушена міграція: комунікативні практики українських дошкільнят у Польщі. У статті досліджено комунікативні практики українських дошкільнят у Польщі, зосереджено увагу на впливі вимушеної міграції на засвоєння та використання рідної мови. Підкреслено, що українські дошкільнята, які отримали тимчасовий захист у Польщі, стикаються зі значними перешкодами у вивченні та використанні рідної мови в дошкільних навчальних закладах, зокрема коли йдеться про навчання грамоти українською. Ситуація ускладнюється ще й фактом використання значною частиною українських сімей російської мови як основної, про що свідчить соціолінгвістичне опитування українців, які виховують дітей дошкільного віку. Опитування проведено серед батьків, чії діти відвідують дитячий садок у місті Кракові (Польща).

Зазначено, що поширення українсько-російських білінгвальних практик серед українських родин із досвідом біженства варто пов'язувати зі складним мовним ландшафтом України, для якого характерне існування різних форм білінгвізму між спорідненими мовами. Результати опитування підтверджують, що деякі українські діти, чії родини віддають перевагу російській мові для повсякденного спілкування, не мають доступу до української мови, що призводить до труднощів засвоєння української як офіційної мови їхньої батьківщини та ускладнює процес їх подальшої реінтеграції в українську освітню систему, який, найімовірніше, станеться після завершення конфлікту. Дослідження ситуації також виявило, що рекомендований підхід до навчання українських дітей польської мови як іноземної не завжди відповідає мовним потребам українців.

Наголошено на важливості сприяти та підтримувати вивчення рідної мови, особливо для дітей вимушених мігрантів, але водночас не розривати зв'язки з батьківщиною, оскільки більшість мігрантів збираються повернутися після закінчення війни. У такій ситуації постає нагальна потреба випрацювати методи навчання з урахуванням культурних та мовних особливостей, які адаптовані до потреб дітей-мігрантів з різним мовним походженням. Стаття дає цінну інформацію про комунікаційні практики українських дошкільнят у Польщі та сприяє зростанню кількості досліджень мови та вимушеної міграції.

Ключові слова: білінгвізм, багатомовність, сімейна мовна політика, сім'ї біженців, мовна соціалізація, рання освіта, сімейна мова, перша мова, друга мова, цільова мова.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of the consideration. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to a massive displacement of people, including children, who have sought refuge in

neighboring countries, such as Poland. Ukrainian preschoolers in the Polish educational system face a number of unique challenges, including a language barrier, curriculum differences, trauma and emotional support

needs, and a lack of resources. Forced migration is a reality for many families. According to the latest UNICEF statistics (January 2023), there are over 600,000 Ukrainian children aged 3 to 19 currently residing in Poland, with approximately 22% enrolled in children's clubs and preschools, totaling more than 130,000 children. However, a small part of Ukrainian-language educational institutions was created as a reaction to the crisis situation, and the vast majority of preschool children attend Polish state kindergartens with the Polish language of instruction. This situation has raised a number of debatable issues regarding the methods of teaching Polish as the target language of education for migrants. The language portrait of Ukrainian families is heterogeneous, and a significant part of Ukrainian families with preschool-aged children use Russian as the functional first language in the family language policy. In this context, the article will focus on the communication practices of Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland and how their forced migration has affected their progress in language acquisition.

Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the language portrait of Ukrainian families raises questions about the implementation of language policies in preschool education. For example, while some Ukrainian families may speak Ukrainian at home, others may use Russian as their first language. This creates a complex linguistic landscape that requires careful consideration when designing language policies and educational programs for Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland. Another significant challenge is the lack of Ukrainian-language educational institutions in Poland. While some schools and educational institutions provide Ukrainian-language instruction, they are scarce and may not be accessible to all Ukrainian preschoolers. This creates a situation where Ukrainian preschoolers are often forced to rely on the Polish education system to provide them with language instruction, which may not always be adequate or effective.

