GLOTTODIDACTICA LI/1 (2024)
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY PRESS POZNAŃ
https://doi.org/10.14746/gl.2024.51.1.3

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Lifeworld dimensions in language education and the integration of refugee students in Germany: Results from a study with Ukrainian refugees

Abstract. This paper examines the educational challenges and language acquisition processes of newly immigrated students in Germany, with a focus on children and adolescents who have fled Ukraine. Utilizing qualitative interviews with Ukrainian refugees, the study explores the impact of migration, particularly due to the Russian war against Ukraine, on the language education of these individuals in German as a Second Language settings. The interviews, which were conducted with women who have fled Ukraine, and include their perspectives on familial language practices and educational orientations, reveal the complexities faced by this population in their host country. The paper discusses the implications of experiences of flight, language use within the family, structural changes in educational approaches, and the Ukrainian online schooling in sustaining educational continuity. The findings underscore the need for trauma sensitive, culture informed, and language-specific pedagogy, alongside the importance of considering the emotional and psychological well-being of refugee students. The paper calls for more nuanced research, and didactic considerations that align with the diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds of refugee students.

Keywords: migration, language education, German as a second language, Ukrainian refugees in Germany, educational integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language education aimed at immigrant students who acquire the German language in the context of fleeing their home countries has posed a unique challenge for schools in Germany since 2015, and in particular for German as a second language (Deutsch als Zweitsprache: DaZ) instruction, and has been addressed by various disciplines. The discussion in educational sciences and the didactics of German as a second language is mainly concerned with questions of schooling

Glottodidactica 51(1), 2024: 45–66. © The Author(s). Published by Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2024.

and second language acquisition of newly immigrated students (cf. Ahrenholz et al. 2018; Benholz et al. 2016; Birkner et al. 2022b; Cornely Harboe et al. 2016b; Gamper et al. 2020; Massumi et al. 2015; McElvany et al. 2017; Otto et al. 2016; Ohm et al. 2023; von Dewitz et al. 2018). In addition to various schooling models and the development of language skills in selected areas, the discussion also addresses the impact of fleeing as a particular form of migration on (language) learning processes (cf. Cornely Harboe et al. 2016a; Cornely Harboe et al. 2018; Plutzar 2016; Plutzar 2019; Quehl 2019; Reiter 2019). Many questions regarding the design of German teaching and learning processes for different age groups, school types, and proficiency levels remain open (cf. Birkner 2022a: 10). However, there is a broad consensus that cultural-, trauma-, and language-sensitive teaching that takes existing (language) skills and (language) learning experiences into account and builds upon them, should be a fundamental principle of language work with newly immigrated students (cf. Bredthauer & von Dewitz 2022; Brummel & Kimmelmann 2017; Cornely Harboe et al. 2016a; Consortium BiSS-Transfer 2021).

The issue resurfaced in 2022 after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, as a result of which many people were forced to leave Ukraine and seek refuge in other countries. In Germany, the first representative survey[1] of refugees from Ukraine shows that 80% of the adults are women, 77% of whom came without a partner and 48% with minor children (cf. Brücker et al. 2022: 1). According to KMK school statistics, as of December 2023, 222569 children and adolescents who have fled Ukraine have been enrolled in general and vocational schools in Germany (cf. KMK 2023). The number of children at the preschool level is unknown.

For research and practice, the following question arises: On which findings regarding the schooling of newly immigrated students can we build, and which specific migration conditions of Ukrainian refugee children and young people should be taken into account?

In our paper, we consider refuge as a distinct form of migration, examining familial language practices and the educational orientations of Ukrainian refugee families. These aspects, highlighted by interviewees, merit consideration in ongoing discussions about integration and the teaching of German as a second language.

[1] In the study "Refugees from Ukraine in Germany" (IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP Survey), "in the first wave, 11,225 Ukrainian nationals aged 18 to 70 years old were surveyed, who moved to Germany from February 24, 2022, to June 8, 2022, and were registered by the residents' registration offices" (Brücker et al. 2022: 3).

