Names | A Journal of Onomastics

"Iron Ukrainization": The Historical and Political Dimensions of Naming the Railways in Ukraine

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Abstract

This article examines the historical names of railways in Ukraine by employing cultural-geographic and critical approaches. More specifically, this research describes semantic categories of railway names in Ukraine and highlights how railway names are explicitly or implicitly used as political instruments and forms of discursive power. The empirical part of the research is based on a database of the names of the railways in Ukraine throughout the history of the national railway network. The data was collected using modern reviews and directories, media screening, as well as archive sources. Throughout history most of the names of Ukrainian railways were not commemorative and performed primarily orientation function. Still, most of the names had potential political implications. Focusing on certain cases of politically-driven renaming of railways in Ukraine, including the ongoing project of "Iron Ukrainization", this research demonstrates how place names related to transport networks may function as geospatial projections of hegemonic political power, by legitimizing specific centers of political power in the linguistic landscape of a country.

Keywords: railway, place name, hodonym, geopolitics, critical toponomastics, Ukraine

1. Introduction

The toponymy of transport is an important field of research that facilitates our understanding of geospatial network development. It allows investigation of the senses and ideologies inscribed by social actors in writing the cultural landscape. However, as yet, place names related to transport and mobility have been rarely explored by the academic world. Very often, studies that address place names related to transportation and mobility often omit their political meaning (Destrem 2022). In particular, aside from some pioneering research and observation in the media (Craghead 2023; Bergmann 2009), place names related to the railway network have been insufficiently researched; and very little attention has been paid to the political dimension of the place names related to railway infrastructure.

This paper aims to examine the names of railways in Ukraine from a historical perspective through a cultural-geographic lens. The primary research question of this article is: How do railway names in Ukraine function as political instruments and forms of discursive power? The secondary research questions are the following: (1) What are the main semantic categories of railway names in Ukraine; (2) and how have they evolved over time, being influenced by historical and geopolitical factors?; and (3) In what ways do railway names contribute to the symbolic legitimization of political power in Ukraine's linguistic landscape?

This article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework for the critical study of place names related to transport and mobility. Then the data and methods employed in the research are described. The following two sections present the research results and findings. Firstly, naming models of railways in Ukraine are analyzed in historical retrospective together with their actual and potential political implications. Secondly, two episodes of political contestation of the names of railways in Ukraine are reviewed. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

The term "railway" in this paper refers to organizationally (and sometimes physically) separated parts of the railway network, owned or operated by different companies or their regional branches, and typically having their specific names. The International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) defines "toponym", or "a place name" as a proper name of a place, both inhabited and uninhabited, including transport communications as street, route etc.; if limited to the planet Earth, toponyms can also be called "geographical names" (ICOS 2019). Using this definition, the names of railways are proper names of communications that have certain stable geographical locations on the Earth's surface. They can therefore be considered toponyms, place names, or geographical names. The legitimacy of applying the term "toponym" to linear transport communications is also confirmed by other sources (Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro 2023; Ainiala et al. 2016; Hough 2016). However, not all names related to transport can be considered toponyms—for example, names of rolling stock as cars or locomotives (see Coates 2023, 2016).Railway names can also be classified as cultural names (Ainiala et al. 2016); and, if derived from the operating railway company or its structural division, they may also be classified as ergonyms (i.e., the names of products or brands) (ICOS 2019). Due to the extreme variety of the naming objects and the generally insufficient development of the topic, attempts to

coin a single term for this type of toponyms have so far been unsuccessful. The proposal of "stathmonym" (Room 1996) fails to characterize the non-point spatial realities related to transport and mobility such as lines, networks, etc. In turn, the latter can be treated as a subcategory of hodonyms.

