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# KYJEV OR KYJIV? USE OF UKRAINIAN CITY NAMES IN SLOVAK MEDIA AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOLIDARITY

**Daniel RABINA**

## **ABSTRACT:**

At the time of our study, more than five hundred days had passed since the beginning of the Russian occupation of Ukraine. Given the sufficient time gap and the significant amount of media output, I can thus analyse a unique phenomenon that appeared in the Slovak media shortly after the beginning of the occupation – the appearance of previously unused variants of the names of the cities Kyjev or Kyjiv [Kyiv], Charkov or Charkiv [Kharkiv], and Lvov or Lviv [Lviv]. Through a quantitative analysis, we focused on media content across publishing houses N Press (*Denník N*), Petit Press (*SME*), OUR MEDIA SR (*Pravda*) and news portals [www.tasr.sk](http://www.tasr.sk) and [www.sita.sk](http://www.sita.sk). As a follow-up to the performed analysis, I directly confronted representatives of individual media with the findings, including ascertaining the motivations and reasons that led the editors to change, or persistence in using the original names. In the study, I also point out the phenomenon of the emerging language problem, which is already occupying the attention of linguists today.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Charkov, Charkiv, Kyjev, Kyjiv, Lvov, Lviv, media language

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# 1 Introduction

The war conflict in Ukraine, which we have been witnessing since February 24, 2022, makes up a significant part of the news content of all world media. As with other war conflicts, this is a topic that generates a significant amount of output across all media types. Slovakia is no exception. The very factor of it involving a neighbouring country causes events about Ukraine to be the subject not only of foreign but also of domestic news, as they also enter domestic political or social events to a considerable extent.

As an example, in the period from February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023, the Slovak media<sup>1</sup> published up to 48,298 media outputs with the occurrence of the phrase “conflict in Ukraine”. Looking at this number through the parameter of the daily average, I can conclude that an average of 132 media outlets with a mention of the “conflict in Ukraine” are published daily in Slovakia.<sup>2</sup>

The increase in the number of outputs related to the conflict is also indicated by the year-on-year comparison of occurrences of specific keywords. In cases of the keyword “Ukraine”, I can state that while in the period of one year before the official beginning of the conflict (February 24, 2021 – February 24, 2022), 125,439 outputs were published in Slovak media, so in the same year-long period starting from the first day of the conflict (February 24, 2022 – February 24, 2023) up to 1,031,849 outputs were published, which is an increase of 722.59%.

Also, in connection with the increasing information about the events in Ukraine, my intention was to focus on a phenomenon that appeared in the Slovak media shortly after the start of the conflict and caused controversy not only across the media environment, but also amongst the general public. The core of the study is a quantitative content analysis aimed at comparing the occurrence of the names “Kyjev”, “Charkov” and “Lvov”, respectively “Kyjiv”, “Charkiv” and “Lviv” in the selected Slovak media content.

In addition to the media, this phenomenon has also other levels. That is why in the introductory chapter I provide at least a basic overview of its political and linguistic context. Following this, I will present the results of the analysis, including the reactions provided by media representatives for the purposes of the text. Subsequently, I will name the points that, in connection with the discussed topic, create space for a deeper discussion across several disciplines, and in the end, I will identify possible inspirations for further research.

## 2 Political and Media Theory Context

In the influential foreign media, the use of the Ukrainian versions of the names of the cities Kyjev,<sup>3</sup> Charkov,<sup>4</sup> Lvov<sup>5</sup> or others (see, for example, TASR, 2022b) was a relatively widespread phenomenon even before the beginning of the occupation, it was not common in Slovakia, with a few exceptions (see, for example, TASR, 2022a). The trend has intensified after February 24, 2022. The Associated Press announced in August 2019 that it was changing its usage from “Kiev” to “Kyiv”. The company justified the change (see, for example, Радіо Свобода, 2019a) as a trend that is “in harmony with the preferences of the Ukrainian authorities in the transcription of this name into English and in connection with the increase in usage”.

Shortly thereafter, the British public broadcaster BBC reacted similarly (see, for example, BBC News, 2019), *The Economist magazine* (see, for example, Ukrinform, 2019a), *The Telegraph newspaper* (see, for example, Радіо Свобода, 2019b), *The Washington Post* (see, for example, Vojtovych, 2019), *The New York Times* (see, for example, Ukrinform, 2019b) and many other renowned world media followed suit. It was not a spontaneous series

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<sup>1</sup> Remark by author: A total of 4,786 sources detected by the MONITORA.

<sup>2</sup> Remark by author: Without using other variations (e.g., “war in Ukraine”, “Russian-Ukrainian conflict”, “special operation”, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Remark by author: In Ukrainian language “Kyjiv”.

<sup>4</sup> Remark by author: In Ukrainian language “Charkiv”.

