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FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE DYNAMICS OF LANGUAGE CHOICE: SOCIOLINGUISTIC FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

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This theoretical article explores language choice as a central, multidimensional mechanism in the formation and functioning of family language policy (FLP), particularly within bilingual and multilingual households. Building on sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and ideological frameworks, it conceptualizes language choice not merely as a communicative decision but as a socially embedded, emotionally charged, and ideologically mediated practice. The article critically synthesises classical and contemporary FLP theories, examining how macro-level language ideologies and state policies intersect with micro-level parental decisions, emotional orientations, and intergenerational identity work. Special emphasis is placed on the Ukrainian sociolinguistic context, where forced migration, war, and the legacy of Russification have dramatically reconfigured linguistic hierarchies and family language practices. Drawing on recent research, including studies by the author, the analysis demonstrates how language choice becomes a space of symbolic resistance, national realignment, and identity consolidation for Ukrainian families. It highlights the emergence of phenomena such as “language shame” and affectively motivated language shift, particularly in situations where Russian and Ukrainian coexist in emotionally asymmetrical ways. The article offers a conceptual model of language choice that integrates three interdependent dimensions: (1) the ideological, reflecting perceptions of legitimacy and political meaning; (2) the affective, encompassing emotional investments and attachments to language; and (3) the strategic, involving the functional and future-oriented planning of children’s linguistic repertoires. Language choice is thus framed as a mediating mechanism through which broader sociopolitical forces are internalized, negotiated, and enacted within the family. This work contributes to the theoretical development of FLP by foregrounding the emotional and symbolic weight of language choice, especially in post-conflict and displaced contexts. It provides a lens through which to better understand how multilingual families respond to instability, adapt to shifting sociolinguistic landscapes, and shape their linguistic futures in times of uncertainty.

Keywords: family language policy, language choice, bilingualism, multilingualism, language ideologies.

Problem Statement and Relevance. While family language policy (FLP) has gained recognition as a critical area of sociolinguistic research, the internal mechanisms by which language choice functions within this framework remain under-theorised, especially in contexts marked by multilingualism, forced migration, and sociopolitical transformation. Most studies to date have concentrated on observable language practices and outcomes, often overlooking the ideologically charged and emotionally mediated nature of language choice within the family domain.

Language choice is not merely a matter of utility; it reflects deeper structures of identity, emotional belonging, and symbolic power. In bilingual and multilingual families, especially those affected by displacement or historical language suppression, such choices carry significant implications for intergenerational language transmission and cultural continuity. This complexity is particular-

ly visible in the Ukrainian context, where families grapple with the legacies of Russification, renewed interest in linguistic revitalisation, and the demands of integration into new sociolinguistic environments abroad.

Despite increasing academic interest in these dynamics, there is still a need for a more integrated theoretical lens that explains how language ideologies, affective orientations, and identity negotiations converge in shaping family-based language decisions. This article seeks to fill that gap by providing a conceptual model of language choice as a dynamic and context-sensitive practice, grounded in the Ukrainian case and relevant to multilingual societies more broadly.

Review of Recent Studies and Publications. The study of family language policy (FLP) has significantly evolved in the past two decades, transitioning from structural models of language transmission to a more nuanced understanding of

everyday language practices, ideologies, and emotional attachments. Pioneering work by Fishman (1965, 1991) laid the conceptual foundation by linking language choice to domains of use and ethnic identity preservation. However, this approach viewed the family primarily as a passive site of transmission.

Subsequent research has expanded the scope of FLP, positioning the family as an active agent of language planning. King, Fogle, and Logan-Terry (2008) introduced the now widely accepted tripartite model of FLP – comprising language beliefs, practices, and management – which recognises the conscious and unconscious decisions made by parents in shaping their children's linguistic environments. This framework has since been elaborated through ecological and identity-based perspectives (De Houwer, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen, 2018), emphasising the role of social context, power dynamics, and emotional motivation.

A particularly influential strand of scholarship has focused on language ideologies as central to FLP. Spolsky (2004) and Piller (2017) argue that beliefs about language legitimacy, utility, and morality shape parental decisions in multilingual contexts. In turn, Gumperz (1982) and Grosjean (1998) developed interactionist and holistic models of bilingualism, viewing language choice not as an automatic code-switching act, but as a strategic performance of identity embedded in specific social contexts.

