

The Language Engagement Landscape of Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders in Ireland

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Abstract

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ireland has granted temporary protection to over 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. In light of this, the current study employs a case study approach to explore the language engagement of six Ukrainian temporary protection holders (UTPHs) living in an Irish city. Using narrative inquiry, the research examines UTPHs' access to language engagement opportunities, the challenges and facilitators they face, and their willingness to invest in language learning. Despite recent calls to recognize that refugee language engagement may differ from other migrant groups due to unique migratory experiences, there has been no prior research on the language practices of temporary protection holders. This study therefore addresses a critical and timely gap in the understanding of language engagement among refugees, with a focus on temporary protection holders. The findings show that UTPHs engage in language activities across five key spaces: administrative, service, educational, domestic, and workplace settings. Female participants demonstrate a strong commitment to language investment, utilizing available resources to overcome multiple barriers to engagement. Conversely, male participants exhibit a more cautious approach, postponing their language investment efforts for the future.

Keywords: Ukrainian temporary protection holders, language engagement, facilitators, barriers

1. Introduction

Set against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 which has led to the forced migration of almost six million people¹, and the subsequent activation of the Temporary Protection Directive on March 4, 2022, this study explores spaces for language engagement and the barriers and facilitators which shape them among displaced Ukrainians currently seeking refuge in Ireland. Ireland hosts a higher proportion of Ukrainians fleeing the war compared to any other Western EU member state, with 1.4% per capita (McQuinn et al.,

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312584/ukrainian-refugees-by-country/>

2023). The sheer number of people accommodated raises the issue of integration into society (and the labour market). A major factor in integration is host language proficiency. According to Alba, Sloan and Sperling (2011), it is a prerequisite for successful economic and community integration. It facilitates the transfer of previously acquired education and expertise while simultaneously aiding communication with locals thus promoting successful integration (Kosyakova et al., 2022).

However, the case of Ukrainian displaced people is somewhat unique compared with other migrants. They experienced forced displacement, defined as ‘migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood’ (International Organization for Migration, 2019). The unexpected and violent nature of their departure means that Ukrainian displaced people were not prepared for migration. Accordingly, only a small fraction possesses the necessary language skills for successful integration into society². A further issue is their status in the host country. Ukrainians neither hold official refugee status nor are they asylum seekers. They are in fact Temporary Protection Holders (the term Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders (UTPHs) will be used throughout this study). Temporary Protection ensures that individuals share the rights and freedoms of European citizens while residing in the host country, but they live in perpetual uncertainty about their future and face a significant possibility of rapid repatriation.³ This may have an impact on their desire and ability to integrate and thus invest in host language engagement.

² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ftp/p-ai/arrivalsfromukraineinirelandseries9/>

³ <https://www.irishimmigration.ie/information-on-temporary-protection-for-people-fleeing-the-conflict-in-ukraine/>

2. Literature Review: Language Engagement and Refugees

Surprisingly, host language engagement of refugees remains very much an under-researched area (Van Tubergen, 2010). Most studies take a broader picture focusing on migrants. Of the studies that look specifically at refugees, many adopt the economic-led model of language attainment developed by Chiswick and Miller's (2001). It starts with the premise that language is a form of human capital that migrants may invest in if incentivized by economic gain. The model highlights the following as key determinants in language attainment: age at migration; educational attainment at migration; duration of residence in host country; birthplace and its geographical and linguistic distance from the host country; the number of migrants who speak the language of origin in the host community; and migrant status – e.g. refugee, economic migrant, from a former colony.

Studies into refugee language attainment which draw on this model include Van Tubergen (2010) who studied language attainment among refugees from Iran, Iraq, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Somalia in the Netherlands; Kristen and Speuring (2021) worked with Syrian refugees and economic migrants from Poland, Italy, and Turkey in Germany; and Kosyakova et al. (2022) who studied refugees in Germany. All three shed light on additional obstacles that refugees may encounter with regards language engagement and investment. These include mental health issues, lack of pre-departure preparation which may relate to language proficiency level, the legal status of refugee which brings with it huge uncertainty in terms of whether the person can stay in the host country, and barriers to access to the language outside institutional spaces due to living arrangements such as refugee centers which hinder access to the local population.