<sup>5</sup> Remark by author: In Ukrainian language “Lviv”.

of reactions without a previous political impulse. Even in 1995, four years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian government officially latinised<sup>6</sup> the name of its capital and returned it to the original wording Kyjiv (according to one of the founders referred to as Kyi). A gradual change occurred in 2005 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019b), after the adoption of the Ukrainian Law on Geographical Names, which provided a legal framework for their standardisation, registration, and preservation. The next step was the resolution of the Ukrainian government including the approved transliteration table, given in accordance with the uniform rules of transcription in official documents, in cartographic publications, on signs of inhabited places, streets, subway stations, bus stops, etc.

After the beginning of the Russian occupation of the Crimea Peninsula, the efforts of the Ukrainian government for the international acceptance of the new wording of Ukrainian cities intensified. In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine launched an internationally targeted #CORRECTUA campaign (see, for example, Freedom, 2018), in which it called on other countries to “examine and, if necessary, modify the use of outdated Soviet-era place names” (Table 1).

Archaic Soviet-era spelling	Correct modern spelling
'the Ukraine'	Ukraine
Kiev	Kyiv
Lvov	Lviv
Odessa	Odesa
Kharkov	Kharkiv
Nikolaev	Mykolaiv
Rovno	Rivne
Ternopol	Ternopil

Table 1. Examples of spelling of the most frequently used Ukrainian city names  
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2019a)

In the updated text of the campaign, the Ukrainian Ministry states the following: “In light of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, including the illegal occupation of Crimea, we are once again experiencing Russification as a tactic that attempts to destabilise and delegitimise our country. We hope you will understand how the use of Soviet-era place names – rooted in the Russian language – is particularly painful and unacceptable for the people of Ukraine.”

Apart from the emotional (solidarity) level, in the case of using the Ukrainian versions of the names, it is a clear political message, or an expression of political support, whether from institutions or individuals. This is also why it is possible to talk about the ideological essence of the investigated phenomenon.

If we look at the term *ideology* through its original, unprofane meaning, in a broader sense (Jiráková & Köpplová, 2009) we can perceive ideology as a set of ideas, concepts and values that a given society takes for granted and with

<sup>6</sup> Remark by author: Giving a Latin or Latinate form to (a word).

which it identifies itself as its own interpretation of the world. In the narrow sense and in relation to communication, culture and media, the term is used to manifest social relations and group interests in the meaning of words, symbols, or messages. In this regard, space is automatically offered to mention the constitutive model of communication, which, unlike the transmission model of communication (Jiráček & Köpplová, 2009) leads to mutual and continuous validation of meanings, values, and beliefs.

It is the constitutive model that offers the perspective of long-term trends in the behaviour of the audience (readers, or viewers) and the media, including mutual interaction, or changes in their thinking and approaches to various topics. From the point of view of political theory, it is also appropriate to mention the agenda setting theory<sup>7</sup> (Trampota, 2006), which is based on the concept of the long-term effect of media communication. The starting point of the theory was formulated in the first half of the 1960s by Bernard Cohen, who in his work *the press and foreign policy* attributed to the media, in addition to persuasive effects, effects of a cognitive nature. Accordingly, to the media can be attributed the ability, through long-term information on a topic or problem, to persuade people to perceive the topic as a significant social problem (Trampota, 2006). They crystallised over time three main agendas that interact with each other and bring more political context to the agenda-setting discourse (ŘíCHOVÁ, 2012). In addition to *public agenda* (topics considered important by the public, mostly identified by public opinion surveys) and *media agenda* (topics represented in media content), in 1996 Dearing and Rogers also identified a *political agenda*, which is created by political actors and distributed through the media towards the public (Trampota, 2006).

The case of the #CORRECTUA campaign offers an example of the implied interaction between political, media, and public agendas. At the beginning of the whole process there was a political decision, or a series of normative acts on which the campaign itself is based. Following this, a key decision was made by a significant number of world media with an international scope, to which national level media were gradually added – including some Slovak ones (as my analysis will confirm). It is a fact that in this case we are witnessing the transmission of the theme (emancipation of the Ukrainian nation) through symbolism.

In connection with the mentioned constitutive model of communication, it is referred to as the so-called *cultural model*, which looks at communication as a source of formation and development of culture (Jiráček & Köpplová, 2009). This model focuses on the search for a relationship between the processes of social communication and creation (constitution) by constantly confirming and developing meanings, values, attitudes, and codes. In the case of the phenomenon to which our text is dedicated, we cannot only talk about “changing name for name”. This was also not the case in Slovakia after 1989, when there was a widespread renaming of streets (e.g. Gottwaldovo námestie – Námestie slobody, Malinovského – Šancová, Komsomolská – Molecova), whose names symbolised totality and recalled painful sections of our modern history.