Place names related to transport and mobility include a huge variety of toponyms related to the stops, stations, and lines of rail and non-rail transport networks, as well as airports and sea ports. They include place names related to both urban and non-urban transport networks, existing and former (historical) objects, as well as facilities that are currently in use or no longer used, objects in cities and outside of them (Destrem 2022). Such place names have several distinctive features related to their origin and functions. Transport networks are mostly located in areas that are already inhabited. Therefore, their toponymy is largely based on an already well-named geography, on pre-existing and nearby toponyms, resulting from the principle of "secondary nomination" (Destrem 2022; Bergmann 2009). Since the names of transport facilities are typically envisaged to perform a function of wayfinding, a significant number of observed name changes seem to reflect the need to synchronize the names of transport facilities (first of all, stations) to changes in the urban landscape, and to prevent travelers from becoming lost due to ambiguous names. For the same reason, duplicates are avoided within transport networks (Nahornyi 2023; Destrem 2022).

Transport place names represent a rich sort of information about the processes of urban development, the relations established between demographic growth and spatial mobility, between social practices and means of transport, or between centers and peripheries (Musset 2010). They may help to understand how various social, cultural and political actors construct different scales of territoriality and identity—globally, nationally, and locally (Craghead 2023; Destrem 2022). A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates their involvement in the political processes. The naming and renaming of tram stations, metro stations, airports, and other places of transport reveal the power and identity discourses and intentions, and function as a tool for political communication and justification—often in times of conquest, revolution, and power transition (Rose-Redwood et al. 2019; Fomenko 2018; Merril 2014, 2015; Woznicki 2003), but also in less tumultuous periods of time (Tomasik 2018; Destrem 2017, 2022; Halpern & Regmi 2011). Indeed, it could even be argued that in times of relative peace, the symbolic and political value of transport place names might be even more important because they are visible to large groups of people in their mundane lives (Destrem 2022). Be that as it may, transport nodes, such as metro stations, play a key role in structuring the person's mental map of urban space (Gnatiuk et al. 2022; Look & Shrobe 2007; Lynch 1960). Consequently, it is not surprising that changing the names of certain stations often precedes and facilitates the changing of street names nearby (Merril 2015). In comparison to other types of toponyms, transport place names may even be more often involved in the process of toponymy commodification—commercial use of place names by various actors for financial profit via, for example, the sale (or, rarely, free-of-charge transfer) of naming rights by municipalities to private companies (Voulteenaho 2022; Fraszczyk et al. 2020; Kapur 2019; Rose-Redwood et al. 2019; Destrem 2017; Light & Young 2015; Lehtonen et al. 2016).

3. Data and Methods

To gain an overview of the historical practices followed in naming railways in Ukraine it was necessary to create a chronologically-ordered database of all railway names wherever they existed within the contemporary internationally recognized state borders of Ukraine. The resulting database covers a period from the beginning of the railway network construction in the country in the 1860s to the present-day, 2024. For each railway name, the following information was collected: the name itself (in original language(s) and English translation(s)); the years of the names' appearance and disappearance; as well as any previous and subsequent names for the same part of the railroad network. The names of the railways in southeastern Ukraine were introduced by the Russian occupational administration after 2014. These names were included into the analysis for scientific purposes to take account of the recent naming trends. However, it must be stressed that the respective actions involved in (re)naming of these railways are unreservedly illegal under international law.

As certain parts of the territory of Ukraine were under the rule of different states in the 19th and 20th centuries, compiling the database required utilizing various sources. For a railway network in the territory formerly controlled by the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, the main information source used was a directory titled "Brief Information on the Development of Domestic Railways" (Afonina 1996). This source contains detailed annual information on the Russian and Soviet railways starting from 1838 and ending in 1995, including lists of names of railways for each year. For a railway network in the territory controlled by Austria-Hungary in 1861–1918, a directory titled "Bibliography of the Austrian Railways from the Beginnings to 1918" (Neuner 2002) was employed as the primary source. Information about changes in railway names by the Ukrainian national government between 1917 and 1918, which are missing in Russian-language sources, was gathered from the newspaper "Vidrodzhennia" ('Revival' which was published in Kyiv in 1918–1919

(Library Portal of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine). Finally, to track recent toponymic changes in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia since 2014, media sources were used. Excluding repetitions,the final database contains 75 unique railway names. During the data analysis, onomastic repetitions were included (unless otherwise noted), increasing the total number of railway names investigated to 103.