Moving beyond an economic model, Alefsha and Al-Jamal (2019) and Al Masri and Abu-Ayyash (2020) explored the linguistic challenges faced by Syrian refugees. Alefsha and Al-Jamal (2019) specifically focused on refugees in Jordan and engagement with English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Most refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line, making English proficiency crucial for job opportunities provided by the Jordanian government (Alefsha & Al-Jamal, 2019). Despite EFL classes offered by resettlement agencies and Jordanian schools, many refugee students drop out. Four main challenges emerged: institutional (unfamiliarity with classrooms, lack of materials, teachers, and prior education), financial (inadequate government support), social (family concerns, childcare, mental health), and educational (low prior education, discomfort with English, teacher adaptation).

Al Masri and Abu-Ayyash (2020) examined language practices and challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Austria, France, Malaysia, and Romania. Aside from linguistic challenges inherent in learning a new language, the authors found that resistance from the local population, a high concentration of refugees in one area, immediate employment needs, long waiting lists for state-funded language courses, and inadequate support for elderly learners presented additional challenges. Financial constraints further hindered access to paid language courses. Additionally, stress and post-traumatic stress disorder affected refugees' emotional state and engagement with the host language.

Moving on to the Irish context, Carson (2008) explored the English learning experiences of refugees from Romania, Angola, Moldova, Iraq, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Congo, and Bosnia. Lack of a sense of belonging coupled with isolation and loneliness proved demotivating for their English language learning efforts. Their children's experiences of being bullied at school due to differences added to the challenges. However, despite adverse circumstances, refugees continued

their language studies. English was seen as a means to access employment and facilitate integration. Thus, integration and language proficiency were viewed as interconnected. In their 2021 study of Syrian refugees in Ireland, Čatibušić et al. focused on refugees receiving state-funded English classes. The study highlighted the importance of English proficiency for Syrian refugees in Ireland. They viewed it as essential for building relationships with locals, assisting their children with schoolwork, and maintaining respect within their families. Lack of employment opportunities was a significant concern, with language proficiency seen as the main barrier. Refugees faced challenges navigating the Irish state system due to limited English proficiency, despite some available translation services. Factors like distance, health issues, and childcare responsibilities hindered class attendance, with dissatisfaction among older people regarding teachers speaking only in English. Refugees showed willingness to use technology for language learning but preferred not to study in exclusively Syrian or mixed-gender groups.

Taken together, the above studies highlight the multifaceted landscape of barriers and facilitators influencing refugees' linguistic engagement, while foregrounding the vital role of language proficiency in societal integration. These investigations have cast a wide net, exploring multiple parameters influencing the language practices of refugees in various host nations. Barriers and facilitators include migration status, language proficiency level, trauma, age, gender, levels of education, cultural and economic background, marital status, presence of children and employment. The studies also shed light on, although not explicitly, the importance of spaces. For example, in formal educational settings, refugees may encounter barriers in the form of unfamiliar cultural practices; whereas mass accommodation centers can isolate refugees from the local population, and lack of translators potentially erects barriers when trying to communicate in administrative spaces.

Host Language Engagement and Space

According to Benson (2021), physical space is a causal factor in language learning. On a macro level, it may involve moving from one geographical area to another where different languages are spoken. This can be referred to as “spatial displacement” (Benson, 2021a, p. 3). The present study represents a perfect example of this as the participants have been forcibly displaced from one language space to an entirely different one. However, multiple language spaces also exist within a geographical space. In terms of second language acquisition, such spaces may be linked to language learning environments. For a space to function as a language learning environment, it should offer opportunities for learners to engage with and interact with various language resources, including people, objects, and, we argue, systems within the space. (Devlin & Magliacane, 2022) though, it must be acknowledged that spaces are dynamic in nature and can give rise to both barriers and facilitators to language engagement.