2. STUDY AND METHOD

This paper is based on findings from an exploratory qualitative interview study "Linguistic situation of Ukrainian refugee families in Germany", which was conducted with women who have fled from Ukraine. The search for interview participants was conducted via personal contacts and social media. The interviews took place from June 2022 to January 2023 in the form of video conferences and telephone calls. The criteria for participation in the study were 1) entry into Germany after or shortly before February 24, 2022, and 2) a familial relationship with one or more children or youths. The interview guide focused on the language situation of the family before and after the flight and included questions about the languages spoken at home in Ukraine and family language in Germany, as well as languages learned or mastered. 24 guided interviews have been conducted with Ukrainian refugees, ranging in length from 12:46 to 57:28 minutes and averaging 34.8 minutes. The total duration of the audio recordings is 835 minutes or 13.9 hours. Participants chose the language for the interviews, resulting in mainly Ukrainian (with two partially in Russian) interviews, which were then transcribed by a multilingual research assistant.

Two researchers are using a summarizing content analysis to evaluate the interview transcripts. The goal of this approach is to reduce the material to retain only the essential content. This process aims to create a manageable corpus that, through abstraction, still reflects the original material (cf. Mayring 2015: 67). The analysis of the narratives was also carried out in accordance with narrative analysis (Schütze 1983), with a focus not only on the 'what' but also on the 'how'.

The data evaluation, guided by the summarizing content analysis (Mayring 2015), centers on several key areas: familial language practices, the multilingualism of children and young individuals in both daily life and school settings, and their viewpoints on schooling (cf. Orobchuk & Skintey 2023; Skintey et al. 2023; Skintey & Orobchuk 2024, forthcoming). The project aims to shed light on the context of flight and its influence on language practices and language acquisition, and to develop didactical implications on this basis. Thus, the project focuses on three target groups: children, adults, and the family as a cooperative space. Additionally, interviews with teachers (n=5) were conducted to include their perspectives. Although these interviews are not intended to be used as primary data in the current study, they have been instrumental in defining the focal points of the research.

When interpreting the results, some limitations of the study must be considered. The sample selection process may introduce potential bias, as those who participated might have had a pre-existing interest in the project's focus, potentially rendering the sample as less representative. Additionally, the use of

digital tools for interviews could have altered interaction dynamics. The socio-cultural and national commonalities between the researchers and the participants could influence the breadth of shared information and lead to a 'fraternization effect', causing participants to subconsciously avoid controversial topics or omit information, a phenomenon noted by Baros (cf. 2010: 376–379). Furthermore, the researcher's personal motivations and emotions can affect the interview process and its content (cf. Ellis et al. 2011: 278). Acknowledging the researcher's positionality is thus essential, requiring reflection as an analytical tool in the approach (cf. Siouti 2022: 117–118). These considerations underscore the need for additional methodological improvements in future research to mitigate these limitations and enhance the neutrality of data collection and analysis.

Based on the collected data, we allow ourselves to present important initial findings from the study. The following sections will address aspects that are not "visible" in the classroom but have a significant influence on language acquisition and play an important role in language and educational integration: the experience of flight, language use within the family and in the context of flight, parental educational aspirations, and participation in Ukrainian online classes. We consider these factors to be significant elements in the lifeworld[2] of newly immigrated students from Ukraine.

3. SCHOOLING FOR NEWLY ARRIVED STUDENTS: NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITY

A retrospective reveals that the schooling of newly immigrated students is not a novelty but has been a task of the German school system since the 1950s gaining significance in the course of wave-like migration movements (cf. Gamper et al. 2020: 347–348; Karakayalı et al. 2017: 225–228; Reich 2017: 77–84). Educational policy strategies developed hastily from one immigration wave to the next in dealing with this task are criticized as "crisis management" (Schroeder 2018: 9) and "adhocracy" (Karakayalı et al. 2017: 228).

The schooling and the associated design of German as a second language (DaZ) learning offers are based on state-specific regulations and are also tied to school-specific implementation possibilities (see, for example, Gamper et al. 2020: 352). As a result of these developments, there are a variety of different formats that range from separate schooling in a preparatory class at one pole to direct and complete integration into regular classes at the other pole (cf. Ahrenholz et al. 2018: 44; Massumi et al. 2015: 7; Otto et al. 2016: 25–27). Although so far there is

[2] German: *lebensweltlich.*

little research on which form of schooling allows for better linguistic and social integration of the students (cf. Marx 2020: 1), the current results favor integrated schooling with tailored German as a second language support (cf. Höckel & Schilling 2022: 23) and a better integration of preparatory with regular classes (cf. Karakayalı & Heller 2022: 5). At the same time, existing research provides evidence that current language education concepts or their implementation do not suffice to provide newly immigrated students with the same educational opportunities as students without an immigration background (cf. Marx et al. 2021: 829–830; Montanari et al. 2017: 19).