The railway names were classified into several categories, which differed in terms of their sources and semantics. Two major categories were identified: (1.) commemorative names, given in honor of prominent personalities, dates or events; and (2.) orientation names, indicating where the railway was located. For the latter category, a set of sub-categories was identified: "destination", "connection", "node", "multiple node", "relative", "region", and "nation". In addition, the analysis also used the categories "destination" for names indicating the end destination of the railway transport; and "connection" for railyway names consisting of place names that denote the locations connected by a railway. By comparison, the "node" category was used to include names denoting the nodal point of the railway—for instance, a city in which the railway headquarters is located or a large railway junction where several separate lines converge. The "multiple node" category was devised for compound names consisting of the names of two nodes. The "relative" category was used to capture names denoting the geographical position of the railway relative to other geographical objects such as the state capital, borders, or large rivers. The "region" and "nation" categories were used for railway names that were derived from the names of the relevant region or nations.

Also, the names of railways were classified according to their novelty. The novelty categories devised were the following: new names, inherited names, and restored names. New names are those that occur for the first time in history (at least in relation to a specific section of the railway network). Inherited names are those preserved in the process of transformation (re-organization) of the railway network such as the merging of several railways into one or division of one railway into several ones. Restored names are those previously used in relation to a given railway, but were then canceled, only to be later restored after a certain period of time.

In order to study the political dimension of the collected railway names, a critical toponymic lens was employed. As previous research has shown (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022; Giraut & Houssay-Holzchuch 2016; Rose-Redwood & Alderman 2015; Vuolteenaho & Berg 2009), this approach makes it posssible to highlight how the names are explicitly or implicitly used as political instruments. Moreover, this approach helped to reveal how railway names function as forms of discursive power, and as symbolic geospatial projections that normalize power relations.

4. Railways in Ukraine: Naming Patterns in their Historical and Political Context

The absolute majority (95.15%) of the railway names that existed in the territory of Ukraine were historically found to belong to the "orientation" category. Only 5 names (4.85%), none of which has survived to the present-day, were commemorative. Figure 1 shows the absolute numbers and ratio of railway names in terms of different semantic categories per year. Figure 2 provides the number of the railway names that emerged per decade, distinguishing between the newly emerged and inherited or restored names.

There were six instances in which commemorative naming was identified in the data-set of Ukrainian railways. This took place twice in Austria-Hungary when the *Galician Carl Ludwig Railway* and *Erzherzog Albrecht Railway* were named in honor of representatives of the Austrian imperial family); twice during the Russian Empire when the *Catherine Railway* was named in honor of Empress Catherine II in 1884 and then later in 1893; and twice under the Communist rule when the *Catherine Railway* was named in honor of Empress Catherine II and the *Stalin Railway* was named in honor of Joseph Stalin. All these names commemorated the outstanding political figures of the respective countries; and with the exception of Catherine II, each of these figures were still alive at the time when the railways were named after them. In such a way, the commemorative railway names may have contributed to the symbolic legitimization of Austrian, Russian and Soviet political power in Ukraine's linguistic landscape. It is worth noting that the name *Catherine Railway* first appeared in 1884 and was canceled after the democratic revolution in 1917. However, it re-appeared once again in 1919, under communist rule, and was maintained until 1935. This fact may reflect the strength of tradition and historical continuity between Soviet and imperial Russia.