Likewise, in the case of the Ukrainian versions of the cities of Kyjev, Charkov, Lvov and others, it is a broader and deeper context that has its own cultural and, nowadays, emotional base. That is also why by using them we express not only support, but in a certain way also agreement with the political and emancipatory efforts of Ukrainians since 1991.

### 3 Language Problem

From the point of view of linguistics, I do not register many media or professional texts that address the given problem. Vadrna, a deacon of the Bratislava Eparchy of the Greek Catholic Church, addressed the problematic issue of declension in a short blog on the Postoj portal (Vadrna, 2022). A more comprehensive text is an interview with linguist Jarošová from March 25, 2022, published in *Denník N* (Čorej, 2022). Right at the beginning, the editor confronted the respondent with the decision of *Denník N* editors to use Ukrainian place names. “I understand your

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<sup>7</sup> Remark by author: The political aspect of setting the agenda was first validated by Shaw and McCombs, who in 1968 managed to prove, using the example of the pre-election communication of the presidential candidates in the city of Chapel Hill, that people really consider important those topics that receive the greatest representation in the media space.

decision, but as a linguist I openly admit that I do not identify with it. Slovak is a stabilised language, and changes that depend somewhat on emotions or symbols should be approached with caution,” Jarošová responded. Following this, Jarošová states.

Kiev is not a classic Russianism, but a word that has been part of our vocabulary for a very long time. The same applies to Lviv, which was the centre of Galicia within the monarchy. This was also part of the aforementioned rules from 1902, and even in his case we did not feel that it was a Russianism. The Poles had Lwów (pronounced “Lvuv”), the Ukrainians Lviv, we Lvov and it worked – the identification function worked. So, I would say that these associative emotions connected with Russian are jumping out at us only now, for understandable reasons.” (Jánošová in Čorej, 2022)

The unique identified professional text is the article *War in Ukraine as a language problem* by Cimermanová from the Ludovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics (JÚLŠ). Although the text has not been published yet, with the permission of the author, I present some knowledge that is relevant in relation to the topic. Cimermanová writes: “One of the factors that affect the dynamics of the language are also “general socio-political factors”, among which I could also include such crisis and dramatic situations as war. The war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, represents a new social extra-linguistic fact that conditioned some questions, problems, or uncertainties” (Cimermanová, in press, p. 1). As the title of the text implies, the author looks at the topic through the prism of a language problem. Cimermanová states that it is not a type of problem that would cause misunderstanding in communication, but a so-called a pragmatic-linguistic problem “related to the need to show belonging to Ukraine, which at the same time disrupts the established way of writing the names of cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv or Lviv in Slovak” (Cimermanová, in press, p. 2).

Cimermanová admits that the media, which chose different transcriptions, caused uncertainty for language users. This is evidenced not only by controversies on social media, but also by questions addressed to the JÚLŠ language consultancy. For all of them I can quote at least one.

Hello, some time ago I noticed that the literary names of Ukrainian cities (such as KyjEv, CharkOv) somehow stopped being used in the Slovak press, and instead I increasingly see the names of cities in their original forms, so to speak, i.e., Kyjiv, Charkiv. Has there been any official change in the written Slovak language that I don't know about? If not, why doesn't someone point this out, or why isn't this rule also used for the names of other foreign cities, e.g., Wien instead of Viedeň? This would at least maintain consistency. Thank you in advance for the clarification.” (Cimermanová, in press, p. 7)

The author states that the perspective of language experts is not unipolar either. In her text, the opinion of linguist Valentová, also from JÚLŠ, is given. In her internal opinion, Valentová draws attention to the distinction between the term *exonym* (a geographical name that is adapted into Slovak, e.g., Viedeň) and *endonym* (the official name that is used in the language of the country from which it originates, e.g., Wien). She states that geographical names can be used in one form as well as in the other, but consistency should be maintained in one text. Valentová further states that JÚLŠ recommends using the accepted standardised Slovak exonym Kyjev (Cimermanová, in press).

Linguist Pachomovová from the University of Prešov offered a different opinion in an interview (Bella, 2022) published in *Denník N*. Pachomovová<sup>8</sup> points out that several Western countries are switching to *transliteration* (e.g., Kyjev to Kyjiv) from Ukrainian. She goes on to say: “As a linguist, I understand that every language has its own rules for transliterating foreign names, but there are moments in history when language standards change as well.”

As the previous lines confirm, unequivocal agreement on the given topic does not exist amongst the general population or the media themselves, which will be confirmed by our analysis in the next part of the text, but not even

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<sup>8</sup> Remark by author: Svitlana Pachomova is a native of the Ukrainian city Uzhhorod.

amongst language experts. However, especially in the professional sphere, the prevailing opinion is that it is a living phenomenon that is in the process and far from codification<sup>9</sup> (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, 2021).