Regarding the schooling and German language acquisition of children and youth who have fled from Ukraine, research-based insights are still lacking. Reports mention war-related psychological stress and trauma among children and adolescents, the dual burden due to the parallel attendance of Ukrainian online school, and the families' ambivalent desires to stay or return (cf. Mediendienst Integration 2022).

Building on the insights explored, we now delve into a critical conceptual reflection. This sets the stage for a deeper and more nuanced examination of the complex identities and experiences that continue to shape and inform our study's outcomes, as well as the broader discourse surrounding the education of refugees in displacement and resettlement contexts.

In this section, we specifically grapple with the challenges and implications of 'othering'[3] (cf. Karakayalı & Heller 2022: 305) associated with ethno-national-cultural differences. While recognizing the risks involved in emphasizing these distinctions, we maintain that it is essential for two primary reasons. Firstly, doing so brings much-needed attention to the often overlooked Ukrainian-speaking group within educational, second, and foreign language didactic research. Secondly, challenging the war propaganda narrative denying the existence and sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation and language is paramount to ensure that the scientific discourse does not inadvertently perpetuate these destructive narratives.

It is important to emphasize that our use of the terms 'from Ukraine' and 'Ukrainian' transcends the limitations of citizenship or ethnic origin. We use these terms inclusively to cover the diverse spectrum of children and young people who lived in Ukraine during the onset of the Russian war of aggression, participated in the Ukrainian educational system, and subsequently were compelled to flee. This inclusive approach captures the experiences of both national

[3] German: *Besonderung*. This means "a form of differentiation" that also makes the newly immigrated students "a distinguishable group from the rest of the class in joint schooling" (Karakayalı & Heller 2022: 305).

minorities residing in Ukraine and other refugees, such as the Syrian community that faced secondary displacement.

Furthermore, as we engage with our interview data, we must bear in mind that we are examining the narratives of a "highly self-selected population" (cf. Kohlenberger et al. 2022) that fled the country in the immediate context of the conflict. Therefore, the reconstructed aspects of lifeworld may differ from those of people who have fled from Ukraine and have had longer experiences of war, occupation, and flight, and as a result, may possess incomplete or interrupted educational biographies or, in general, shorter educational biographies (cf. Baier-Klenkert 2021).

4. EXAMINING THE LIFEWORLD: INSIGHTS INTO UKRAINIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Concerning schooling, our data show that students go through different models and, due to moving, age, or grade-level changes, may switch between them (cf. Skintey et al. 2023). Different students experience the forms of schooling in varying ways during the first months: Regular classroom education is perceived as a place of neglect and misunderstanding, education in a 'Ukrainian' class is seen as demotivating due to age-related heterogeneity, and placement in a 'mixed' preparatory class is seen as a punishment, since participation in the 'Ukrainian' class was unsuccessful (cf. Skintey et al. 2023). Additionally, there are reports of positive experiences in German regular classes, supported by online private tuition in German and English after an initially "traumatic" phase (interview 17).

In the following, we address aspects that, as elements of the students' lifeworld, influence their educational and linguistic integration and lead to pedagogical and didactic considerations.

4.1. Potential traumatic experiences and the consequences for education

Refugee children bring with them not only their educational experiences and cultural backgrounds (often seen as foundational in the field of German as a second language): The realities of these children and young people include their experiences, particularly before and during their stay in Germany or other countries (cf. Paradis et al. 2022). The experience of fleeing does not end with their arrival at another seemingly safe place. Being forced to leave one's home

is usually accompanied by traumatic experiences[4], which can be caused by an overwhelmed reaction to taxing external circumstances or inadequate internal processing of perceived environmental stimuli. As the above use of language suggests, trauma itself is understood as a process shaped by the interactions between the social environment and the psychological well-being of people, which does not have a static form but is constantly changing and evolving (cf. Becker 2014: 195–196). Trauma consists of sequential events (cf. Becker 2014) that manifest differently at various times and across different age groups. The effects of trauma can occur at various times and may last for varying durations. It is important to emphasize that the potentially traumatizing moments mentioned here are caused by human actions and are not, for example, the result of natural disasters. This prevalence has the consequence that they are both emotionally and physically-sensitively tied to language (cf. Busch 2015). These "man-made disasters" cause the self and basic trust in others, as well as family structures, to break down (Leuzinger-Bohleber 2022: 808). The suffered traumatisations, and the consequences, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and sleep disorders, can affect memory performance, attention, learning capacity and thus everyday competence (cf. Schwald 2017: 30). For this reason, the close connection between flight, trauma, and learning German should be taken into account in the design of educational programs (cf. Plutzar 2016: 109). The relationship between traumatic experiences and language is not arbitrary and not unidirectional, but complex and multi-layered (cf. Busch & McNamara 2020: 327). School and language learning can either contribute to implicit trauma processing or reinforce the trauma.