Only two names of the "destination" category were identified, and none were found to be in use today. In both cases, the destinations named were economic facilities. There was the industrial railway, the *Beshuy Railway* which ran to the Beshuy coal mines in Crimea; and the *Odesa Port Railway* which ran to the Odesa city port. These names seem to have served comparatively little political purpose, as they simply indicated the railway destination, and named relatively small, local, economic enterprises.
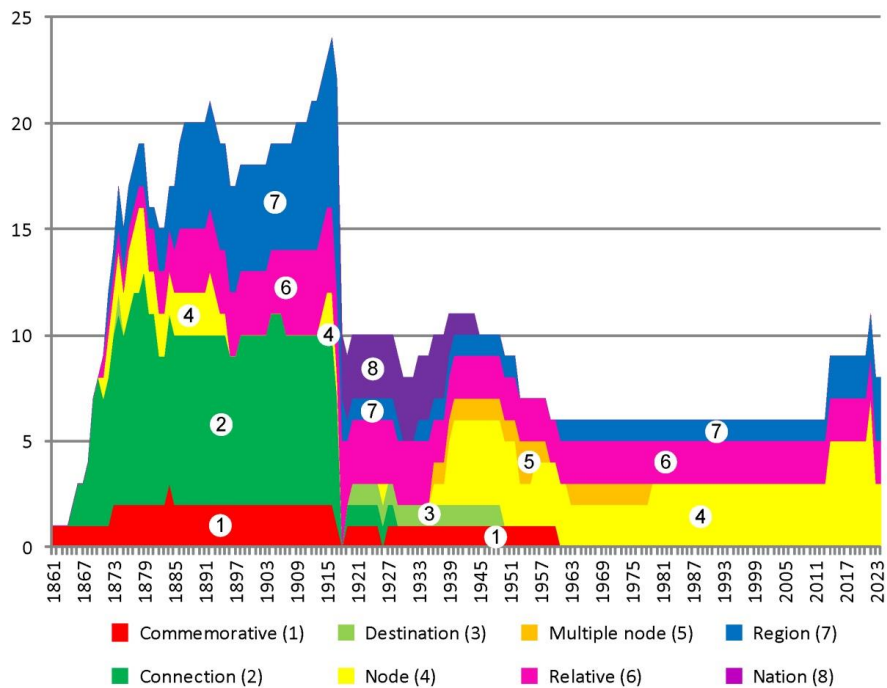
Figure 1: Absolute Numbers and Ratio of Railway Names in Terms of Different Categories per Year (1861–2024)
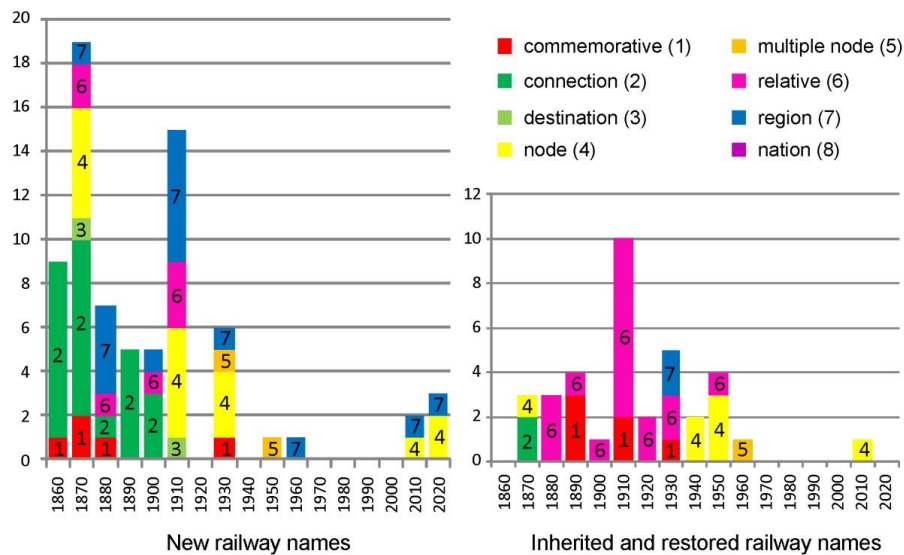
Figure 2: Numbers of the Railway Names That Emerged per Decade (1860s–2020s)

The "connection" category included mostly (79.31%) binary names consisting of starting and ending points (e.g., *Lviv-Yavoriv Railway*). A minority (20.69%) consisted of three elements and included an intermediate point (e.g., *Kursk-Kharkiv-Sevastopol Railway*). None of the names in this category survived to the present. Nevertheless, this naming pattern appears to have been very productive at the beginning of the railway network development in 1860–1910. During this time, this pattern accounted for 42.03% of all identified names in the dataset. Among the names in the "connection" category that existed in the territory controlled by Russia, 38.9% contained the names of cities located in the territory of present-day Russia (e.g., the *Kursk-Voronezh Railway*). Such names simply reflected the objective reality, namely spatial configuration of railways. Accordingly, it would be incorrect to say that these names promoted the idea of Ukrainian-Russian unity within the Empire. Nevertheless, they did reflect the economic, social, and political ties between Ukraine and Russia, the imperial metropolis. Such names then linguistically portray the Empire as a territorial unity.