Overall, the main problem is that Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland face significant language difficulties that can impact their educational and social integration. Addressing these difficulties requires a comprehensive understanding of the complex linguistic landscape of Ukrainian families in Poland and the development of effective language policies and educational programs that consider the unique needs of Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland. In this article, we will try to explore these challenges in depth and discuss potential solutions that can help Ukrainian preschoolers succeed in their new educational environment in Poland. By examining the experiences of Ukrainian preschoolers in Poland, we can gain important insights into the broader issue of supporting the educational needs of migrant children in host countries.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The article explores the language development of Ukrainian preschool children who have experienced forced migration due to the military aggression against Ukraine. It is important to emphasize the importance of understanding the complex linguistic and cultural backgrounds of migrant children, and the need to support their language development in a multilingual context. The study builds

on existing research on bilingual and multilingual language development in preschool children, family language policies, and positive language learning practices for children with refugee experience [7; 10; 20; 21; 3; 22; 17]. The article highlights the trilingual language development of Ukrainian preschoolers with refugee experience in Poland, drawing on Pawel Levchuk's bilingualism and multilingualism research [11; 12]. The article also provides a positive educational practice that support the language development and social-emotional well-being of preschool children with refugee experience. The authors draw on work on creating a friendly environment and promoting positive learning experiences for migrant children [9].

The study employed a range of sociolinguistic methods, including statistical methods, to collect and analyze data. Specifically, data from a sociolinguistic survey conducted online in July 2022 was used to gain insight into the language situation of preschool children from Ukrainian families who had migrated to Poland following the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The survey, titled "Family Language Policy of Ukrainians in Poland", was conducted in Krakow among families whose children attend a Ukrainian kindergarten. The survey had 65 adult respondents, who represented families with children aged 4.5-6.0. The survey questionnaire comprised 28 questions about language practices, experiences, and behavior in family communication, as well as the correlation between Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and other languages used by the children.

The majority of respondents (86%) came from major Ukrainian cities, representing all macro-regions of Ukraine with different historical and socio-cultural characteristics. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of national trends in the formation of children's language groups and the priority of primary and secondary means of communication. By analyzing the self-identification of the language(s) used in family communication, the study provided a unique perspective on the linguistic situation in Ukrainian families who were forced to migrate to Poland. The article contributes to the growing body of research on language development and forced migration, highlighting the importance of supporting the language development and social-emotional well-being of migrant children in host countries.

The purpose and objectives of the article. The purpose is to investigate the communication practices of Ukrainian preschoolers who have experienced forced migration and their families in Poland, particularly in relation to their home language use. Based on the purpose, **the objectives** of the article are as follows: 1) explore the language background and language use of Ukrainian families with refugee experience who raise preschool children in Poland; 2) examine the factors that influence Ukrainian preschoolers' language use in Poland; 3) investigate the strategies used by Ukrainian families to maintain their home language and culture in Poland.

The outline of the main research material. The representation of the language situation in the families of migrants from Ukraine in Poland is essential for understanding the challenges and opportunities facing

these families in terms of language preservation and development. Language is a crucial aspect of identity, culture, and communication, and its maintenance is vital for the well-being of individuals and communities. Therefore, it is important to analyze the components of family language policy, including the home language and general educational practices applied by the Polish government to the education of forced migrants from Ukraine, particularly preschool children. The home language is a critical component of family language policy as it is the primary means of communication between family members. For Ukrainian migrants in Poland, maintaining the Ukrainian language is essential for preserving their cultural identity and ensuring that their children are bilingual. The use of the Ukrainian language at home can help children develop strong ties to their cultural roots and provide them with the necessary linguistic skills to communicate with their extended family members in Ukraine. It is important to note that the term home language is not actively used in Ukrainian linguistics. However, understanding the situation regarding the application of different formats of family language policy through the characterization of family language practices, home language, first of all, will give an understanding of language situation. The concept of home language refers to the language(s) spoken by family members in the home environment and can provide important information about language use patterns and preferences. Therefore, analyzing sociolinguistic indicators of the use of family languages, including the home language, the child's mother tongue (first language), and the activity of other languages, is crucial for understanding the linguistic dynamics within migrant communities. Analyzing the family language practices of migrants and understanding the situation with the realization of the educational rights of migrants in the educational system of Poland can provide a general idea of the situation with the preservation and development of the Ukrainian language outside of Ukraine. It can help identify the challenges and opportunities facing Ukrainian migrant families in Poland and provide insights into the effectiveness of current policies and practices aimed at supporting minority languages and cultures.

