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The Decline of Russian in the Bilingual Repertoire of Ukrainians: Transformations in Language Use and Emotional Responses Amid War

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a rapid rejection of Russian among Ukrainian bilinguals. This article introduces the concept of ideologically accelerated language shift, understood as a moralized and emotionally driven transformation of bilingual repertoires. Based on a mixed-methods survey of 1,298 Ukrainians living in Poland, the study demonstrates how ideology, emotion, and moral agency interact to reshape language practices. The findings show widespread reduction or abandonment of Russian, mediated by language shame and social pressure, and a reconfiguration of bilingualism in exile, with Polish increasingly replacing Russian as a neutral alternative. The study contributes to conflict sociolinguistics by highlighting language as a moral and emotional resource in wartime.

Keywords: ideologically accelerated language shift, bilingualism, language ideology, moral agency, linguistic insecurity, language shame, Ukrainian language, forced migration, emotional bilingualism

Upad ruščine pri dvojezičnih Ukrajincih: spremembe v rabi jezika in čustveni odzivi med vojno

Ruska invazija na Ukrajino leta 2022 je sprožila hitro zavračanje ruskega jezika med ukrajinskimi dvojezičnimi govorci. Prispevek uvaja pojem ideološko pospešenega jezikovnega premika, ki označuje moralno in čustveno pogojeno preobrazbo dvojezičnih repertoarjev praks. Raziskava na podlagi kombinirane ankete med 1.298 Ukrajinci, ki živijo na Poljskem, pokaže, kako ideologija, čustveni in moralni vzgibi soustvarjajo spremembe v jezikovni rabi. Rezultati kažejo obsežno zmanjšanje ali opuščanje rabe ruščine pod vplivom jezikovnega sramu in družbenega pritiska ter preoblikovanje dvojezičnosti v izseljenstvu, pri čemer poljščina vse pogosteje nadomešča ruščino kot nevtralna komunikacijska možnost. Prispevek prispeva k sociolingvistiki konfliktov s poudarkom na jeziku kot moralnem in čustvenem viru v času vojne.

Ključne besede: ideološko pospešen jezikovni premik, dvojezičnost, jezikovna ideologija, moralno delovanje, jezikovni sram, prisilna migracija, ukrajinščina, čustvena dvojezičnost

1 Introduction

Armed conflict and forced migration are among the most powerful accelerators of language change. When social networks collapse and populations are displaced, language use becomes deeply tied to ideology, identity, and emotion (Fishman 1991). Linguistic choices in such settings often function as acts of alignment or resistance rather than

neutral communication (Spolsky 2012). The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 created precisely these conditions, transforming bilingual repertoires and redefining the symbolic value of Russian.

Before the war, Ukraine's linguistic landscape was marked by a long-standing coexistence of Ukrainian and Russian, with regionally diverse patterns of bilingualism (Bilaniuk 2005; Masenko 2011; Kulyk 2025). While Ukrainian served as the official state language, Russian remained dominant in many urban and private domains. Since 2022, this situation has been changed: the Russian language has acquired associations with occupation and violence. Consequently, millions of Ukrainians have begun to re-evaluate their linguistic identities, experiencing discomfort, guilt, or unease when using Russian. This phenomenon – conceptualized here as language shame – reflects an affective mechanism through which ideological realignment translates into everyday linguistic practice.

Although the linguistic effects of the war in Ukraine have drawn increasing scholarly attention (Kulyk 2023; Hentschel 2024), most existing studies focus on policy, media discourse, or macro-level trends. The emotional and ideological mechanisms underlying individual language behavior remain underexplored. Prior work on emotional bilingualism (Harris et al. 2006; Pavlenko 2008) and post-conflict sociolinguistics (Schmid 2011) shows that trauma and moral reasoning can deeply reshape linguistic preferences. However, systematic empirical analysis of these processes in the Ukrainian context is still lacking.