Jarošová in the mentioned interview for *Denník N* states that the standardisation of the names Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv (and others) in the Slovak language must be preceded by several steps. One of the necessary prerequisites is the standardisation of the geographical name or names by the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Authority of the Slovak Republic. According to Jarošová, in addition to the credibility of the source, the factors of frequency and mass use are also important. Since it is a long-term process, Jarošová points out that the change, or codification itself can take a long time, sometimes decades (Čorej, 2022).

## 4 Methodology

When investigating the phenomenon of the extent of use of transcriptions of different versions of the names of Ukrainian cities, I focused on those that appear in the media most often in altered form. The initial analysis revealed that these are the names of the cities of Kyjev [Ukrainian: Kyjiv], Lvov [Ukrainian: Lviv] and Charkov [Ukrainian: Charkiv]. Although I register several variant uses for other names as well (Černihov/Černihiv, Nikolajev/Mykolajiv, Ternopol/Ternopil), these are isolated cases. For the needs of the study, I used the method of quantitative content analysis<sup>10</sup> through the analytical tool MONITORA.<sup>11</sup> Since the method makes it possible to examine a longer period and point out development trends (Trampota & Vojtěchovská, 2010), I decided to choose the range from February 24, 2022 (the first day of the occupation) to July 8, 2023. In total, it was a symbolic 500 days.

When choosing the investigated media, I focused on the complete content published by their publishing companies – specifically *Denník N* (publishing house N Press), *SME* (Petit Press) and *Pravda* (OUR MEDIA SR). I came to this decision based on the finding that the trend of using one (Kyjev/Charkov/Lvov) or the other variant (Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv) can be observed almost without distinction across the entire content of the publishing house.

I also added the contents of the news portals<sup>12</sup> [www.tasr.sk](http://www.tasr.sk) and [www.sita.sk](http://www.sita.sk) of the two largest press agencies, the Press Agency of the Slovak Republic (TASR) and the Slovak Information and Press Agency (SITA). The last variable of our analysis was media type. In this category, I decided on a combination of four media types: ONLINE, PRINT, TV, and RADIO. As a result, the work with MONITORA consisted of a combination of four variables:

1. Keyword (E.g. Kyjev, including inflected forms “Kyjeva”, “Kyjevom”, “Kyjevo”).
2. Time Range from February 24, 2022, to July 8, 2023.
3. Publishing House relevant to the given medium, or the agency’s news portal.
4. Media type ONLINE/PRINT/TV/RADIO.

## 5 Results

In the first phase of the analysis, I focused on identifying the ratio between the use of the names Kyjev/Kyjiv, Charkov/Charkiv, Lvov/Lviv through the parameter “number of outputs” across all Slovak media. As can be seen

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<sup>9</sup> Remark by author: By the term *codification* (regulation, unification), which guarantees a socially uniform form of language binding for certain areas of use, we mean a set of rules that are contained in codification manuals. The binding nature of the codification is declared by the central state administration authority. In Slovakia it is the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

<sup>10</sup> Remark by author: Quantitative content analysis examines what topics the media deal with and what space they devote to them. It allows working with many resources, data and time spans (Trampota & Vojtěchovská, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Remark by author: Professional media content monitoring tool. During the finalisation of the study, renamed to Mediaboard (n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> Remark by author: In the case of news agencies, I decided to monitor only their news websites to be able to identify just their primary content. That is, not the content that they created, but that was taken over and adapted by other media.

(Table 2), in summary I can state a clear preponderance of media outputs with the occurrence of the name Kyjev (92,704) compared to Kyjiv (8,734). A similar phenomenon can also be observed in outputs with the keywords Charkov (13,742) vs. Charkiv (1,643) and Lvov (6,463) vs. Lviv (1,505).

Table 2. Occurrence of monitored keywords in all media

	Total
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	92704
<b>Charkov</b>	13742
<b>Lvov</b>	6463
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	8734
<b>Charkiv</b>	1643
<b>Lviv</b>	1505

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

In the following graphs (Figures 1 – 3), I visualise the usage ratio in a percentage display. It is obvious that even if the dominance of the occurrence of the names Kyjev/Charkov/Lvov is confirmed, we see a higher percentage representation of the name Lvov in the case of the last-named name. During a retrospective spot check, I found that this difference is caused by the relatively frequent occurrence of the name (in the form of Lviv) in the outputs of the Slovak media published in Hungarian (Uj Szó, 2023), respectively Slovak, but using part of the text in English (Topky.sk, 2023). I also observed the same phenomenon with the names of Kyjiv and Charkiv, but in a less frequent range.