In light of the above, the current study explores how barriers and facilitators emerge and dissipate within and across spaces. It does so by turning its lens on Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders, a specific cohort who have recently been spatially displaced and who now find themselves in a liminal space between refugee and legal migrant.

3. Methodology

This study, conducted in the summer of 2023, takes a narrative approach focusing on the lived experiences of six UTPHs who settled in a city in Ireland. It aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. Within which spaces do UTPHs engage with the English language?

2. What facilitators or barriers to language engagement do UTPHs encounter in those spaces?

3. How do those barriers and facilitators to language engagement develop over spaces?

A narrative approach using semi-structured interviews was adopted. Norton (2013) states that giving voices to participants of studies at a specific time and place improves the understanding of their relationships with the world. It gives the participants the power to tell their stories on their terms. Furthermore, Baynham foregrounds the centrality of space in narratives of ‘displacement and mobility’ (2015, p. 123). The interviews, lasting from 1 hour to 2.5 hours, were conducted by the researcher in either Ukrainian or Russian. The researcher, a Ukrainian with a refugee background, is fluent in Russian, Ukrainian, and English. This linguistic and cultural connection helped participants feel more comfortable and probably facilitating more honest responses. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Informed consent was sought both orally and in written form. The study received ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork. A thematic analysis was subsequently carried out.

Participants

The participants, aged 33 to 62, lived in the city for an average of 10 months. Four are female and two are male. All participants spoke Ukrainian and Russian fluently; some preferred Ukrainian for their interview, others spoke in Russian. They were all Temporary Protection holders and fled their country due to the war initiated by the Russian Federation in 2022. They all came to Ireland directly from Ukraine without living in other countries. Five participants hold university degrees; one has a technical school diploma. Their initial level of English varied from

none to upper intermediate (learned at school or university) based on self-evaluation.

Pseudonyms were used to keep the anonymity of participants, references to identifiable information were also anonymized (see table 1).

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Level of English⁴	Preferred Language for the Interview	The Highest Level of Education
Nastia	33	female	A2	Ukrainian	Master's
Svitlana	30	female	C1	Ukrainian	Master's
Kateryna	49	female	A2	Ukrainian	Master's
Nadiya	52	female	B1	Ukrainian	Master's
Sasha	33	male	A1	Russian	Master's
Svyat	59	male	A1	Russian	Level 5 technical school diploma

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

4. Findings

In this section the barriers and facilitators to language engagement will be explored through the lens of spaces of engagement. Following the data, UTPHs engage with English in five distinct spaces: administrative, service, educational, home, and employment.

4.1 Administrative Space

4.1.1 Port of Arrival

All interviewees experienced their first encounter with English at Dublin Airport upon arrival. Depending on date of arrival and English proficiency, experiences varied. Early arrivals in March and April 2022 lacked access to interpreters and relied heavily on fellow Ukrainians. They faced challenging questions, bureaucratic forms, and interactions with customs officers and sorting center representatives, often leading to high stress levels and confusion due to language barriers. While translating services were provided later in 2022, they were not retained. As Sasha notes, ‘there were no interpreters’ in January 2023 when he came to the country. However, even when interpreters were provided, their presence was not always facilitative. Kateryna expressed her frustration:

I did not understand what to do, I did not know how to behave [...] We arrived at night, the interpreters appeared only in the morning [...] Even when we were already on the bus to our accommodation, I did not know where we were going and what to expect.
(Kateryna)

Although in some cases, the participants’ children were proficient English speakers, this was not always considered a facilitator that could be exploited. For example, Kateryna hesitated to rely on her older children for translation due to concerns about accuracy. Lack of awareness

about procedures and language barriers were significant obstacles, partially alleviated by the presence of volunteers and the community's willingness to assist. While volunteers aided with translations and paperwork, newly arrived Ukrainians utilized whatever English they knew and leveraged technology like Google Translate to communicate with government representatives and navigate their situation.