The "node" category was moderately large (9.84%) in the 19th century, but in the 20th and 21st centuries, this naming pattern became one of the most productive, accounting for 23.81% of the railway names. At the initial stages of the railway development, so-called "nodes" could be relatively small cities which nevertheless served as important local railway junctions (e.g., Fastiv, Tokmak). However, in the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the progressive spatial consolidation of railways, the transportation nodes were almost exclusively made up of large cities (e.g., Odesa, Lviv).

Some railway names from the "node" category served overt political functions, either emphasizing political independence or, vice versa, subordination of certain territories. Between 1874–1918, the railway in the territory of present-day Moldova was a part of the *Odesa Railway*. This name emphasized the area's subordination to the external center (Odesa) and thus its lack of not only national but also regional independence within the Soviet Union. Other railway names in the "node" category appeared to emphasize political claims to de facto uncontrolled territories. As a result of Russian aggression, Ukraine has not controlled the city of Donetsk since 2014, and since 2022 it lost control of most of the Donetsk region. Nevertheless, the Donetsk Railway, which now has its administrative headquarters adm in the small town of Lyman, formally retains its independence. The name *Donetsk Railway* can be seen as emphasizing the Ukrainian authorities' refusal to recognize the Russian occupation and their hope for the return of the occupied territories to Ukrainian control in the future. Notably, in December 2014, due to the impossibility of carrying out operations in the occupied territory, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine ordered that the main office of the Donetsk Railwaybe transferred to the Southern and Near-Dnieper Railways. However, this order was never implemented, and the Donetsk Railway continued to operate under the same name, denoting the Ukrainian government's aim to regain control over Donetsk.

A modest 1.94% of the total dataset fell into the category "multiple node". These two names were the *Moscow-Kyiv Railway* and the *Odesa-Chisinau Railway*. Recorded in the first half of the 20th century during the Soviet Era, ,both of these names combined the names of cities from different nations of the Soviet Republic. The combination of these names linguistically and symbolically stitched together the multinational Soviet territory into a single entity. While the name *Moscow-Kyiv Railway* linked Russia with Ukraine, *Odesa-Chisinau Railway* linked Ukraine and Moldova.

The "region" category was found to be moderately large from the very beginning of the railway network construction to today nowadays; and composed 18.45% of the data-set. Mostly, however, these names did not survive until the present-day, given organizational transformations of the railway network. In 2025, examples includethe *Near-Dnieper Railway* in the government-controlled territory and the *Crimea Railway* on the Crimean Peninsula, which has been occupied by Russia since 2014. In general, these names do not seem to have had a pronounced political connotation if the railway named wasactually located in the homonymous region. However, there may be exceptions. First, the non-coincidence of the territorial contours of the railway with the boundaries of the respective region could lead to misunderstanding and public rejection of the name (see discussion of the results of the "Iron Ukrainization" in the next section). The boundaries of regions that do not have official administrative status may be ambiguous (Marek 2020) which can also lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, sometimes, naming railways after regions is a direct political demonstration. This may be especially in the case when the name of the region itself turns into a political symbol. For example, in 2023, railways in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia (except Crimea) were united into a the *Novorossiya Railways*. From a historical point of view, the term "Novorossiya" was the official name for the Ukrainian lands annexed by the Russian Empire in the 18th century. Since 2014, at the instigation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the term has been used by the Russian establishment to designate the southeastern part of Ukraine and to "scientifically" substantiate Russian claims to it. In the realities of the 21st century, "Novorossiya" is not an actual region, but rather a historical anachronism used by the Russian regime as a symbolic marker (Kuzio 2019). The name *Novorossiya Railways* acts as an additional political irritant for the Ukrainian government and society, which do not recognize Russia's claims to the southeastern Ukrainian territories.