This study addresses this gap by examining how war-related displacement reshapes bilingual repertoires and emotional attitudes toward Russian among Ukrainians residing in Poland – the largest host country for Ukrainian refugees. Specifically, it explores:

1) how the war has influenced the use of Russian among bilingual Ukrainians;
2) what emotional and identity-related factors drive the rejection of Russian; and
3) how language shame manifests as a distinct sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Drawing on frameworks of language ideology (Woolard, Schieffelin 1994), emotional bilingualism (Pavlenko 2008), and conflict-induced language shift (Fishman 1991; Spolsky 2012), this paper argues that wartime transformations of bilingualism are ideologically motivated and emotionally mediated rather than spontaneous. By integrating affective and ideological dimensions of language change, the study contributes to emerging scholarship in conflict linguistics and the sociology of multilingualism.

2. Theoretical Framework

The wartime transformation of linguistic behavior among Ukrainians can be best understood through an integrated framework combining three interrelated dimensions: language ideology, emotional bilingualism, and conflict-induced language shift. Together, these perspectives explain how ideological narratives and affective experiences converge to reshape bilingual repertoires during crisis and displacement. Language ideology comprises the socially constructed beliefs and values that assign symbolic and moral weight to specific languages (Woolard, Schieffelin 1994; Gal 1981). In contexts of political instability and postcolonial tension, such ideologies become tools for social differentiation and identity negotiation.

In Ukraine, the history of Russification and subsequent linguistic decolonization has long positioned language as a moral and political boundary (Bilaniuk 2005; Masenko 2011). The Russian invasion of 2022 redefined these symbolic hierarchies: Ukrainian acquired the status of a "language of resistance," while Russian was re-indexed as the "language of the aggressor" (Kulyk 2024). This ideological revaluation transformed linguistic behavior into a visible form of political and ethical alignment. Similar re-indexing processes have occurred in other post-conflict settings, such as the rejection of German in post-WWII Eastern Europe or Catalan revival under Franco's Spain (Gal 1981). These parallels highlight how ideological discourse, when coupled with moral urgency, can rapidly accelerate linguistic change beyond intergenerational timeframes. While ideology explains macro-level realignments, emotional bilingualism addresses how these ideologies are internalized and enacted at the individual level. Pavlenko (2008) demonstrated that bilinguals attach distinct emotional values to each language, depending on personal and sociopolitical experience. Emotions thus become central to linguistic identity and choice, especially in conflict-affected societies (Harris et al. 2006; Schmid 2011).

One significant driver of the language shift observed among Ukrainians, both within the country and abroad, is the phenomenon of *language shame* (Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, Levchuk 2024). In Ukraine, segments of politically active society increasingly urge bilingual Ukrainians – particularly Russian-dominant speakers – to reduce or abandon the use of Russian. The war has intensified negative associations with the Russian language, prompting self-conscious behavioral change. This process manifests both domestically, where social media and state discourse promote linguistic purification, and among migrants in Poland, who report pressure to switch to Ukrainian in everyday communication. In this study, *language shame* is conceptualized as an affective and moral response emerging from ideological dissonance. It encompasses both language shaming – the public stigmatization of others for speaking a disapproved language (Piller 2017) – and

self-shaming, when individuals internalize stigma and apologize for their own language behavior. Previous works (Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, Levchuk 2024) describe *language shame* as part of a broader emotional economy of bilingualism, combining feelings of guilt, alienation, and the desire for moral coherence.

This phenomenon aligns with research on the emotional significance of the first language (Harris et al. 2006) and the affective nature of code-switching (Pawliszko 2022). These studies demonstrate that bilinguals select languages not merely for communicative convenience but based on emotional resonance. *Language shame*, therefore, operates as an emotional regulator that mediates between ideology and linguistic practice – transforming moral conviction into behavioral change. Traditional models define language shift as a gradual, intergenerational process driven by sociopolitical dominance and utility (Fishman 1991). However, war and displacement can compress these temporal scales, accelerating the abandonment of stigmatized languages (Spolsky 2012). Under such conditions, linguistic choices acquire performative value as declarations of resistance or belonging (Gal 1981).

In wartime Ukraine and its diaspora, ideological and emotional forces act simultaneously: the rejection of Russian is both an ethical stance and an emotional coping mechanism. Among migrants in Poland, this shift is further influenced by the functional necessity of Polish, which may replace Russian as a secondary language (Hentschel 2024). This suggests an emerging Ukrainian-Polish bilingual model, reflecting both adaptation and symbolic reconfiguration. Building on Gumperz's (1982) concept of *bilingual repertoire* and Hornberger's (1989) *Continuum of Biliteracy*, this study views language behavior as dynamic and context-sensitive rather than binary. The wartime decline of Russian thus represents a conscious act of linguistic self-repositioning – a sociolinguistic phenomenon driven not by attrition but by ideological agency and emotional motivation.