4.1.2 Irish Public Employment Service (Intreo)

The next encounter with English occurred in Intreo. When they arrived at their accommodation, all UTPHs had to fill out some extra documents locally. All participants agreed that there was enough help in the social support centers. Despite the time of arrival and the level of English, UTPHs were able to receive professional help with filling out the forms while applying for various services necessary for proper existence in the country. Sasha, with no English knowledge, initially went there with his wife, who helped with translation, but later successfully attended the place alone since ‘there were Russian-speaking people there’.

Participants with English proficiency at B1 level or higher tended to rely less on translation services, feeling confident in their ability to understand information and did not consider Intreo as their primary source of citizen information. For Svitlana, ‘there was no need for translators’. Establishing connections with local people also helped navigate the system. Svitlana found a supportive host when still in Ukraine who assisted with paperwork and Kateryna received advice from a long-term Polish friend in Ireland.

For unemployed participants with lower English levels and no local connections, Intreo inspectors served as the primary source of official information, assisting with various integration aspects, such as recommending English courses, advising on schools for children, and providing

career development guidance. Female participants communicated with public servants and in time relied less on interpreters pointing out that ‘their host families and teachers encouraged them not to use Google translate any more’ (Nastia).

While females in the study had positive attitudes towards Intreo, it is significant to note that males had more negative experiences. Nadiya said that ‘the inspector motivated [her] to invest in studying English and to find a job that would make [her] happy’. At the same time, Intreo seemed to play the role of the barrier to language investment for males. A year into the war, Intreo started encouraging males to find employment. Since the men in this study arrived later, they did not have a whole year that could have been dedicated to language investment. Thus, male participants said that getting employed without speaking English proved a significant barrier to language learning.

4.2 Service Spaces

Services spaces include clinics, supermarkets, shops, cafes, train and bus stations, taxis, gyms, and barbershops, where communication is mostly transactional. Most participants expressed readiness to engage in English communication in such spaces and were happy when others understood them. However, the presence of a more competent English speaker seemed to prove a barrier to engagement. In the case of Nadiya, she was happy to act as a language broker when she was the dominant speaker, but opted out of engagement in her daughter’s presence as her daughter had a higher proficiency level.

Other people believe in my English skills more than I do. I always help my Ukrainian friends when we need to talk to somebody local. On the other hand, when I am with my daughter, who speaks English fluently, I do not need to do this. (Nadiya)

Another barrier was the medium of communication. When needing to book services, participants were less likely to engage with the language over the phone. Aside from specifically language problems, the ambiguous legal status of Ukrainians presented a barrier to language engagement in service spaces. For example, realtors and potential employers seemed to be reluctant to talk to UTPHs. As Svyat noted about realtors:

They are either not sure that Ukrainians will be here for a long time or they think that Ukrainians do not have enough money. (Svyat)

Kateryna stated that her supervisor at hospitality courses invited potential employers to the course, but according to her,

Employers are not in a hurry to employ Ukrainians because they can leave at any given moment. (Kateryna)

4.2.1 Healthcare Space

Participants often faced challenges communicating in English during medical visits, particularly those with low proficiency levels. The lack of medical vocabulary posed a barrier to effective engagement with medical staff. Despite these difficulties, they developed coping mechanisms, such as preparing phrases beforehand using online dictionaries and relying on Google Translate for unforeseen questions.