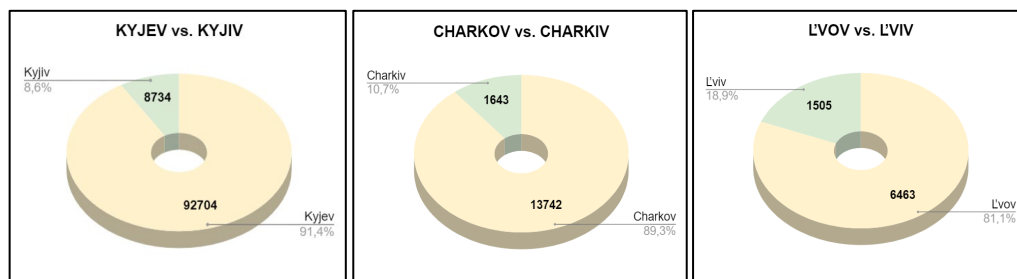


Figure 1. The ratio of occurrence of the key word Kyjev vs. Kyjiv (MONITORA)

Figure 2. The ratio of occurrence of the key word Charkov vs. Charkiv (MONITORA)

Figure 3. The ratio of occurrence of the key word Lvov vs. Lviv (MONITORA)

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

When looking at the phenomenon through a reduced number of media according to the established methodology (Table 3), I concluded that the only publishing house with a predominant use of the names Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv is N Press, i.e., the publisher of *Denník N*. I identified a preponderance of occurrences of the name in the publishing house's outputs Kyjiv (4,470) vs. Kyjev (1,558), Charkiv (832) vs. Charkov (428) and Lviv (426) vs. Lvov (268). At other publishing houses, the occurrence of outputs with any of the shapes Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv was negligible. The only exception is the news portal of the SITA agency, where we observed 50 outputs with the name Kyjiv, compared to 205 outputs with the name Kyjev, which is a share of 19.61%.

Table 3. Occurrence of monitored keywords in media outputs of selected media (MONITORA)

	Total	N Press	Petit Press	OUR MEDIA SR	www.tasr.sk	www.sita.sk
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>						
<b>Kyjev</b>	92704	1558	10622	4069	1022	205
<b>Charkov</b>	13742	428	2278	682	148	13
<b>L'vov</b>	6463	268	1019	320	46	15
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>						
<b>Kyjiv</b>	8734	4470	144	62	1	50
<b>Charkiv</b>	1643	832	46	29	6	4
<b>L'viv</b>	1505	426	38	11	2	5

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

### N Press (*Denník N*)

As mentioned above, I identified the most significant representation of the use of the names Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv at the publishing house N Press (Table 4). An interesting finding is that with the name Kyjiv (4470) we can even talk about more than half of the total number of outputs (8,734) with the occurrence of this name in all Slovak media. Specifically, it is 51.18%. In the same type of comparison, I observed a slightly lower percentage for the name Charkiv (50.64%), for the name Lviv it was 28.31%.

Table 4. The occurrence of monitored keywords in the media outputs of the N Press publishing house (MONITORA)

	N Press
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	1558
<b>Charkov</b>	428
<b>L'vov</b>	268
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	4470
<b>Charkiv</b>	832
<b>L'viv</b>	426

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

We can follow the time sequence of occurrence of the name Kyjiv on the following graph (Figure 4) showing the observed period in weekly frequency.

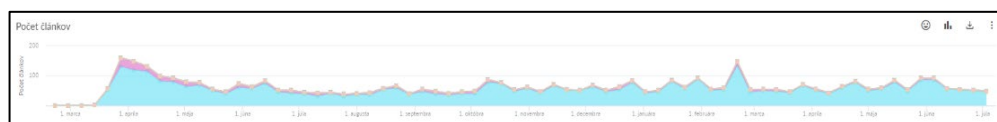


Figure 4. Timeline of the keyword “Kyjiv” occurrence in articles by N Press publishing house (MONITORA)

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

For comparison, we also present a graph (Figure 5) with the occurrence of the name “Kyjev”.

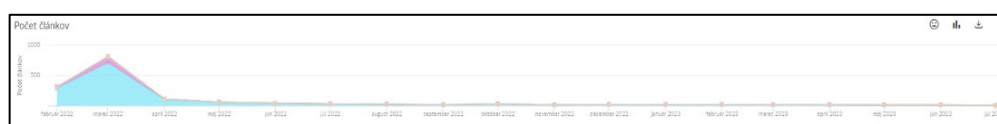


Figure 5. Timeline of the keyword “Kyjev” occurrence in articles by N Press publishing house (MONITORA)

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

At the first look at both graphs, it is clear when the change occurred, and the publishing house N Press decided to switch to displaying the name “Kyjiv”. At the same time, a sharp decline in the use of the name “Kyjev” can be seen. The first text with the appearance of the name “Kyjiv” in *Denník N* after the beginning of the occupation was the mentioned interview by the linguist Svitlana Pachomova from March 17, 2022. A few days after that, *Denník N* published the article titled “Kyjev je Kyjiv a v *Denníku N* ho tak aj budeme písať”, in which the editor-in-chief Matúš Kostolný explained why Ukrainian versions of the names of Ukrainian cities, specifically Kyjiv, Charkiv and Lviv, are starting to appear in the articles of *Denník N* (Kostolný, 2022).