The study operationalizes this theoretical framework across three analytical levels:

Analytical Level	Theoretical Lens	Key Mechanism	Empirical Indicators	Outcome
Macro	Language ideology	Moral re-indexing of languages (Ukrainian as virtue, Russian as stigma)	References to national identity, symbolic resistance	Public discourse pressure and ideological alignment
Meso	Emotional bilingualism	Internalization of ideology as *language shame* and *self-shaming*	Expressions of guilt, apology, emotional rejection of Russian	Emotional regulation and moral coherence
Micro	Conflict-induced language shift	Behavioral adaptation in bilingual repertoires	Reported reduction or avoidance of Russian use	Decline of Russian; emergence of Ukrainian Polish bilingual norms

In sum, this framework conceptualizes wartime linguistic transformation as a process where ideology shapes emotion, and emotion governs behavior. It connects macro-level narratives of national identity with micro-level emotional and linguistic practices, providing a comprehensive lens to interpret the ongoing reconfiguration of bilingualism among Ukrainians during war and displacement.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design to investigate how ideology, emotion, and linguistic behavior interact in the wartime transformation of Ukrainian bilingualism. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed concurrently, allowing both measurable trends and personal narratives to inform each other. The approach integrates three analytical levels derived from the theoretical framework:

1) the macro-level of language ideology,
2) the meso-level of emotional bilingualism and *language shame*, and
3) the micro-level of conflict-induced linguistic behavior.

This design follows recent methodological recommendations for mixed-methods sociolinguistic research (De Houwer, Ortega 2022; Dewaele 2019), ensuring transparency, triangulation, and replicability. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it captures the complex nature of bilingualism during war – where emotional, ideological, and behavioral factors are deeply intertwined. Quantitative data reveal the overall scope and frequency of language change, while qualitative data provide insight into the emotional logic and ideological reasoning behind individual linguistic choices.

Each research question was operationalized through specific instruments and analytical steps. The first question, addressing how the war has influenced the use of Russian among bilingual Ukrainians, was explored through closed-ended questions about frequency of language use across different domains (home, work, education, media). The second question, examining emotional and identity-related factors that drive the rejection of Russian, was studied through self-assessment scales and open-ended reflections on pride, guilt, or discomfort related to language use. The third question, focusing on how *language shame* manifests in linguistic behavior, was investigated by integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative narratives describing apology, avoidance, or emotional distress when using Russian.

The data were collected through an online sociolinguistic survey titled "*Language Awareness and Multilingualism of Ukrainians in Poland during the Russian Aggres-*

sion". The survey was conducted from May to June 2023 using the secure research platform ProfiTest.pl. The instrument, developed by P. Levchuk, consisted of thirty items covering four thematic areas: demographic and linguistic background, language use across social domains, emotional and attitudinal responses, and ideological perceptions of language. Responses were measured using five-point Likert scales (ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*), frequency ratings, and optional open-ended comments to capture personal experiences. To ensure clarity and cross-cultural reliability, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a group of fifty respondents from the target population. Feedback from this pilot phase informed minor adjustments to wording and scaling.

The final dataset comprised 1,298 valid responses. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were recruited through Ukrainian diaspora organizations, educational institutions, and online networks in Poland. The sample included a diverse cross-section of displaced Ukrainians by region, age, gender, and linguistic background, ensuring analytical (rather than statistical) representativeness.