In our interviews, respondents report behavior changes in their children, such as irritability, loss of motivation, withdrawal, silence, apathy, enuresis, or talking to themselves. Younger children's lack of German language skills is often cited as the reason for their lack of contact with peers (interview 4, turn[5] 8) or for the behavior changes observed in the first months of schooling (interview 7, turn 74), while adolescents are referenced for their loss of autonomy, disorientation, and desire to return (interview 3, turn 1; interview 8, turn 42; interview 24).

> You see, the children are reading everything from us. And while we ourselves are unstable, while we read the news every day, especially in the first two or three months constantly, the children are just as irritable (interview 7, turn 74).

[4] This section does not deal with medically confirmed cases of trauma. Circumstances are described that can have a traumatic effect on children. Another point is that some traumas may take a long time before they become symptomatic.

[5] Turn (speaker contribution) is indicated in interviews that have already been fully transcribed.

From the interview data, the following dimensions could be identified through which potentially traumatic experiences can be triggered:

- temporal: Because one cannot follow their own plans and desires, refugees often refer to this condition as "life on pause." Waiting for planning security and until one can speak German distorts the perception of time. This period is often perceived as "time lost," especially by adolescents (interview 19; 3, turn 1),
- spatial: Being in certain spaces or places can trigger traumatic experiences, such as living in basements or bomb shelters for months, living in cramped spaces in refugee camps or hostels, or living in occupied territories,
- perceptual: Directly experiencing explosions, missile or drone attacks, and their aftermath are embodied experiences, which further experiences are built upon,
- ideological: This aspect can manifest as a permanent feeling of injustice for the home country and its inhabitants. For example, one mother stated that she and her son find the school subject "Ethics" very complicated due to such experienced injustice (interview 6),
- familial: Particularly in the family domain, many traumatic potentials play out. The most common trauma factor is the separation of families and male family members who cannot leave or are serving in the military. Some families face the loss of a family member. An interviewee speaks about her daughter (7 years old), who does not agree with their stay abroad and wants to return to Ukraine, leading to further tension within the family:

> With Ilona,[6] things were very complicated at first, there were many tears, fits of hysteria, packing of suitcases, and declaration of 'I'm going to Ukraine' […]. Even now, when she feels offended, she packs her things and 'goes' to Ukraine (interview 24, turn 104).

- social: The children lose their first self-established social contacts. They are forced to undergo a change that they do not desire. Meanwhile, they find themselves "speechless" in a new group, also lacking the resources to reposition and identify themselves. One student (16 years old) describes his experience in the regular class as follows: "I'm like a shadow here. Whether I'm in class or not, I'm not noticed at all" (interview 3, turn 1).

For young individuals, this multidimensional paradigm shift during flight is not easy to manage. As initial findings from our interview study show, many parents wish for their children not only to learn German but also to have access to psychological support at school (e.g. interview 12). The connection to the home-

[6] All names have been pseudonymized.

land among Ukrainian children is still very strong –socially and through media: "All friends stayed in Ukraine, she [the daughter] sees Ukrainian symbols, the Ukrainian blue and yellow flag everywhere. There are flags hanging all over our room" (interview 24). Despite or alongside the potential risk of retraumatization, the themes related to the hometown also have positive connotations and, with proper didactic preparation, can contribute to learning motivation. A German teacher reports on such positive experiences:

> My goal is to create a stress-free class and to say that we can do everything and cope with everything. They [the students] become more lively […] They talk about themselves and about Ukrainian cities… (teacher of German, interview 1).

Such a decision must be made cautiously and with well-considered didactic preparation. However, it is not always possible to predict what may actually evoke traumatic experiences. One of the interviewed teachers described a situation from a class: The sound of a garbage truck came from outside. A student reacted to this noise:

> S: A familiar sound!
> T: Are there garbage trucks like that in Ukraine?
> S: No, it sounds like a missile. (teacher of German, interview 1)[7]

This example illustrates that a situation, even one occurring outside the context of the lesson, can capture the attention of those affected (cf. Schwald 2017: 30) and potentially evoke a traumatic memory. In this moment, the student decides to verbalize his memory with the potential for developing the topic further. Thus, he has made his traumatic memories visible or audible. For educators, this means being sensitized and prepared for such topics, being able to respond appreciatively to comments from students, or even helping to articulate some aspects of trauma.