For the period of time covered in the dataset, there were relatively few (9.33%) original names in the "relative" category. However, this category was the most resilient over time: occurring for the first time in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, these names were preserved during both the merging or split of the railways (62.96%). In addition, there were several examples (8.33%) when these names were were restored after renaming. Thus, including repetitions, these railway names account for 23.30% of the identified names in the data collected. These names were found to carry the most sensitive political connotations. The geographic and/or political center of the nation state—its capital and surrounding capital region—is usually the reference object of these names. This was especially the case for those that indicated compass directions. For example during the periods of Austro-Hungarian and Russian (Soviet) political control in Ukraine, the railway names in the "relative" category named the corresponding imperial centers. Examples include the *Southern Railway* (1906–1916, 1918 to 2024) which is located south of Moscow; the *Western Railway* (1936–1953)which is to the West; the *South-Western Railway* (1880–1916, 1918 to 2024); and the *Hungarian North-Eastern Railway* (1871–1917) which was located north-east of Budapest. Such names were logical from the point of view of the former Empires. They served as tools for structuring geographical space linguistically in accordance with the political vision of the imperial elites. At the same time, from the point of view of Ukrainian geography and state building, such railway names were strange, illogical, and even absurd. The *Southern Railway* is actually located in the north-eastern part of the country; and the *South-Western Railway* is located in the northern and central parts. By the same token, the fragments of the former *Western Railway* are located in the north, while the former *Southern Access Tracks* is in the central-western part; and the former *Hungarian North-Eastern Railway* was in the extreme southwest. Oddly enough, the *Southern* and *South-Western* railways still exist in Ukraine to the confusion of many passengers. These names remain as relics of the colonial times when the main spatial geographical landmark in Ukraine was Moscow and the surrounding lands of the historical core of Russia.

Finally, there were three cases of "nation" railway names. All three came from the interwar period of 1920–1930s. During this time, parts of these railways belonged to the Central European states, as reflected in their names: the *Polish State Railways* in Poland; *Czechoslovak State Railways* in Czechoslovakia; and *Romanian Railways* in Romania. From a political point of view, the role of these names appears to be quite banal and straightforward as they reflected and symbolically consolidated the fact that certain parts of Ukraine's territory with interwar Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.

Another important aspect of the politics of naming railways in Ukraine is the language chosen. In Austria-Hungary, until 1918, the official names of railways were in German in the Austrian part (i.e., Galicia and Northern Bukovina) and Hungarian in Transcarpathia, the Hungarian part. In addition, in Galicia, where the Polish language had official status since 1869, there were parallel Polish names for the railways. Within the Russian Empire, until 1917, all railway names were exclusively in Russian. Under Soviet rule (1922–1991), Russian and the local language were used in parallel for railway names. Thus, during this period, in Ukraine the railyways names appeared both in Russian and Ukrainian. After Ukraine gained independence, the Ukrainian names became official. Generally speaking, the policy of naming railways has been a part of the language policy of the ruling political regimes (see e.g., Boychuk et al. 2023; Danylenko & Haienko 2018; Kindrachuk 2016); in particular, it emphasized the lack of real political and cultural independence of the Ukrainian people. It is important to emphasize that we are talking here about the names of railways in official documents and reports. The linguistic practice of the local population might differ significantly and be more diverse. The linguistic aspect of naming railways and other elements of the transport infrastructure in the context of (post)colonialism and subaltern societies deserves a separate study.