Most participants were women (around 80%), aged between 18 and 65 (mean age approximately 37). In terms of linguistic background, 63% identified Ukrainian as their first language, 24% Russian, and 10% reported being bilingual from childhood. Language background categories used in this study (Ukrainian as first language, Russian as first language, and bilingual from childhood) are based on respondents' self-identification rather than on externally verified measures of linguistic competence or balanced bilingualism. The category "bilingual from childhood" reflects early and regular exposure to both Ukrainian and Russian within the family or immediate social environment, as perceived and reported by the respondents themselves, and does not imply equal proficiency or symmetrical use of both languages. Importantly, self-reported first language is treated here as an indicator of early linguistic socialization rather than a fixed marker of current language dominance. Current language use and dominance were therefore analyzed separately through domain-based questions on everyday communication practices. While self-reported data necessarily reflect subjective perceptions of language behavior, this subjectivity is analytically relevant to the present study, which focuses on ideology, emotion, and moral self-positioning as drivers of linguistic change rather than on objective linguistic competence. This diversity allowed for comparative analysis of how pre-war linguistic repertoires influenced post-war adaptation and emotional responses. The qualitative component was based on over 1,000 open-ended responses, which provided a rich source of data on participants' feelings, motivations, and self-perceptions. The qualitative data illuminated the same three levels identified in the theoretical framework. On the macro-level, respondents

framed their language choices in terms of ideology, patriotism, and moral duty, often describing Ukrainian as a "language of resistance" and Russian as "morally contaminated." On the meso-level, participants expressed strong affective reactions, ranging from pride and solidarity to guilt, embarrassment, or self-justification – reflecting the internalization of *language shame*. On the micro-level, they described concrete behavioral strategies, such as avoiding Russian, switching to Ukrainian in public, or adopting Polish for functional communication. These qualitative insights provided emotional and moral depth to the statistical patterns, revealing how ideology and affect converge in linguistic practice.

Both datasets were integrated through a joint triangulation process (Fetters, Curry, Creswell 2013), in which quantitative trends and qualitative codes addressing the same concepts were compared to ensure coherence and interpretive consistency. For instance, respondents who reported discomfort with Russian in Likert-scale questions often described feelings of shame or apology in their narrative comments. This overlap confirmed convergent validity, demonstrating that ideological, emotional, and behavioral constructs were consistently reflected across methodological layers. This convergence not only validates the mixed-methods design but also strengthens the causal interpretation of findings: ideology influences emotion, and emotion guides linguistic behavior.

The study adhered to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA 2017) and received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences. All participants gave informed consent and were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. Special attention was paid to the emotional well-being of respondents, given the psychological vulnerability of war-affected populations. The survey used neutral wording, optional skip logic, and a non-intrusive design for emotionally sensitive questions. Narrative responses were anonymized, and any identifying details were removed during data cleaning and reporting.

As an online survey, the study may underrepresent older adults and those without stable internet access. Nevertheless, the large sample size, demographic diversity, and integration of qualitative and quantitative data help to mitigate these limitations. The self-reported nature of the data may also introduce social desirability bias; however, triangulation and cross-method validation substantially enhance reliability and depth.

This methodological framework directly operationalizes the theoretical model proposed earlier.

Language ideology was measured through attitudinal and identity-oriented items; emotional bilingualism was examined through participants' self-reported feelings and narratives of *language shame*; and language shift was captured through reported changes in language use and avoidance behaviors. The mixed-methods approach thus provides a holistic understanding of how ideological discourses, emotional responses, and practical adaptations intertwine in shaping the wartime evolution of Ukrainian bilingualism.

4. Results

The results section presents both quantitative findings and qualitative narratives that together reveal how ideology, emotion, and behavior interact in the wartime transformation of the Ukrainian bilingual repertoire.

All examples and numerical data derive from the empirical survey and respondents' open-ended comments collected in 2023.

4.1. Ideological Realignment: The Moralization of Language Choice

Across all groups, language use is no longer perceived as a neutral communicative act but as a moral and civic stance. Participants repeatedly expressed that Ukrainian had become the "language of resistance" and the "only right language." Typical comments included:

- *"I don't switch to the occupier's language during conversations."*
- *"Now the Russian language has become disgusting to me."*

Such statements point to a moralization of language – a process whereby linguistic choice becomes a proxy for ethical alignment and collective identity. The quantitative data confirm the scale of this ideological shift. Among L1-Russian speakers, 38.2% reported a complete shift and 34.3% a partial shift in language behavior, while only 27.5% reported no change.