Second language learning for refugee children not only helps restore normality for children but also allows them to move from a state of speechlessness[8] (cf. Plutzar 2016: 118) to becoming linguistically active and into the agency paradigm (cf. Mick 2012). Plutzar describes this state as follows: "You are no

[7] Reconstruction of a conversation based on an interview excerpt. Whether the conversation took place as presented and in what language it was held cannot be verified.

[8] German: *Sprachlosigkeit*. Verena Plutzar describes *Sprachlosigkeit* as the often inevitable consequence of flight or migration, wherein individuals lose the innate fluency of their native language and are compelled to acquire a new language to a degree that permits them to regain autonomy and self-efficacy. This experience of *Sprachlosigkeit* leads to regressive states reminiscent of childhood, with a lasting effect on one's self-concept (Plutzar 2016: 118).

longer who you were, and you are not yet who you would like to be in the new society"[9] (Plutzar 2016: 118). Therefore, the role of the linguistically active individual is partly to articulate one's identity and partly to gain influence in social participation. It is especially important to identify the competencies and interests that children bring with them and figure out how to give them linguistic form in the shortest possible time.

It should be emphasized that not all the traumatic experiences mentioned can be didactically resolved in German classes. Nevertheless, through well-thought-out and structured lesson planning that considers the psycho-emotional condition of the children, second language classes can contribute to both the learning motivation and the linguistic integration of children.

4.2. Language use within the family and with the environment

For the acquisition of a second language, it is best to build upon existing language skills. However, all mastered languages are connected with specific experiences, emotions, and functions. In Ukraine, in addition to Ukrainian as the official language, several minority languages such as Russian, Hungarian, Crimean Tatar, Polish, Romanian, Armenian, Bulgarian, and others are spoken. Ukrainian and Russian, as well as various forms of Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism and diglossia (cf. Masenko 2008: 96), however, have long dominated the language situation. This phenomenon has deep historical roots: after three centuries of Russification and the language policy aimed at displacing and assimilating the Ukrainian language in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (cf. Masenko et al. 2005), the Ukrainian language was recognized as a central element of state and nation-building and its status as the official language was legally secured. While language functioning in public spaces (e.g., Ukrainian as the language in education, including the elementary sector) is regulated by law, family language use remains an individual decision, conscious or unregulated. In light of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, language use practices are increasingly becoming a subject of contention based on individual language attitudes and against the backdrop of current societal discourses at the level of the individual or family. It can be observed that "Russian, as the language of the aggressor, is losing ground in Ukraine", and more and more Russian-speaking Ukrainians are switching to Ukrainian-Russian diglossia, and bilingual Ukrainians are switching to the Ukrainian language (cf. Besters-Dilger 2022: 3:39–3:46, 54:39–55:15; also see Kulyk 2020: 240–248; Moser 2022: 407–415; Kylyk 2024; Kudriavtseva 2023).

[9] Translation from German by the authors.

In our interviews, respondents who previously spoke mainly Russian in the family reported a switch to Ukrainian completely or more Ukrainian language use in the family. The war and the perception of language as an instrument of resistance, the effort to develop the language and the later education of the children (interview 4, turn 18; interview 7, turn 10), or as an "unexplained inner drive" (interview 16, turn 41) are cited as reasons for these decisions. Ukrainian is also preferred for communication in the public domain to position oneself or be recognized as Ukrainians (interview 4, turn 68). At the same time, concerns arising from encountering the Russian language can be discerned in the interviewees' narratives. A mother reports on other parents' concerns that their children speak Russian and not Ukrainian because they are predominantly in contact with Russian speakers here (interview 9).

This clearly shows that the language use of individuals and families who have had to flee abroad is influenced by the respective socio-cultural environments. From the perspective of poststructuralist second language acquisition research, language-related decisions such as language maintenance, language learning, and language switching are closely linked to constructions of identity, which in turn dynamically occur in relation to the home country and the host country (cf. Seals 2020: 187–188).