While this global body of research continues to expand, the Ukrainian sociolinguistic context has remained underrepresented in FLP theory. Recent contributions by Shevchuk-Kliuzheva (2022, 2024) have begun to fill this gap by theorising FLP through the lens of forced migration, wartime bilingualism, and emotional language ideologies. Her empirical and conceptual work, based on surveys and interviews with Ukrainian families in Poland, highlights how wartime experiences have transformed family language choices into tools of identity formation, resistance, and emotional regulation. These studies highlight how language shame and self-shaming foster the decline of Russian and the promotion of Ukrainian in families. Building on this work, Shevchuk-Kliuzheva (2024) has also proposed an integrated model of FLP that connects macro-level factors (such as language policy, war, migration) with micro-level parental practices. This approach situates the family as both a linguistic and ideological space, where decisions about language are influenced by national trauma, symbolic boundaries, and affective identities.

Nevertheless, broader FLP scholarship continues to be shaped by transnational insights. Curdt-Christiansen (2013, 2020) draws attention to the entanglement of family language strategies with structural inequalities and symbolic capital. Smith-Christmas (2016) uses ethnographic methods to demonstrate the complexity of negotiation and contestation in daily language use. These contributions confirm that FLP is not a static construct but a dynamic, ideologically saturated practice.

Collectively, these studies – including the emerging body of Ukrainian FLP research – demonstrate a growing awareness of the non-neutral, politicised, and emotionally charged nature of language choice. However, there remains a need for further theorisation of how language ideologies and affective orientations operate in families navigating conflict, bilingualism, and migration. This article seeks to contribute to that effort by offering a conceptual synthesis grounded in the Ukrainian case and relevant for theorising FLP in volatile sociolinguistic environments.

Aim and Objectives of the Study. The primary aim of this article is to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding language choice as a key mechanism within family language policy (FLP), with a particular focus on ideologically and emotionally charged contexts such as forced migration, bilingualism, and sociopolitical transformation. The study draws on the Ukrainian case to explore how family-level decisions about language use reflect broader dynamics of identity, resistance, and cultural continuity.

To achieve this aim, the article pursues the following objectives:

1. To critically synthesize major sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and ideological approaches to language choice in family contexts, highlighting both classical and contemporary theories and their relevance to the study of FLP as a dynamic, identity-forming practice.

2. To explore how language ideologies, emotional responses, and historical-political conditions shape language behaviour within multilingual families, emphasising the symbolic and affective dimensions of language choice beyond its functional role.

3. To conceptualize language choice as a mediating link between macro-level forces (such as language policy, war, and migration) and micro-level family strategies, using the Ukrainian sociolinguistic experience as a case study to inform broader theoretical perspectives on FLP in post-conflict and diasporic settings.

These objectives form the foundation for a deeper exploration of how language choice operates within families, not only as a communicative de-

cision, but as a site of ideological negotiation and identity construction.

Main Theoretical Discussion. Language choice constitutes the most immediate and observable manifestation of family language policy (FLP). It is both a practical decision and a symbolic act through which family members perform, negotiate, and transmit linguistic ideologies, cultural identities, and emotional affiliations. In this article, language choice is approached as a multidimensional phenomenon: (1) a pragmatic act of selecting a linguistic code; (2) a family-level planning strategy; (3) a symbolic resource of identity performance; and (4) an emotionally and ideologically mediated mechanism of language policy. This multifaceted character makes language choice a powerful entry point for theorising how families operate within multilingual, dynamic, and often conflict-affected environments.

Spolsky's (2004) foundational model of FLP – comprising language beliefs (ideologies), language practices, and language management – provides a useful scaffold for understanding how families engage in language planning. However, this model alone does not account for the complexity of contexts in which language choice is bound up with power asymmetries, historical memory, or emotional responses. While traditional models such as Fishman's (1991) domain theory conceptualised language choice primarily as a response to functional communicative needs, more recent scholarship emphasises its ideological and affective dimensions. Piller (2017) and Curdt-Christiansen (2018) have highlighted how language ideologies intersect with social class, gender, and aspirations for children's futures, while Pavlenko (2005) and Garrett (2010) have shown how emotions – such as pride, shame, trauma, or solidarity – affect language behavior within families.

A critical distinction must also be made between functionalist approaches, which focus on how language choice reflects external domains and communicative efficiency (Fishman, Grosjean), and critical-interactionist perspectives, which examine language as a site of power, identity work, and resistance (Gumperz, Curdt-Christiansen, Smith-Christmas). Gumperz (1982) viewed code-switching not as interference, but as an act of contextualization and social positioning. Grosjean (1998) proposed a holistic view of bilinguals as speakers who navigate functionally distinct language systems. These insights, while foundational, must be enriched by an understanding of the emotional and ideological stakes that inform language decisions in contemporary multilingual families.