For years we have been used to writing and speaking Kyjev, Lvov, Charkov. It is clear that we took our designations of these places from Russian. This is due to decades of influence from the Soviet Union, in which Russian was the main language. In this form, the names of Kyjev, Lvov, and Charkov have entered the Slovak language, and we probably don't even realise that behind them is the Russian effort to rewrite history. After a month of war, we have to say that Kyjev is actually, that is, in Ukrainian, Kyjiv, Lvov Lviv, and Charkov should be spelled Charkiv correctly.” (Kostolný, 2022)

The author states in the text that the decision reached by the editorial office is political. This idea was elaborated by Kostolný conducted for the needs of my study (e-mail communication, August 4, 2023).

We made the decision to change the spelling of Ukrainian city names in an effort to start writing names according to Ukrainian and not according to the historical transcription, which was based on Russian and the Russification of Ukrainian. It was a political decision, in which opposition to the Russian war was also manifested. Even with the passage of time, I consider it to be correct and I am glad that we approached it. Most serious media (especially in English-speaking countries) took such a step earlier. After the start of the total war against Ukraine, I consider it inappropriate to approach the Russian interpretation of history even in such a symbolic matter as rewriting the names of cities. Moscow has been disputing independent Ukrainian history and existence for a long time, this is also reflected in the language and writing of names.

In connection with the aforementioned sharp decrease in the occurrence of the name “Kyjev”, the question was logically raised whether it was, in the case of *Denník N*, a collective decision. “We discussed this decision in the editorial office, but the decision is clear and the entire editorial office respects it. We make exceptions only in the case of external authors who expressly insist on transcriptions based on the rules of Slovak language spelling,” replied Kostolný. Finally, I was interested in Kostolný's opinion on the fact that *Denník N* remained alone in the initiative, with a few exceptions.<sup>13</sup> Kostolný's reaction was as follows.

I admit that I thought that others would take a similar step. It is a symbolic gesture that shows support for the Ukrainians who were attacked by the Russian occupiers. And abroad, many important media gradually decided to take a similar step. However, it is everyone's free decision and I respect that.

### **Petit Press (SME)**

In the case of the Petit Press publishing house (Table 5), 10,622 outputs using the name “Kyjev”, 2,278 with the name “Charkov”, and 1,019 with the name “Lvov” were observed. With the occurrence of the name “Kyjiv”, 144 outputs were published, “Charkiv” 46 outputs and “Lviv” 38 outputs.

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<sup>13</sup> Remark by author: Another rare medium with a significant number of articles in which the names “Kyjiv”/“Charkiv”/“Lviv” were used was the magazine *.tyždeň* published by W PRESS publishing house.

Table 5. The occurrence of monitored keywords in the media outputs of the Petit Press publishing house (MONITORA)

	Petit Press
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	10622
<b>Charkov</b>	2278
<b>L'vov</b>	1019
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	144
<b>Charkiv</b>	46
<b>L'viv</b>	38

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

It is obvious that, compared to N Press, the Petit Press publishing house retained, with a few exceptions, the original marking of the names of Ukrainian cities. Regarding the topic, in the article “Kyjev will remain Kyjev” (2022) from April 6, 2022, Holinová, a commentator of the *SME* daily expressed this opinion.

We can appreciate this (political) gesture, but I am leaning towards the wording we have used so far. The strongest reason is the familiarity of the names Kyjev, Charkov, etc., not to mention London and Munich. Language showed us a long time ago and by itself how we adapt various foreign names. In the same way, the Polish language coped with Kyjev, which threw it into the typical Polish form of Kijów. (Holinová, 2022)

Holinová (2022) mentions one more reason for using established names, which is inflection in Ukrainian.

The form Kyjiv (Київ) is used in this language only in the nominative. But when bending, the vowel changes, which is “no reason for fireworks” in Slavic languages, and we are in Kyjev again, or we hope to go to Kyjev (Києва) again.

Similar to the previous case, I confronted the results of our analysis with the management of the editorial office. The questions were answered by Juraj Fellegi, deputy editor-in-chief for journalism and the printed edition of the *SME* daily. Regarding Holinová’s article (2022), he stated (e-mail communication, August 15, 2023) that even though it was not created as an editorial opinion, the editorial team identified with it.

When deciding to use the names of Ukrainian cities as they are used in Slovak even after the start of the “full-scale” Russian invasion of Ukraine in *SME* articles, we prioritised language use instead of a political or activist approach. Since in the Slovak language and according to the attached quantitative analysis, the use of the names Kyjev, Charkov and Lvov is still significantly prevalent in the media in Slovakia – and at the same time we have not met with the displeasure of our readers, we see this decision as the right one for the time being.