However, differing readiness levels among medical staff to use translation apps presented additional barriers, with some participants reporting reluctance from staff to utilize such tools. Nevertheless, others, like Sasha, found medical personnel sympathetic to language struggles and willing to use translation apps for communication facilitating their overall experience:

When I meet the person, who is giving the vaccine to my child, I use the Translator. People do not refuse to communicate [...] You cannot talk for a long time using the app, but for quick answers, it is a must-have for a person who does not know English. (Sasha)

4.3 Educational Space

4.3.1 Language courses and Resources

Ireland facilitated language learning for UTPHs by offering free English courses provided by the Educational Training Board (ETB), although some participants initially underestimated their need for them due to uncertainty about the duration of their stay. The availability of diverse courses and integration with other nationalities in class facilitated language engagement for those who availed of the courses. Ireland's provision of time before immediate work obligations allowed for focused language learning. Female participants reported using English in class to communicate with teachers and peers, benefiting from structured learning and a supportive environment that enhances language acquisition. According to Kateryna,

This is the only place where I speak English and feel relaxed at the same time. It also gives me the system so that I understand the language better. (Kateryna)

Additional language practice through speaking clubs was also a possibility. However, these varied in effectiveness based on the venue's suitability, with quieter environments facilitating engagement (Kateryna) and noisy pubs presenting a barrier in terms of long-term commitment (Nadiya). Ireland's provision of financial support allowed some participants to enroll in paid courses alongside free ones, with motivations ranging from general improvement to professional development. Experiences varied among learners, with inappropriate class placement being a potential barrier to learning motivation. Despite challenges, participants demonstrated a willingness to invest in language learning through additional courses (for Svitlana) and self-study activities like computer literacy and upholstery classes (for Nadiya and Kateryna).

By contrast, neither male had the opportunity to invest in studying English upon arrival. Both cited government policy as the main barrier. They claimed that they were not given the time for adaptation or language learning as they were encouraged to find work immediately.

Another barrier was age. According to Svyat:

I also believe that you need to learn the language when you are young. Now, my memory is not what it used to be. (Svyat)

Finally, family circumstances presented a barrier too. Sasha had an infant at home. He expressed a desire to study the language but felt that work and parental duties preclude the possibility.

It's impossible to study English after work because I am helping my wife with the baby. In the future, I hope to study English because it is impossible to exist without a language [...] When my child is 10 and speaks fluently, what will I do? (Sasha)

4.3.2 Schools

Kateryna, the only participant with young children enrolled in local schools, reported communicating in schoolyards with teachers daily. Since her English level was low, she sent emails to teachers and spoke to them using translating applications or regular paper. She stated that talking on the phone with school representatives created a considerable barrier due to her inability to understand spoken English without seeing the face of the speaker. Being put in a situation whereby she was forced to confront the barrier, Kateryna was able to use the fact that her child was attending school from 8.30 to 14.20 as a language investment facilitator and attended language courses during this time.

I go to courses in the morning when children are at school. For evening classes, my niece looks after younger children, and I can go too. (Kateryna)

4.3.3 Resources

Female participants invested in media-based resources to learn the language, which facilitated their language development. Kateryna was heavily investing in English using various online platforms, such as the British Council and Duolingo. She also used YouTube channels like English Club, Smart Alex, and English Galaxy, and apps like Wordbeat highlighting the diversity and ready-availability of such resources.

I switch to another when I get tired of one source. The main point is to do something every day. (Kateryna)

Nastia brought English books with the parallel translation into Ukrainian from her summer trip back home. Svitlana listened to English music to find unusual vocabulary. Nadiya mentioned listening to BBC 6-minute news, as well as watching films on Netflix and Disney+ with subtitles and sometimes without them. Nastia used Language Reactor, a toolbox for learning vocabulary in films. Kateryna invested in language by doing homework in English together with her children. Nadiya discovered graded readers in the city library, and she checked out two books every three weeks.

4.4 Home space

UTPHs tend to live in private rented accommodation, host families, or in shared accommodation, such as hotels or hostels. The participants in this study lived in private rented accommodation or with host families.

4.4.1 Private rented accommodation

Living in private rented accommodation posed a barrier to English engagement for both male and female participants, as they often did not use English for communication at home and prioritized maintaining Ukrainian education for their children. While some utilized media like radio and TV shows for language exposure, most lacked Irish friends, citing language barriers and perceiving the nation as closed. Kateryna mentioned a story when she attended the mass in an Irish church, and the congregation seemed to be shocked to see an intruder, ‘as if she was peeking into their bedroom’. However, participants befriended residents from other countries and used Russian as a lingua franca for communication with them.