A special feature of the language situation in Germany is that Russian has a longer tradition as a foreign and heritage language and currently has a much more extensive range of offerings than Ukrainian (cf. Bergmann & Kratochvil 2017; KMK 2014; Witzlack-Makarevich & Wulff 2017). In addition, many people lack both the knowledge that Ukrainian and Russian are different languages and sensitivity to current language shift processes in Ukrainian society. Furthermore, the limited availability of Ukrainian-language resources in this country often lead to Russian being readily and unreflectively used for translating, interpreting, as a language of instruction, etc. The symbolic and identity-forming importance of language, especially in the context of flight and war experiences, is thereby neglected. On the other hand, psychological research warns of possible negative effects of resorting to the Russian language in working with Ukrainian refugees: Mistrust towards Russian interpreters and the Russian language can arise during language mediation, burdening the development of the open attitude necessary for successful psychotherapeutic treatment (cf. Zindler et al. 2023: 137, 143).

In postcolonial and migration pedagogical literature, such practices aimed at 'forcing' the use or acquisition of a language are referred to as "injurious capability"[10] (Bjegač 2020: 44) in reference to "enabling violation" (Spivak 1996: 19). On the one hand, the use of the 'second mother tongue' promoted in the

[10] German: *verletzende Befähigung*.

former Soviet Union targets enabling quick communication and potentially integration. Being 'forced' to speak Russian can lead to language-related traumas at the individual level or to the reproduction of imperial continuities at the institutional or societal level.

4.3. Family educational orientations

In qualitative-reconstructive education research, the term "educational orientations" refers to orientations towards education by actors such as students, families, schools, and peers, which are documented in concrete action practice (Hermes & Lotze 2020: 10). A distinction is made between "formal educational orientations", such as obtaining educational qualifications relevant to the respective education system, and "informal educational orientations", such as the promotion of educationally relevant skills (cf. Hermes & Lotze 2020: 11).[11]

From the study mentioned in section 1, it is apparent that 72% of those who have fled Ukraine have a university degree (cf. Brücker et al. 2022: 1), which aligns with the results of other studies referring to Ukrainian refugees in Europe as a population with a "high degree of self-selection" (cf. Kohlenberger et al. 2022).

The high educational background of the mothers, combined with the high cultural value placed on education in Ukraine, could explain their educational orientations: Most mothers we interviewed stated that their children participated in early childhood education and extracurricular educational programs in Ukraine, in addition to attending educational institutions. Regarding the schooling of their children, some interviewees expressed doubts as to whether the right decision had been made with the choice of the respective schooling model and expressed a need for appropriate guidance (e.g., interview 24), especially mothers of children in secondary education (e.g., interview 7, turn 64). Furthermore, some parents have invested[12] in additional language support for their children in the form of private online classes, mostly in German, English, or another foreign language (e.g., interview 2, turn 34; interview 7, turn 36), and have continued this practice in Germany (e.g., interview 1, turn 38; interview

[11] For differentiation from the concept of *educational aspirations*, see Hermes and Lotze (2020: 13). Previous studies on parental educational aspirations show that parents with a migration background generally have higher educational aspirations than parents without a migration background (cf. Gresch 2012: 75), with discrepancies existing between idealistic and realistic educational aspirations. Optimism and lack of information are discussed as possible causes for this (cf. Becker 2010: 19).

[12] Since the interviews were conducted at a relatively early stage of the migration process, we might assume that the educational orientations from the country of origin are still in effect. However, it is far too early to say how these educational orientations will evolve with increasing duration of stay.

16, turn 91; interview 12; interview 17). For other subjects, they often attended Ukrainian online school.

The ongoing or planned parallel participation of Ukrainian students in the lessons of the Ukrainian online school deserves special attention. Continuing Ukrainian education is a multifactorial decision, with each family typically being influenced more by one factor or another. In addition to the previously mentioned reason – catching up on traditional subjects (e.g., interview 12; interview 14) – several aspects that have been implicitly mentioned earlier can be noted. One is the lack of familiarity with the German education system (interview 9). Another, non-educationally related aspect mentioned is maintaining ties to the homeland and social contacts (both for parents with other parents and teachers, and for children with other children) (interview 2; 12; 24). Parents also report short communication channels to Ukrainian teachers and even individual online support options that can be accessed from Germany (interview 14, turn 66; interview 19). Other parents mention that their children are being held back in German schools, which, as described above, is perceived as a loss of time (interview 3, turn 1). This is one of the reasons why the Ukrainian school continues to be attended online, which is also related to the uncertainty of planning (interview 12). As an additional motivation for attending the Ukrainian online school, the maintenance and learning of the Ukrainian language was mentioned (interview 13, turn 58). Typically, these participation processes run in parallel and independently across two to three education systems. Productive and transparent communication between schools and parents, as well as the establishment of efficient communication channels functioning in both directions, could help to better integrate and optimize these educational processes.