According to Fellegi, the decision was made after a discussion by the editorial board: “At the same time, we took into account the use of language, comprehensibility and moderation,” he added. I asked Fellegi whether the editors also notice votes in favour of using the form Kyjiv/Charkiv/Lviv. “After the start of the ‘full-scale’ Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was partly a social topic, so opinions in favour of the forms of Kyjiv/Lviv/Charkiv were definitely heard in the *SME* editorial office. The agreement on the use of the names used in Slovak was not disputed later,” replied Fellegi. Fellegi did not comment the question of his opinion on Matúš Kostolný’s statement that in the case of the N Press publishing house it was a political and solidary decision.

### OUR MEDIA SR (*Pravda*)

A total of 4,069 publications with the name “Kyjev”, 682 with “Charkov” and 320 with “Lvov” were observed in the publications of the OUR MEDIA SR publishing house (Table 6). At the same time, I observed 62 outputs using the name “Kyjiv”, 29 “Charkiv” and 11 “Lviv”.

Table 6. The occurrence of monitored keywords in the outputs of the OUR MEDIA SR publishing house (MONITORA)

	OUR MEDIA SR
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	4069
<b>Charkov</b>	682
<b>L'vov</b>	320
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	62
<b>Charkiv</b>	29
<b>L'viv</b>	11

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

Similar to the Petit Press publishing house, it is also clear at OUR MEDIA SR that, with a few rare exceptions, there was no change in the introduction of established names. *Pravda*'s editor-in-chief Luboš Kamenistý (e-mail communication, August 21, 2023) sees the decision as the right one, even with the passage of time. "We are mainly concerned with the comprehensibility of the content for the reader. Of course, the issue of grammar is no less important." Kamenistý also confirmed that the discussion on the topic of changing the names of Ukrainian cities did not take place within the editorial office. At the end, the editor-in-chief of *Pravda* offered his opinion on Konečný's statement about the "political decision".

Instead of making similar "political" decisions, *Pravda* tries to provide the most detailed information about the military conflict in Ukraine. We consider this to be much more fundamental than changing the names of Ukrainian cities. As the only opinion-forming newsroom in Slovakia, we still have a special banner displayed at the top of our online page with the most up-to-date military news and essential journalistic materials devoted to Russian aggression.

### TASR.sk

In articles and press releases published on the news website [www.tasr.sk](http://www.tasr.sk) (Table 7), I can also note a clear dominance of the use of the established names "Kyjev" (1,022), "Charkov" (148) and "L'vov" (46). For the combination of "Kyjiv" (1), "Charkiv" (6) and "L'viv" (2), I noted only unit values.

Table 7. The occurrence of monitored keywords in the media outputs of the [www.tasr.sk](http://www.tasr.sk) news website (MONITORA)

	www.tasr.sk
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	1022
<b>Charkov</b>	148
<b>L'vov</b>	46
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/LVIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	1
<b>Charkiv</b>	6
<b>L'viv</b>	2

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

In response to the results of the analysis, I received the following opinion from TASR editor-in-chief Marián Kolár (e-mail communication, August 8, 2023).

TASR works in accordance with the valid Rules of Slovak Orthography of the Ludovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics. The agency is not opposed to such a system change in the future, but it requires at least a basic consensus of the majority of media clients who subscribe to the service. TASR has hundreds of media subscribers with very diverse target groups. The media, as end users of TASR services, have the opportunity to modify the form of published news.

### SITA.sk

The analysis of the content on the portal of the SITA agency (Table 8) produced the following findings. I also noted the prevalence of the established names use “Kyjev” (205), “Charkiv” (13) and “Lvov” (15), but as was mentioned above,<sup>14</sup> it was not a case of unequivocal dominance as, for example, with the portal [www.tasr.sk](http://www.tasr.sk).

Table 8. The occurrence of monitored keywords in the media outputs of the [www.sita.sk](http://www.sita.sk) news website (MONITORA)

	www.sita.sk
<b>KYJEV/CHARKOV/LVOV</b>	
<b>Kyjev</b>	205
<b>Charkov</b>	13
<b>L'vov</b>	15
<b>KYJIV/CHARKIV/L'VIV</b>	
<b>Kyjiv</b>	50
<b>Charkiv</b>	4
<b>L'viv</b>	5

Source: Mediaboard (n.d.)

The explanation was provided by Mirka Dobošová, head of SITA’s foreign editorial office. It follows from her answer (e-mail communication, August 11, 2023) that, unlike other newsrooms of the agency, the foreign newsroom decided to use “Ukrainian names”.

This is the reason for the disparity – in the foreign editorial office, we decided to use Ukrainian names. On April 1, 2022, I asked the editor-in-chief with this proposal, and he agreed. However, I have no idea why they did not extend this decision to the entire agency.