Recent research has shown an increasing interest in understanding the socio-emotional and cognitive aspects of family language policies, including the interaction, dynamics, reciprocity, and orientation of its various components. Positive beliefs and attitudes held by both parents and children are essential for creating an environment that fosters language development and promotion [18, 182]. Researchers suggest that family language policies, language management efforts, ideologies, implicit and explicit language choices, and parental language use, strategies, practices, and well-being can all influence children's language outcomes [5].

In this study, we aim to examine various parameters that we consider important and indicative, such as the child's language of origin, the mother tongue, and the child's mother tongue. By analyzing these data, we hope to identify general sociolinguistic trends among forced migrants from Ukraine and gain a better understanding of the relationship between the language spoken at

home and various learning outcomes, which remains poorly understood to date.

The role of language in the well-being and integration of immigrants is complex. Language proficiency is important for becoming socialized into the linguistic and cultural behaviors of different communities [15], particularly in mono-ethnic communities [8], as well as more diverse communities [6]. Home language is critical to a person's identity, which is required for psychological well-being [3, 311].

Theories of segmented assimilation suggest that preserving the culture and language of the country of origin is an alternative path to integration that can also lead to high levels of education for immigrant children [16, 38]. In contrast, linear assimilation theories propose that over time and across generations, immigrants stop using their language of origin and switch to the language of the destination country [2, 43]. Studies investigating language retention and change tend to find relatively rapid intergenerational changes in L2 use and proficiency and corresponding L1 attrition [1; 14; 19]. The situation with Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland is still unclear due to the ongoing military conflict and the situation of waiting, as migrants from Ukraine express a desire to return to Ukraine under favorable conditions. However, their prolonged stay in Poland is likely to influence their speech behavior both within family communication and outside the family.

The demographic indicators for Ukrainian temporary migrants in Poland revealed that this population is mostly composed of young women. Specifically, 75.3% of respondents were under 45 years old, and 98.5% were women (see Table 1). The author of study also emphasized the importance of understanding changes in the language behavior of forced migrants from Ukraine. 41.5% of respondents indicated that their behavior had changed, while 38.5% reported that it had changed to some extent. These results suggest that the experience of migration can influence the way people think about and use language. The high percentage of respondents who reported changes in their language behavior or attitudes underscores the complexity of language use among forced migrants and highlights the need for careful consideration of the social, cultural, and linguistic factors that shape language preferences and behavior.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the home language is the language learned in childhood in the home environment, and the term can also be defined as the first language or mother tongue. In Polish academic discourse, the term home language is used as an equivalent of heritage language and is defined as the spoken language of everyday family life, which is also a kind of ethnic language [13, 166]. According to survey data, Ukrainian families still frequently utilize the Russian language for their home communication. The results showed that Russian remains a common language within households, with 29.2% of respondents using it as their primary language. Meanwhile, 40% of respondents reported using Ukrainian as their main language for family communication. The remaining 30.8% of respondents identified their family as bilingual, as they adapt their language based on the situation at hand (see Table 2).

Table 1
Survey “Family language policy of Ukrainians in Poland” (2022), age, gender and origin of 65 respondents. Own research

Age:	
25-30 y/o	9.3%
30-35 y/o	21.5%
35-40 y/o	21.5%
40-45 y/o	23.1%
45-50 y/o	21.5%
50-60 y/o	3.1%
Gender:	
Female	98.5%
Male	1.5%
Origin (macro regions):	
Kyiv	10.8%
Eastern part of Ukraine	18.7%
Southern part of Ukraine	22.3%
Center of Ukraine	12.7%
Northern part of Ukraine	19.4%
Western part of Ukraine	16.1%

family. Unfortunately, this preference for Russian as a home language or first language for children, combined with limited contact with Ukrainian in other environments, can hinder the development of communicative competence in Ukrainian, especially in the context of early childhood bilingualism. The results of the socio-linguistic survey conducted among Ukrainian forced migrants raising preschool children in Krakow suggest that it is important to give careful consideration to the educational environment available to these individuals in Poland. The linguistic diversity observed within Ukrainian families, coupled with the prevalence of Russian as a home language, highlights the need to create favorable conditions for preschoolers to practice and maintain proficiency in Ukrainian. Such efforts can help facilitate the successful reintegration of Ukrainian children into their home country’s educational system in the future, while also maintaining their connections to Ukrainian language and culture. This is especially important for families in which Russian is the primary language of communication (29.2%) or those who practice bilingualism between Ukrainian and Russian depending on communicative context (30.8%), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Survey “Family language policy of Ukrainians in Poland” (2022), use of language(s) at home by 65 respondents. Own research