5. DISCUSSION AND DIDACTIC CONSEQUENCES

The study conducted allows us to shed light on some migration- and lifeworld-specific aspects of students who have fled Ukraine and their families, which are relevant to schooling and (language) learning. In this paper, we have illuminated several central aspects of the situation of flight that have not yet been sufficiently addressed in the existing discussion, but which, in our opinion, require more differentiated research and should be given more consideration in the design of language education.

Firstly, parents report changes in their children's behavior, seen in emotional reactions, disinterest, and declining motivation concerning (academic) learning or participation in recreational activities. Often this is attributed to difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves in the German language as a second

language. These findings coincide with the results of the IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP survey, which reported a lower psychological well-being of Ukrainian refugee children compared to other children living in Germany (cf. Brücker et al. 2022: 14). Initial insights from the practical work of psychosocial care for minor refugees from Ukraine point to several stress factors, such as the experience of war and flight, uprooting, loss of friendships, concerns about relatives, loss of home, loss of familiar surroundings and structure, as well as fear and uncertainty regarding the future. These can be risk factors for the mental health of children and adolescents, which, in addition to other factors, can lead to the development of symptoms associated with anxiety and depression (cf. Zindler et al. 2023: 130, 143–144). These results raise the question of whether the construct of motivation, used in practice as a cause for observed learning difficulties in refugee students, is an adequate category to describe the cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of learning processes. Since the traumatic experiences of war, flight, natural disasters, etc., can affect the psychological well-being of children and their learning process at very different intervals and are not always visible in class, it is one of the tasks of second language teaching to take on a stabilizing function in the lifeworld of students. In light of these psychological and sociolinguistic aspects of forced migration, heritage language classes can also play a crucial role in providing stability. Appropriate sustainable concepts need to be developed within the framework of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Secondly, our data show that many refugees are rethinking their family language practices and public language use as they position themselves against the Russian invasion or even associate traumatic experiences with the Russian language. These findings are consistent with a study conducted in Berlin with 200 Ukrainian refugee families, which showed that 94.2% of respondents want heritage language instruction in Ukrainian for their children, even if they are bilingual themselves (Bergmann & Turkevych 2024). In contrast, practice-oriented literature on language education for Ukrainian refugee students points out that these students are "usually" bilingual (Belyaev 2022: 39) or "traditionally rather" Russian-speaking (Neugebauer 2023: 6) and therefore can be unproblematically addressed in Russian. Whether such pragmatic recommendations and solutions represent "ad hoc practices" (Garfinkel 1967: 22), which help (or are supposed to help) actors come to practical decisions under unclear conditions and with limited resources (information, time, etc.) (cf. Bergmann & Meyer 2021: 44), or are practices aimed at securing the claimed special status of the Russian language as a "second mother tongue" (Moser 2022: 405) for migrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union in Germany and its transfer to the new target group, requires further research and scientific discourse. Language didactic decisions (e.g., concerning the question: What language(s) can I use for language comparisons or contrastive

language work?) should be made for all students on an empirical basis and in combination with the wishes of the students themselves, whenever possible. For this, it is important to gather information on first and family languages as well as on current language attitudes, such as preferred and dispreferred languages, directly from children and young people or their guardians, and to choose language support accordingly, based on sociolinguistic evidence (cf. Brizić 2007)[13].

Finally, the parents' perspective brings valuable insights regarding the current educational debate on the language and educational integration of newly arrived children and young people. Uncertain prospects for staying, existing wishes to return, and obstacles in transferring grades and qualifications as "cultural capital" (cf. Bourdieu 1983) influence family educational decisions and investments. Parents' educational orientations, especially their efforts to have students participate in Ukrainian online schools, are interesting because they highlight aspects that have so far received little attention in the current educational discourse concerning refugee children and families: The concept of education is multidimensional and culturally constructed. This should be considered – at least at the beginning of the school integration.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The current study has identified several blind spots and developmental tasks, indicative of the need for an expanded empirical foundation to refine educational strategies. The results of the current research underscore the criticality of language education for immigrant students within the context of flight, focusing especially on those fleeing Ukraine. The paramount need for culturally sensitive, trauma-informed pedagogies in teaching German as a second language is unambiguously highlighted, advocating for educational methods that are cognizant of the multilayered socio-emotional landscape of these students. The paper has revealed pivotal shifts in family language practices in the face of trauma and war, reshaping understandings of language learning against a backdrop of complex sociopolitical challenges. It is evident that educational orientations within refugee families play a significant in decision-making processes related to schooling, further emphasizing the cultural nuances in conceptions of education.