This shift in analytical focus is especially necessary in conflict-affected societies such as Ukraine. In the wake of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, language has been transformed into a symbolic battleground. Language choice is no longer merely a preference – it is a declaration of identity, allegiance, and resistance. In this context, Ukrainian families must navigate not only bilingualism in the home but also the politicisation of language use in public and private domains.

Empirical studies conducted by Shevchuk-Kliuzheva (2022, 2024) demonstrate how Ukrainian migrant families renegotiate their FLP through emotionally and ideologically motivated strategies. These include the elevation of Ukrainian as a language of national continuity and the rejection or marginalization of Russian due to its association with aggression. One of the most significant findings is the emergence of *language shame* – a phenomenon where speakers express discomfort or self-consciousness about using Russian, even when it remains part of their habitual linguistic repertoire. This emotional undercurrent profoundly affects how parents guide children's language development, often resulting in an asymmetrical bilingualism or a shift in home language priorities.

Such examples show that language choice functions as a mediating mechanism between macro-level sociopolitical forces and micro-level family practices. Families do not operate in isolation; their linguistic decisions are shaped by state policies, dominant ideologies, migration experiences, and collective memory. The Ukrainian case exemplifies how language planning at the family level is not only reactive but also proactive, strategically designed to affirm identity, transmit values, and construct symbolic boundaries in conditions of disruption and instability.

By integrating sociolinguistic theory with insights from critical discourse studies and emotional linguistics, this discussion advances a more comprehensive model of language choice within FLP. It argues that understanding language choice as a socially embedded and emotionally invested process is essential for theorising multilingual family life in times of conflict, displacement, and rapid sociopolitical change.

Building on the multidimensional understanding of language choice discussed above, this section proposes a conceptual model that positions language choice as a mediating mechanism – a dynamic interface between macro-level sociopolitical forces and micro-level family practices. Rather than viewing language choice as a discrete act or a set

of isolated preferences, the model frames it as a structured yet fluid process that translates ideology, emotion, and external pressure into everyday language behaviour within the family.

At the macro level, language choice is shaped by systemic influences such as state language policies, historical legacies, migration regimes, language hierarchies, and wartime dynamics. These influences provide the ideological scaffolding within which families evaluate the symbolic value of languages, negotiate belonging, and reinterpret linguistic loyalty. In the Ukrainian context, for example, the historical dominance of Russian, the state's current efforts to promote Ukrainian as the sole official language, and the moral delegitimation of Russian following the full-scale invasion have profoundly restructured the symbolic order in which language choices are made.

At the micro level, families operate as both receivers and producers of language ideologies. Parental decisions about which language to use with children, which language to avoid, or how to combine multiple languages are shaped by *affective responses* such as pride, guilt, nostalgia, anxiety, or trauma. These emotions are not ancillary to rational planning – they are constitutive of language policy itself. This model thus rejects any strict separation between cognitive and emotional dimensions of FLP and instead highlights how *affective ideologies* mediate between external pressures and internal practices.

The proposed model integrates three core dimensions of language choice in FLP:

1. Ideological dimension: Language choice reflects the perceived legitimacy, prestige, and political connotations of different languages, as interpreted by family members. In this sense, every linguistic act carries symbolic weight, especially in conflict-affected societies.

2. Affective-emotional dimension: Emotional investments in specific languages, whether positive or negative, profoundly influence decision-making. The emergence of *language shame* or *language pride* plays a key role in reorienting language use, especially among displaced families.

3. Strategic-pragmatic dimension: Language choice is also a matter of long-term planning, particularly in multilingual settings. Families may adopt deliberate strategies to preserve the heritage language, support the acquisition of the host country's language, or manage the functional distribution of codes across domains (e.g., home, school, peers).

Together, these dimensions interact recursively. Macro-level discourses on national language iden-

tity, political legitimacy, or migration policy filter into family environments, where they are emotionally internalized, interpreted, and transformed into practical strategies. The family, in turn, reproduces or resists these discourses through everyday linguistic behaviour. In this sense, language choice becomes the mechanism by which ideological forces become embodied, lived, and transmitted across generations.