Among L1-Ukrainian and bilingual respondents, 39.7% fully changed their language use and 36.0% partially changed it. Even among L1-Ukrainian respondents – already Ukrainian-dominant before the invasion – 34.1% reported active behavioral modification, and 17.0% partial adjustment. These figures show that moral and political evaluation of Russian has influenced speakers across all language backgrounds, transforming ideology into a behavioral norm rather than a symbolic declaration. Respondents also noted growing social expectations to conform to this ideological stance. About 60% admitted feeling

social or online pressure to abandon Russian. One bilingual respondent described:

– *"If you write something in Russian online, people attack you – even if you're supporting Ukraine."*

The data suggest that public moral discourse now functions as an additional mechanism of linguistic regulation, reinforcing collective identity while restricting tolerance for Russian in social and digital spaces. Moral evaluation of language has become central to self-presentation. This ideological realignment forms the foundation for the emotional dynamics explored in the next section.

4.2. Emotional Transformations: From External Shaming to Internalized Regulation

Respondents' testimonies show how social judgments transformed into inner affective control – what we term *language shame*. L1-Russian and bilingual speakers especially described decisive self-correction:

– *"Russian has been erased; my Ukrainian is improving."*

– *"I have completely switched to Ukrainian."*

Others emphasized situational flexibility that still carries emotional tension:

– *"I speak more Ukrainian. But if necessary, I can speak Russian."*

This indicates that linguistic shame operates not through fear of linguistic error but through moral discomfort attached to Russian as a code. The process marks a transition from externally imposed to self-regulated language policing, where individuals monitor and justify their own speech. Emotional distancing also extended to cultural and media consumption. Respondents reported purging Russian content from their lives:

– *"I don't use Russian content anymore."*

– *"Since February 24, I NEVER switch to Russian, and I've changed the content I consume—Russian irritates me."*

– *"I stopped watching Russian movies, listening to Russian music, or reading Russian books."*

For many, this abstention carried therapeutic meaning, a sense of "cleansing" or "detoxification." At the same time, some participants observed greater Russian audibility in their surroundings due to population displacement:

– *"Since the invasion, I hear more Russian in my city because of war migrants."*

– *"More Russian speakers have moved into my area, so I hear it more frequently now."*

Such comments underline the coexistence of personal rejection with unavoidable social exposure – emphasizing that emotional stance and linguistic environment do not always align. Shame and discomfort function as emotional regulators. Ideological rejection is internalized as self-surveillance and avoidance, preparing the ground for behavioral change.

4.3. Behavioral Adaptation: Restructuring the Bilingual Repertoire

Behaviorally, the decline of Russian is evident across all groups. Among L1-Russian respondents, 70.9% reported decreased Russian use, and 4.2% ceased using it completely. Among bilinguals, 86.0% reduced usage, and 8.8% stopped entirely. Among L1-Ukrainian respondents, 84.9% reported a reduction, with 18.1% explicitly rejecting Russian after February 2022. Still, 62.8% of L1-Russian speakers continued daily use, compared to 49.3% of bilinguals. Among L1-Ukrainian respondents, 41.6% never used Russian. These figures indicate that avoidance is widespread but differentiated by social context and network composition. Respondents' narratives reveal domain-specific strategies:

– *"I only speak Russian with certain relatives, but not in public."*
– *"I work with Russian-speaking IDPs, so I have to use Russian at times."*
– *"Unfortunately, my city remains mostly Russian-speaking."*

Others emphasized long-term abandonment:

– *"Until 2016, I used both languages, but afterward – exclusively Ukrainian."*

The combination of selective use and categorical avoidance demonstrates that speakers actively manage their bilingual repertoires to minimize the symbolic cost of Russian while maintaining communicative practicality.

Language self-identification confirms this realignment. While 63.0% identified Ukrainian as their first language 23.9% as Russian, and 10.5% as bilingual, current functional dominance shows a sharp movement toward Ukrainian. Among L1-Ukrainian respondents, 95.5% now primarily use Ukrainian; among L1-Russian, 49.2% have switched to Ukrainian as their dominant language; among bilinguals, 53.7% report the same. Several participants explicitly connected this shift to historical re-evaluation:

– *"I was born in a Ukrainian-speaking area, but Soviet school policies erased my Ukrainian."*
– *"My first language was Russian due to Soviet influence, but now I use Ukrainian daily."*

These accounts reveal agency rather than attrition: speakers consciously reconstruct their linguistic identities, positioning Ukrainian as both emotionally comfortable and morally legitimate. Behavioral adaptation reflects not a passive decline of Russian but an intentional restructuring of linguistic repertoires – a process governed by both emotional self-regulation and ideological commitment.