[13] That the – surely well-intentioned yet careless – use of Russian in the classroom with students who have fled Ukraine (in the absence of information about their first and family languages) can lead to their speechlessness or silencing (being made speechless, Thomauske 2015, 2017) and reproduce imperial practices of Soviet language policy in a German school is vividly demonstrated by the following article published on the Deutsches Schulportal on September 16 (Ammermann 2022): https://deutsches-schulportal.de/kolumnen/wie-geht-es-tatjana-der-neuen-schuelerin-aus-der-ukraine/ (accessed on December 25, 2023).

The study suggests that a reevaluation of curricula is essential to account for the psychological well-being and linguistic identities of refugee students, necessitating strategic interdisciplinary collaborations. Such cooperation aims to develop schooling programs that foster stability, resilience, and educational advancement for students amid the adversity of displacement. Furthermore, findings advocate for a socio-linguistically sensitive approach to language education, prompting the need for precise empirical data to guide instruction that honors the multilingual realities and preferences of these individuals.

Further academic dialogues surrounding the schooling of students who have fled Ukraine or other regions should aim to identify structural effectiveness and unresolved inquiries. It is through the research and subsequent adjustment of practices that we can aspire to provide the students with an education that prioritizes their individual needs, accommodating their diverse cultural and linguistic heritages, and supporting them as they navigate traumatic experiences. In doing so, the educational community moves towards establishing sustainable, pluralistic, and individualized concepts of schooling that resonate with the realities of the refugee experience.

Funding acknowledgement and disclaimer

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest. The study was carried out as part of the duties at the University of Hildesheim and at the University of Koblenz. The authors declare that the project was partially supported by grants "Seed Funding of the Research Initiative for Young Researcher Fond at the University of Koblenz" (Anschubfinanzierung der Forschungsinitiative Nachwuchsfonds der Universität Koblenz-Landau) and "Seed Funding from the Research Commission at the University of Hildesheim" (Anschubfinanzierung der Forschungskommission der Universität Hildesheim). The paper reflects the views only of its authors.

Disclosure of ethical compliance and research standards

The research was conducted in adherence to Ethics Code of the German Society for Foreign Language Research (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fremdsprachenforschung, DGFF).

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Received: 14.01.2024; **revised:** 7.03.2024

Wymiary świata społecznego w edukacji językowej i integracja studentów z doświadczeniem uchodźczym w Niemczech: wnioski z badania przeprowadzonego wśród uchodźców ukraińskich

Abstrakt. Niniejsza praca omawia wyzwania edukacyjne oraz proces akwizycji języka wśród nowo przybyłych uczniów w Niemczech, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dzieci i młodzieży, które uciekły z Ukrainy. Wykorzystując jakościowe wywiady z ukraińskimi uchodźcami, badanie to zgłębia wpływ migracji, szczególnie spowodowanej rosyjską wojną przeciwko Ukrainie, na edukację językową w kontekście niemieckiego jako języka drugiego. Wywiady przeprowadzone z kobietami pochodzącymi z Ukrainy ukazują ich perspektywę na praktyki językowe w rodzinie i orientacje edukacyjne. Artykuł omawia implikacje doświadczeń ucieczki, użycie języka w rodzinie, strukturalne zmiany w podejściach edukacyjnych oraz rolę ukraińskiego nauczania online w utrzymaniu ciągłości edukacji. Wyniki podkreślają potrzebę pedagogiki uwrażliwionej na traumę, świadomej kulturowo i specyficznej dla danego języka oraz konieczność uwzględnienia emocjonalnego i psychologicznego dobrostanu uczniów uchodźców. Autorki apelują o bardziej zniuansowane badania i rozważania, które będą dostosowane do zróżnicowania językowego i edukacyjnego uczniów uchodźców.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja, edukacja językowa, niemiecki jako język drugi, ukraińscy uchodźcy w Niemczech, integracja edukacyjna.

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