4.4.2 Host families

Two female participants living with host families experienced daily exposure to English, constituting approximately 30% of their communication. For Svitlana, with a C1 level of English proficiency, such daily exposure facilitated comfort when using the language, while Nastia found the constant English overwhelming and stressful. Nastia initially relied on Google Translate but was discouraged from using it by her host family. Her struggle to express herself in English led to significant stress, requiring her to seek professional psychological support.

I did not share my emotions with them because I did not have lexis for this. (Nastia)

Both females agreed that living with a host family influenced their level of English tremendously. However, it was easier for the person with a higher level. At the same time, Nastia said:

[...] my level of English in comparison with other Ukrainians who do not live in host families is higher, but there were moments when I could not process it and said that I did not want to study it. (Nastia)

Females who lived with host families became friends with their hosts, which facilitated their language development and integration into society. They also shared their knowledge about the history of both Ukraine and Ireland and compared cuisines.

4.5 Employment space

4.5.1 Females

Employment could either facilitate or hinder language engagement for female participants, with some seeing it as an opportunity for language practice and independence. However, three participants cited a lack of English proficiency as a barrier to employment. While some were willing to accept low-paying jobs below their qualifications, others sought positions corresponding to their status, recognizing the need to improve their English for better opportunities. Kateryna tried a job not connected to her profession. However, she had to quit because she was not part of the power group. She explained that she ‘was working in the most difficult department alone and was not given flexible hours’. Nadiya's experience with NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications, the body that provides advice on the transferability of qualifications, demonstrated how language proficiency can impact job prospects positively. However, having a job did not guarantee language improvement, as seen in Svitlana's case, who continued to invest in English despite obtaining a well-paying job in her profession. Confidence in communicative skills also played a significant role, as evidenced by Nastia's struggles during her internship and Svitlana's discomfort teaching higher-level English students.

4.5.2 Males

Males started working almost immediately and had to settle for low-skilled jobs. They believed that it was possible to find a job without knowing the language but attributed their status as family breadwinners as the main barrier to learning it formally. They reported using the language at work but with different results. Svyat, who is older, described his positive experience in language engagement and was happy to have any interactions.

I do not regret that I did not go to courses. I don't have time for them. I use the language every day with Irish people [...] My salary is quite good, especially considering that I do not know the language. (Svyat)

Meanwhile, Sasha, who is younger, stated that since he did not have any English, he 'cannot understand his Irish foreman at all'. Both agreed that they would have better and well-paid jobs if they spoke English. They realized the necessity of investing in English learning.

5. Discussion

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of access to various spaces on engagement with the host language; and the barriers and facilitators which emerge for UTPHs within and across each space. Access to a diverse range of physical spaces has often been linked to the emergence of opportunities for language engagement and subsequent development (Benson, 2021; Devlin & Magliacane, 2022). However, the liminal status of temporary protection makes this less of a certainty. The migratory status of the Ukrainian participants places them in an unclear position whereby they are neither (economic/cultural) migrants nor refugees. They had not prepared for mobility and the temporary nature of their status may lead to an inability to invest in the new location. However, their status as protection holders also gives them privileges in terms of

financial aid, access to services and an immediate right to work which other groups of migrants may not have. With that in mind, we will turn to a discussion of the research questions.

All participants in this study have access to a diversity of spaces. These are classified as administrative, service, educational, home and workplace. The barriers and facilitators that emerge within and across the spaces show both commonalities and differences to the barriers and facilitators explored in previous literature related to refugees. Likewise, what could be seen as a barrier in one space, could be exploited as a facilitator in others. We will look at how three main factors – prior knowledge of the host language, having children and legal status can operate as either facilitators or barriers cross spatially.