5. Politically Contested Railway Names: from the Ukrainian People's Republic to "Iron Ukrainization"

During the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–1920), the Ukrainian government was aware of the geopolitical "incorrectness" of certain railway names, and decided to change them to names considered more appropriate for the new nation state. For that reason, in 1918, the *South-Western Railway* became the *Right-Bank Railway*; the *Moscow-Kyiv-Voronezh Railway* became the *Left-Bank Railway*; the *Southern Railway* became the *Slobozhanshchyna Railway*; and the *Catherine Railway* became the *Zaporozhia Railway*. In the Ukrainian-centric system of geospatial coordinates, newly introduced names were logical. The first two emphasized the position of the railways relative to the Dnipro River as the main meridional axis of the Ukrainian lands dividing them into the Right-Bank and Left-Bank Ukraine. The last two referenced the two historical regions of Ukraine, namely "Slobozhanshchyna" and "Zaporozhia". However, railway names that corresponded to the logic of Ukrainian geography and the politics of nationstate-building did not last long.

Just a few years after the defeat of the Ukrainian struggle for national liberation, the Moscow-centric names were restored by the Soviet government.

Once again, the *South-Western Railway* and the *Southern Railway* which were based on the Soviet orientation were imposed after Ukraine gained independence in 1991 (figure 3). However, until 2023, these names were not considered problematic by either Ukrainian authorities or the media. This lack of onomastic resistance may reflect the generally tolerant attitude of Ukrainians to Russian and Soviet heritage in the country's symbolic space during the first decades of independence. However, in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid Russian invasion in the Donbas, official decommunization began in Ukraine. This included toponyms marking the symbolic space of the country (Kuczabski & Boychuk 2020); and in 2022, after Russia's full-scale attack against Ukraine, the Russian and Soviet heritage began to be far more critically examined, resulting in theso-called "de-Russification" and "de-Sovietization" as forms of decolonization (Gnatiuk & Melnychuk 2023).

Figure 3: Regional Branches of Ukrainian Railways in 2014 (before the Russian Invasion)

On February 21, 2023, the state-owned JSC Ukrzaliznytsia (*Ukrainian Railways*) announced the start of the three-year "Iron Ukrainization" ("Zalizna Ukrainizatsiia") program. The name of the program is a play on the Ukrainian words *zalizo* which means "iron" and *zaliznytsia* which means "railway". The goal of this program is to completely delete any and all Soviet and Russian names, markings, and images on any objects of railway transport. Following this progam, in 2023, it was announced that the regional branches of the *Southern Railway* and *South-Western Railway* would change their names. It was further announced that the management of Ukrzaliznytsia would consult the people of Ukraine to select new names for railways. Public voting was to be conducted via a mobile app and a national e-democracy tool developed by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and officially launched in 2020. It was the first time in the history of Ukrainian railways that the name of a railway was being officially entrusted to public opinion. Before that, names were selected by either private railway-owning companies or state officials (Ukrzaliznytsia 2023).

At the beginning of March 2023, Ukrainians voted via the above-mentioned Diia app. The public could pick one of four official alternatives for the *South-Western Railway*. In total, 1,127,277 users took part in the survey. Most (37.01%) voted for the name *Central Railway*; *Kyiv Railway* received in second place (29.15%); *Capital Railway* came in third place (21.51%); and *Northern Railway* took fourth place (12.33%) (DIIA 2023a). In mid-March 2023, 860,452 users took part a similar election that was held for a new name to replace *Southern Railway*. The option *Kharkiv Railway* received the most support (39.00%); followed by *Slobozhanska Railway* in second place (27.28%); *Eastern Railway* in third place (27.03%); and *Slobidska Railway* in fourth place (6.68%) (DIIA 2023b). At the time of preparing the article (January 2025), the new names of the *South-Western Railway* and *Southern Railway* had not been officially approved.