Across all levels, the data demonstrate a consistent mechanism: public ideology shapes private emotion, which in turn drives behavioral change. Ideological narratives define the moral legitimacy of languages; emotions such as shame, guilt, and pride internalize these values; and behavioral strategies operationalize them in daily life. The Ukrainian case thus illustrates an ideologically accelerated language shift, in which affective and ethical factors replace generational transmission as the main catalyst of linguistic change. Rather than fading through neglect, Russian is actively rejected as incompatible with the new moral and emotional order.

This process represents a distinctive sociolinguistic pattern – one in which ideology, emotion, and agency converge to produce rapid reconfiguration of bilingual repertoires during war and displacement.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that linguistic behavior among Ukrainians during the full-scale war is shaped by a multidimensional mechanism combining ideological, emotional, and behavioral factors. This interaction produces what can be conceptualized as an ideologically accelerated language shift – a process driven not by intergenerational transmission, as in classical models, but by moral and affective re-evaluation of language practices within a single generation. This mechanism has not been previously theorized in sociolinguistics and offers a new explanatory lens for rapid, ethically motivated linguistic change.

5.1. Language as a Moral Boundary: The Ideological Dimension

The reconfiguration of linguistic attitudes toward Russian demonstrates that language ideology in wartime Ukraine operates as a moral boundary rather than a mere cultural or political marker. As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Irvine, Gal (2000) show, language ideologies construct hierarchies of value that link linguistic forms to social and moral legitimacy. In the Ukrainian case, this hierarchy has become overtly ethical: language choice now indexes civic virtue and moral allegiance. Following Kulyk (2024), post-2022 Ukrainian identity is articulated through linguistic practice – Ukrainian symbolizes loyalty, while Russian is re-indexed as morally compromised.

This process resonates with Bilaniuk's (2005) earlier observations that language in Ukraine has long served as a symbolic resource, yet the current context transforms it into a moral imperative.

Respondents' statements – *"I don't switch to the occupier's language," "The Russian language has become disgusting to me"* – exemplify this moralization. Language has become both a tool of communication and a public declaration of ethical stance, converting ideology into a behavioral norm.

5.2 Emotional Reconfiguration: Shame, Cleansing, and Self-Regulation

The emotional layer of the shift reveals how ideology is internalized through affect. Respondents' feelings of guilt, discomfort, and pride show that emotions mediate between collective norms and individual agency.

The phenomenon of *language shame* reflects a transition from external social judgment to internal self-monitoring. Similar affective mechanisms have been observed in postcolonial and post-conflict contexts (Irvine, Gal 2000), where linguistic "purification" involves emotional labor – apology, vigilance, and atonement. In Ukraine, this transformation is exceptionally rapid, intensified by collective trauma and the moral urgency of war. Importantly, respondents frame their linguistic change not as submission to pressure but as an act of moral agency: abandoning Russian becomes an expression of self-respect and ethical coherence. References to "cleansing," "detoxification," and rejection of Russian-language media show that language choice functions as emotional self-regulation. The transition from emotional discomfort to behavioral adjustment follows a process of habituation: repeated affective vigilance in everyday communication gradually solidifies into stable norms of avoidance. In this sense, emotion acts as a bridge between ideology and behavior: transforming moral conviction into consistent linguistic practice.

5.3. Language Behavior as Strategic Adaptation: The Micro Dimension

At the behavioral level, ideological and emotional dynamics translate into strategic adaptation rather than uniform rejection. Speakers engage in domain-based regulation, maintaining Russian in limited contexts (communication with relatives or Russian-speaking IDPs) but consciously excluding it from public, institutional, and digital spaces. This pattern parallels findings from Gal (1981) in Austria, where speakers balance communicative convenience with ideological coherence.