Lack of exposure to the destination language before migration emerged as a significant barrier across most spaces. This is corroborated by research into refugees and language engagement (Akresh et al., 2014). Four out of six participants in this study did not have any pre-relocation knowledge of English, which complicated their communication and as a result the possibility of faster integration. This was compounded by the lack of awareness surrounding procedures, especially in administrative spaces, and was both facilitated and hindered by the presence or absence of state-provided interpreters. In administrative spaces, these barriers were mitigated by the presence of volunteers and by the willingness of people to invest in helping themselves mainly through technology such as Google Translate (Ćatibušić et al., 2021). Lack of prior knowledge of the host language also proved an issue in the workspace. In common with other studies, it prevented some participants from finding jobs in their fields, most notably the female participants, and led to discrimination in the workplace (Norton, 2013). However, lack of language proficiency did not prove a barrier for males getting lower skilled jobs where there were enough co-nationals or speakers of a common language to get by.

Another area which operated variably as either a barrier or a facilitator across spaces is the presence of children. Within high stakes administrative spaces where children are often considered language brokers (Kristen et al., 2015), the participants untypically avoided exploiting their children's higher language proficiency levels in order to prevent misunderstandings. Their identities as adults and parents and the need to protect their children facilitated the necessity to engage with the language regardless of proficiency level. However, within low stakes service spaces, participants, despite competence in the language, deferred to their children with higher proficiency levels thus erecting barriers to engagement. Additionally, lack of childcare has been shown to constitute a barrier preventing mothers from attending courses or applying for jobs (Ćatibušić et al., 2021). Contrary to previous research, the mothers in this study had enough time to attend courses when their children were at school. The presence of older children who could look after their younger siblings also played a significant role in helping the mothers receive necessary language access. Kateryna, for example, utilized the process of doing homework with her children as investment in language learning. However, the presence of an infant proved a barrier to attending classes for the male participant Sasha who worked full time and needed to spend time with his infant in the evenings.

A final issue to be aware of in the home space is the desire to preserve L1 for the children (Norton, 2013). This proved true in the current study because all UTPHs stated that they speak Ukrainian or Russian at home to ensure continuous exposure for their children to their L1. This is linked to legal status which can be revoked at any stage resulting in forced repatriation and necessitates the maintenance of home languages. As documented in previous literature into refugees and language practices, precarity in legal status can be a barrier to host language engagement (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Kosyakova et al., 2022). This was evidenced within the

service space whereby realtors and employers were reluctant to engage with UTPHs due to uncertainty regarding the duration of their stay. On the other hand, the legal status as protection holders proved facilitative across a range of spaces including educational spaces. UTPHs in Ireland receive substantial financial support, enabling them to afford additional language courses, unlike refugees in Ireland and other countries who often have to work immediately despite low language proficiency (Alefesha & Al-Jamal, 2019). Nadiya and Svitlana invested in private language schools and courses, dedicating significant time to language improvement. Although positioned within the category of refugee, the participants prioritized language learning where possible, challenging the notion that refugee status hinders engagement (Chiswick & Miller, 2001). Even those who were initially hesitant, like Kateryna, acknowledged the necessity of English.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, examining language engagement from a spatial perspective can provide fresh insights into the evolving nature of barriers and facilitators to language engagement. What might operate in one space as a barrier can function as a facilitator in another depending on individual circumstances and what one person might consider a language learning environment and if the environment allows access to the language.

In brief, obstructive and facilitative factors often overlap with their function being determined by space and individual circumstances. Unlike previous studies into refugees and migrants, it is impossible to categorise factors neatly as either facilitators or barriers. Therefore, using a spatial lens allowed us to shed light on the dynamic role of a range of social, economic,

political, legal and technological variables in shaping the language engagement landscape of UTPHs.

The study is among the relatively few that specifically focus on temporary protection holders. The necessity for further research, especially concerning gender differences, motivations for language investment, and the educational experiences of young UTPHs, is acknowledged. Ongoing studies are crucial for understanding and supporting the integration of UTPHs into host societies.

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