6. Discussion

The identified patterns of naming Ukrainian railways are similar to those observed in other countries. As found in other investigations (Craghead 2023; Destrem 2022; Bergmann 2009), the railway names were derived from already existing place names along their route of operation and thereby followed the pattern of "secondary nomination". The main and the most obvious function of railway names seemed to be utilitarian and orientation: the names informed railway users where the railway was located, what points they connected, and where exactly they could be reached. There were commemorative names identified, but, as other researchers have found (e.g., Bergmann 2009), they were relatively few in number. It seems that commemorative naming is not as popular a strategy for railways as it is for airports (Centre for Aviation 2015; Halpern & Regmi 2011). Popular strategies for railway naming included labelling the terminal geographic points connected by the railway and referencing important geographical landmarks within the country (e.g. the capital city). These patterns have been found to be common in other countries such as the US and Austria (Craghead 2023; Bergmann 2009). Similar to the US, the names of Ukrainian railways were also found to become longer and more complicated as the railway grew or merged with the other railways (Craghead 2023). Alongside these similarities, the names of railways in Ukraine also seemed to have several unique national characteristics. Many of these patterns seem to be related to the local economic and socio-cultural contexts (including ownership rights to railways); local naming traditions;as well as the linguistic features of the local languages. therein addition, there were no names found in the dataset that referred to prominent buildings or important institutions. This finding was different from what has been reported for Austria (Bergmann 2009). Further, in contrast to the US (Craghead 2023), railway names in Ukraine did not seem to have been driven by purely marketing reasons. This dference may be due to the fact that Ukrainian railways have been for the majority of their history in owned and operated by the state.

Despite this important finding, this study was not without limitation. First, the research focuses exclusively on Ukraine, making it difficult to generalize findings to other geographical contexts without additional comparative investigations. The influence of national linguistic and cultural factors on naming practices also needs further comparative exploration, including other post-socialist or post-colonial contexts. The research reported here did not specifically investigate the public's perception of modern railway names. This is another area for future research. Finally, the chosen classification of railway names into semantic categories was influenced by specificity of the national naming practices. A different system of categorization might have yielded different results and insights.

7. Conclusions

Historically, most of the names of Ukrainian railways have not been commemorative and have performed primarily orientation functions. Consequently, these names may appear to be ideologically neutral (Rose-Redwood et al. 2017; Rose-Redwood & Alderman 2015). However, those names that at first glance appear "neutral" and "apolitical" often obscure power relations that all-too-often underpin the naming process (Rose-Redwood & Alderman 2015). As was shown in this article, some railway names explicitly or implicitly function as geospatial projections of hegemonic political power, legitimizing specific centers of political power in the linguistic landscape of a country. Railway name choices automatically construct certain geographical and cultural scales, since they can make an area appear to be more "local" or more "national" (Destrem 2022; Rose-Redwood & Alderman 2015). Consequently, centralized forms of goverment such as the Soviet Union or Russian Empire seem to have preferred railway names that emphasize the national level, while the more decentralized contemporary Ukraine of within Austria-Hungary appear to have preferred names that emphasized the regional level.

In this way, naming of railways reveals knowledge about geopolitics and power relations (Giraut & Houssay-Holzchuch 2016). It represents a form of discursive power within the national liberation and (post)colonial processes (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010), including mobilizing certain conceptions of scale that is central both to the commercial branding (Destrem 2022; Craghead 2023) and to the political construction and contestation of social space (Destrem 2022; Rose-Redwood & Alderman 2015). As a result, the change of the power regime and respective alterations of the leading national historical narrative may lead to politically driven discourse and renaming of railways. In Ukraine, examples of such renaming appear to have grown from a clash between nation-centric and colonial (pro-Russian or pro-Soviet) historical narratives that have occurred several times throughout history, including the ongoing "Iron Ukrainization".

It is hoped that the current research presented here will encourage more toponymic investigations into the socio-cultural and political functions of place names related to transport networks, including railway transport. As little research has been done on the topic, efforts should be made to collect and analyze

onomastic data worldwide: the analysis should ideally include not only an examination of the place names themselves, but also their definitions and typologies (Craghead 2023; Destrem 2022). At the same time, there is a need for research focusing on specific cases and their place naming processes to bring to light the geopolitical contexts, technology used, and actors involved and their motivations (Giraut & Houssay-Holzchuch 2016). With these goals in mind, close interdisciplinary cooperations between linguists, geographers, historians, political scientists,etc. are not only welcomed, but also encouraged.

AI Disclosure Statement.

 No AI Tools or Technology were used to conduct the research or write this article.

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