In Ukraine, however, the driving force is not institutional constraint but moral discipline. Russian declines not because of state policy or loss of function but because it becomes ethically unviable within the moral economy of war. Among displaced Ukrainians in Poland, Polish emerges as a "neutral" or "safe" substitute language, reflecting both pragmatic adaptation and emotional recalibration. Speakers thus restructure – rather than reduce – their bilingual repertoires, aligning them with new ideological and emotional hierarchies.

5.4. Temporal Dynamics and Comparative Perspective

While the data capture a moment of accelerated moral realignment, it remains uncertain whether these linguistic and emotional configurations will endure beyond the war. Future longitudinal observation will clarify whether ideology-driven change can outlast the crisis conditions that produced it. Comparable moralization of language has also been observed outside Eastern Europe – for instance, in post-genocide Rwanda, where linguistic choice became intertwined with civic ethics and reconciliation narratives (Mazrui 1998; Ataci 2021).

The Ukrainian case therefore expands global understanding of moralized multilingualism, situating Eastern Europe within a broader post-conflict comparative frame.

5.5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The Ukrainian case contributes to sociolinguistic theory by integrating ideology, affect, and agency into a unified model of language change. In this model, language functions simultaneously as a communicative tool, a political symbol, and a moral regulator. This perspective enriches theories of language ideology (Irvine, Gal 2000) and complements research on affective sociolinguistics by introducing ethical motivation as a key dimension of linguistic transformation. The mechanism observed here also resonates with insights from moral psychology, which conceptualizes guilt and pride as social regulators of ethical conduct (Haidt 2003; Tangney et al. 2007). Such integration underscores that linguistic decisions, like moral actions, are shaped by emotional reflexivity and the pursuit of coherence between belief and behavior.

From a policy perspective, these findings suggest that language planning in postwar Ukraine cannot rely solely on legal enforcement or institutional promotion. Sustainable Ukrainization requires emotional and ethical resonance – fostering pride without inducing guilt, and supporting linguistic belonging as both a civic and psychological process. Acknowledging this moral dimension could make language policy more inclusive and less prescriptive, aligning it with lived emotional

realities. Ukrainian linguistic transformation during war is not a reaction to coercion but a manifestation of moral self-reconstruction.

Ideological narratives provide value frameworks, emotions internalize these values, and behavioral strategies enact them in daily life. This triadic interaction – ideology, emotion, behavior – defines the mechanism of *ideologically accelerated language shift*, where language change becomes a conscious ethical choice. By highlighting this mechanism, the Ukrainian case broadens sociolinguistic theory and demonstrates the power of language as both a moral and emotional resource in times of collective upheaval.

6. Conclusions

This study examined how ideology, emotion, and behavior interact to shape linguistic transformation among Ukrainians during the full-scale war. The data demonstrates that the decline of Russian and the consolidation of Ukrainian cannot be explained through conventional models of gradual, intergenerational language shift. Instead, the findings reveal a distinct and rapid process of ideologically accelerated language shift – a phenomenon driven by moral realignment, emotional regulation, and conscious behavioral adaptation within a single generation.

This paper introduces and empirically substantiates the concept of *ideologically accelerated language shift*, offering a new theoretical framework that links moral evaluation, affective investment, and linguistic agency. By identifying ideology itself as a direct agent of linguistic restructuring, the study expands existing sociolinguistic explanations of how rapid, ethically motivated language change can emerge in times of crisis. At the ideological level, language has become a moral boundary and a marker of civic virtue. Ukrainian functions as a language of ethical belonging and solidarity, while Russian is re-indexed as incompatible with collective moral identity. This transformation turns linguistic practice into an act of moral agency – a visible performance of civic resistance and integrity. The moralization of language in wartime Ukraine illustrates how language ideologies can evolve into systems of ethical differentiation that shape both public discourse and private life. At the emotional level, ideology is internalized through affect. The emergence of *language shame* and the discourse of "cleansing" illustrate how collective expectations transform into inner regulation. Emotions such as guilt, discomfort, and pride operate as a bridge between belief and behavior, reinforcing moral coherence rather than undermining agency. Speakers deliberately align their linguistic choices with their ethical convictions, transforming emotion into

a tool of self-discipline and belonging. At the behavioral level, the data reveal strategic adaptation rather than simple replacement. Speakers manage bilingual repertoires through domain-based regulation, restricting Russian to private contexts and expanding Ukrainian across public and digital spaces.