By foregrounding language choice as a mediating mechanism, this model not only enriches our understanding of family language policy in crisis and post-crisis contexts but also opens avenues for future theoretical and empirical research. It provides a tool for analysing how families navigate competing linguistic loyalties, negotiate identity under pressure, and strategically manage multilingual resources in rapidly changing sociopolitical environments.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions. This article has proposed a theoretical reconceptualisation of language choice as a multidimensional and ideologically saturated mechanism within family language policy (FLP). Rather than treating language choice as a neutral or functional act, the analysis has foregrounded its symbolic, affective, and strategic roles, particularly in multilingual families navigating contexts of forced migration, sociopolitical instability, and historical trauma.

The key contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model that positions language choice as a mediating mechanism between macro-level sociopolitical forces, such as language policy, war, and colonial legacies, and micro-level language practices within families. Integrating sociolinguistic, emotional, and critical theoretical perspectives, the model highlights how language ideologies and affective orientations shape, constrain, and motivate family-level decisions about language use. The inclusion of emotional factors such as language shame, pride, or ambivalence expands existing FLP frameworks and underscores the importance of studying family language practices as deeply embedded in historical and affective contexts.

Grounded in the Ukrainian sociolinguistic experience, the article illustrates how families become active agents of language policy by re-evaluating linguistic hierarchies, resisting symbolic domination, and constructing new patterns of identity transmission. While the conceptual model is informed by this specific case, it holds relevance for other post-conflict and diasporic settings where language becomes a resource for both survival and resistance.

At the same time, this study remains theoretical in scope. Future research is needed to empirically test and refine the proposed model, particularly through longitudinal and ethnographic studies that trace intergenerational language practices and emotional dynamics over time. Comparative investigations across diverse geopolitical settings could further assess the transferability and specificity of the Ukrainian case.

In an era marked by displacement, identity fragmentation, and ideological polarisation, understanding language choice as a socially embedded and emotionally charged process is not only a theoretical imperative but a political and humanitarian one. The family, as both a private sphere and a site of ideological negotiation, plays a pivotal role in shaping linguistic futures and deserves continued scholarly attention at the intersection of language, power, and emotion.

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МОВНА ПОЛІТИКА СІМ'Ї ТА ДИНАМІКА МОВНОГО ВИБОРУ: СОЦІОЛІНГВІСТИЧНІ ЗАСАДИ ТА КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНІ ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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Стаття досліджує теоретичний аспект мовного вибору як центральний, багатовимірний механізм формування та функціонування сімейної мовної політики, особливо в умовах двомовності та багатомовності родин. Спираючись на соціолінгвістичні, психолінгвістичні та ідеологічні підходи, автор трактує мовний вибір не просто як комунікативне рішення, а як соціально вмотивовану, емоційно насичену й ідеологічно опосередковану практику. У статті здійснено критичний синтез класичних і сучасних теорій сімейної мовної політики, а також проаналізовано, як мовні ідеології на макрорівні та державна мовна політика перетинаються з батьківськими рішеннями, емоційними настановами та міжпоколіннім формуванням ідентичності (мікрорівень). Особлива увага приділена українському соціолінгвістичному контексту, в якому вимушена міграція, війна та наслідки русифікації радикально змінили мовну ієрархію та мовні практики в родинах. На основі новітніх досліджень, зокрема авторських, аналіз демонструє, як мовний вибір перетворюється на простір символічного спротиву, національного переосмислення та консолідації ідентичності в українських родинах. Висвітлюється поява явищ, таких як «мовний сором» і емоційно вмотивований мовний зсув, особливо в умовах емоційно асиметричного співіснування української та російської мов. У статті запропоновано концептуальну модель мовного вибору, що інтегрує три взаємопов'язані виміри: (1) ідеологічний – відображає уявлення про легітимність і політичне значення мов; (2) афективний – охоплює емоційні впливи та прихильність до мови; (3) стратегічний – стосується функціонального і перспективного планування мовного репертуару дитини. Мовний вибір розглядається як посередницький механізм, через який ширші соціополітичні чинники інтерналізуються, переосмислюються та реалізуються в межах сім'ї. Ця праця робить внесок у розвиток теорії сімейної мовної політики, підкреслюючи емоційну й символічну значущість мовного вибору, особливо в постконфліктних і міграційних контекстах. Запропонована модель відкриває перспективу для глибшого розуміння того, як багатомовні родини реагують на нестабільність, адаптуються до змін у мовному середовищі та формують свої мовні майбуття в умовах невизначеності.

Ключові слова: сімейна мовна політика, мовний вибір, білінгвізм, багатомовність, мовні ідеології.