What language do you use at home?	
Ukrainian / mostly Ukrainian	40%
Russian / mostly Russian	29.2%
It depends on the situation (Ukrainian and Russian)	30.8%
Another option	0.0%

This inquiry presents an accurate portrayal of the language dynamics within families raising Ukrainian preschool children. The survey revealed that 60% of respondents either selected Russian as their primary language for family communication or identified their family as bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian. Thus, it can be inferred that the majority of survey’s participants are bilingual. Respondents noted that both languages play a significant role in family communication, serving both communicative and cognitive functions.

The survey results depicting the language choices of Ukrainian families align with the data on parents’ determination of their children’s mother tongue. This study defines a child’s mother tongue as the primary language that is most frequently used and actively practiced within the home environment. As a result, Table 3 illustrates the numerical distribution of the mother tongue.

The linguistic landscape of Ukrainian families appears multifaceted, characterized by a significant degree of bilingualism. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, one of which is the active practice of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism among forced migrants from Ukraine, who strive to maintain informal communication, in particular, in the Russian language. As a result, a significant share of migrants continues to use Russian as the main language in the

Table 3
Survey “Family language policy of Ukrainians in Poland” (2022), functionally-first language(s) of 65 respondents’ children. Own research

What language does your child speak? (functional-first language)	
Ukrainian language	53.8%
Russian language	16.9%
Ukrainian and Russian languages	26.2%
Another option	3.1%

Regarding the educational situation for Ukrainian children, it is worth noting that many Ukrainian children residing in Poland may be eligible for education under a legal act. The document published in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland (March 11, 2022), which regulates the education of non-Polish citizens and Polish citizens living abroad. The act specifies that educational institutions established for these individuals must provide instruction in Polish and may also offer instruction in other languages as needed. However, there is no specific mention of support for the Ukrainian language or Ukrainian-language instruction. The Ukrainian children in Poland may have access to education under this act, there are concerns about the lack of support for the Ukrainian language in Polish schools. Although there have been efforts made to address this issue, such as the implementation of Ukrainian language classes in some Polish schools and the establishment of Ukrainian-language schools in areas with a substantial Ukrainian population, these measures are sporadic in nature and are unable to effectively solve the problem.

Conclusions and directions for further research. In conclusion, the article highlights the challenges faced by Ukrainian preschoolers and their families who have undergone forced migration to Poland, particularly in terms of maintaining their home language and

culture. The study shows that while Ukrainian adults in Poland actively use Russian as their home language, the majority of Ukrainian children do not have access to Ukrainian language education in Poland, which may negatively impact their proficiency in the language and their cultural ties to their homeland. The article raises important debatable issues for further research, such as the prioritization of language for bilingual and multilingual children and its impact on their education in the host country or upon returning to their homeland. Further research can investigate the role of the family in maintaining the home language and culture of forced migrant children. Specifically, how can families actively promote and encourage the use of the home language among children, and what strategies can they use to balance the use of the home language with the acquisition of the host country's language? Another debatable issue is the effectiveness of language policies in host countries towards migrant children. This includes the availability and accessibility of language programs in

schools, as well as the inclusion of the home language in the curriculum. Research can examine the impact of such policies on the language proficiency, academic success, and overall well-being of migrant children. Moreover, the study highlights the need for greater awareness and understanding of the benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism in educational systems, including the potential advantages for cognitive development and academic achievement. Further research can explore effective strategies for promoting multilingualism and bilingualism in educational settings, especially in contexts of forced migration. Finally, more research is needed on the long-term effects of disrupted language and cultural ties on migrant children and their families. Understanding the impact of forced migration on the language and cultural identity of individuals can help inform policies and programs that support the integration and well-being of forced migrant communities. These issues require further analysis and strategic decision-making from political leaders.

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