Among displaced Ukrainians, Polish often replaces Russian as a neutral communicative code, showing that moral and affective pressures produce repertoire restructuring rather than linguistic loss. This adaptive behavior reflects agentive bilingualism grounded in moral reasoning. The theoretical significance of this study lies in redefining the drivers of language change. By foregrounding moral and emotional agency as engines of linguistic transformation, the Ukrainian case challenges structuralist models that privilege demographic or institutional factors.

The study's limitations relate to its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which capture perceptions rather than long-term behavioral outcomes. However, the convergence between quantitative trends and qualitative narratives enhances the validity of interpretation and establishes a foundation for longitudinal research.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore that postwar language planning in Ukraine must integrate affective and ethical dimensions. Legislation alone cannot sustain Ukrainization; lasting change requires empathy-based communication, cultivating pride without guilt and belonging without exclusion. Acknowledging emotional and moral realities can make language policy more inclusive, resilient, and human-centered. Ultimately, this research affirms that language is not merely a communicative medium but a moral and emotional instrument through which individuals renegotiate identity, belonging, and integrity.

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Povzetek

Članek obravnava spremembe v jezikovnem vedenju Ukrajincev po obsežni ruski invaziji na Ukrajino leta 2022. Vojna je močno preoblikovala jezikovno krajino države in pospešila procese preoblikovanja dvojezičnih praks med govorci ukrajinščine in ruščine. Raziskava uvaja pojem ideološko pospešenega jezikovnega premika, s katerim opisuje hitro spremembo jezikovnih praks, ki je ne povzročajo le strukturni ali demografski dejavniki, temveč predvsem moralne, ideološke in čustvene motivacije posameznikov. Posebna pozornost je namenjena temu, kako vojna in prisilna migracija vplivata na odnos do ruščine ter na vsakodnevno rabo jezikov med Ukrajinci, ki trenutno živijo na Poljskem.

Raziskava temelji na metodološkem pristopu mešanih metod. Empirični del vključuje spletno sociolingvistično anketo, izvedeno med majem in junijem 2023, v kateri je sodelovalo 1298 pripadnikov ukrajinske migrantske skupnosti na Poljskem. Kvantitativni del analizira pogostost rabe jezikov v različnih družbenih situacijah (doma, v službi, v javnosti in medijih), kvalitativni del pa temelji na več kot tisoč odprtih komentarjih, ki razkrivajo čustvene odzive, moralne dileme in osebne razlage jezikovnih odločitev.

Rezultati kažejo izrazit upad rabe ruščine v vseh skupinah govorcev. Več kot 70 % govorcev, katerih prvi jezik je ruščina, in več kot 80 % dvojezičnih govorcev poroča o zmanjšanju ali popolni opustitvi rabe ruščine. Ključni dejavnik tega procesa je pojav jezikovnega sramu, ki ga avtorja opredeljujeta kot čustveno stanje, povezano z občutki krivde, nelagodja ali moralne neskladnosti pri uporabi jezika, ki je v času vojne simbolno povezan z agresorjem. Jezikovni sram deluje kot mehanizem čustvene regulacije, ki povezuje ideološka prepričanja z dejanskimi jezikovnimi praksami.

Raziskava tudi kaže, da se v migracijskem okolju spreminja struktura dvojezičnosti. Poljščina pogosto prevzema vlogo nevtralnega komunikacijskega sredstva, ki nadomešča ruščino v vsakdanjih interakcijah. Posledično nastaja nov model funkcionalne dvojezičnosti, ki temelji na kombinaciji ukrajinščine in poljščine.

Prispevek te študije je predvsem teoretičen: predlaga nov konceptualni model, ki povezuje jezikovno ideologijo, čustva in jezikovno vedenje. S tem razširja raziskave na področju sociolingvistike konflikta in kaže, da v času vojne jezik postane ne le sredstvo komunikacije, temveč tudi pomemben moralni in identitetni vir, skozi katerega posamezniki na novo definirajo svojo pripadnost, identiteto in družbeno odgovornost.