Dobošová also indicated the initiative of the foreign editorial office as an example of the fact that the agency had a discussion on the issue of using names, offering her perspective on the explanation of *Denník N*’s decision: “I agree with Matúš Kostolný’s opinion and I do not understand the stuffy approach that leads to the fact that Russian names are still used in the media with the justification that it is so ‘according to the spelling’.” To the question of why SITA’s foreign editors decided to use Ukrainian names, Dobošová responded.

I consider it simply correct and I see no reason why we should use Slovak transcriptions of Russian names when we write about Ukraine and not about Russia. If we consider Ukraine as a sovereign country and they have their own names and their own names, why should we ignore their express wish and call them in Russian? ... When, in addition, there is also a chart in the rules of Slovak spelling with instructions on how to transcribe from Ukrainian, where, among other things, there is also an example of Київ – Kyjiv. I honestly don’t understand.

<sup>14</sup> Remark by author: When monitoring the news website [www.sita.sk](http://www.sita.sk), I observed 50 outputs with the name “Kyjiv”, compared to 205 outputs with the name “Kyjev”, which is a share of 19.61 %. See Table 3.

## 6 Discussion

The work on the study pointed to moments that offer space for a wider discussion on language and politics.

### Language

From the statements of linguists and, finally, the representatives of the editorial offices themselves, the use of changes in the names of Ukrainian cities brings with it several questions. In addition to the actual use of uncodified terms, their inflection is also problematic. As Vadrna (2022) points out in the mentioned blog and Holinová (2022) also reminds us, the genitive of the word “Kyiv” should not be “Kyjiva”, but “Kyjeva” instead. Holinová and Vadrna’s opinions are also confirmed by the declension table (Table 9) published on the online library *Горох* (2023) that contains the most useful dictionaries of the Ukrainian language.

Table 9. Declension of the name *Kyjiv*

Case	Singular
Nominative	Київ
Genitive	Києва Київ
Dative	Києву
Accusative	Київ
Instrumental	Києвом
Locative	Києву, Києві
Vocative	Києве

Source: *Горох online library* (n.d.)

Despite this, we register 2,284 exits using the term “Kyjive” in the monitored period (Tóda, 2023), 1,057 outputs with the term “Kyjivu” (see, for example, *Denník N*, 2022b) and 322 with “Kyjivom” (see, for example, *Denník N*, 2022a). In the vast majority of cases, these are the outputs of the N Press publishing house.

Another linguistic problem is the question of the Russian origin of the word “Kyjev”. In addition to Jarošová’s statement from the mentioned interview for *Denník N*, where she questioned “the myth that we transcribe the name of the city of Kyiv according to the original Russian transcription”, we can return to Cimermanová’s article (in press). It also includes the private opinion of etymologist Králik cited in Cimermanová’s study (Cimermanová, in press, p. 8). Králik explains.

Based on the spelling of the Slovak name Kyjev, it can therefore be concluded that the initial Ky- (with ypsilon) respects the state in the Ukrainian language (Київ – Kyjiv), but the final – ev takes into account the status in Russian (Києв – Kijev). In my opinion, the Slovak name Kyjev cannot be unequivocally characterised as “Russian” – it seems that it would be more appropriate to talk about the name of a hybrid character, which was created on the basis of the Russian and Ukrainian names of the city in question.

For the needs of our study, Králik (e-mail communication, July 26, 2023) further states: “When carefully transcribing the Russian name *Києв* into Slovak, we would expect the form Kijev. Such a form was used in Slovak orthography until the 1960s.”

### Politics

As can be seen from the statements of Kostolný, the editorial board of *Denník N* is aware that the decision taken is not in accordance with the recommendations of several linguists or does not correspond to the rules of Slovak spelling. At the same time, Kostolný describes the decision as “political”. Although there is no space in this article to solve the eternal question “should the media do politics?”, I can demonstrate with the given examples where the topics start, or agendas, where some media allow a political approach. Despite the rules.

On the other hand, we can ask ourselves whether this approach does not create a precedent that should also be applied in other cases. If I perceive the request from the Ukrainian government for the correct presentation of city names as part of a legitimate emancipation process, it is necessary to consider the heretical question of whether the media (including foreign media) would react similarly to the demands of other countries that have passed through in the past, or they are still going through a difficult process of self-determination. We could also identify the friction surfaces in the case of the mentioned introduction of exonym, or endonym. I do not have to go far for an example. For example, when marking Poszony (see, for example, Ravasz, 2021).

## 7 Conclusion

Based on quantitative data, I managed to demonstrate that the use of the names “Kyjiv”/“Charkiv”/“Lviv” is not negligible in the Slovak media discourse, but at the same time it is far from a dominant share. From the statements of media representatives who did not accept the change, it follows that the primary obstacle is the lack of standardisation, or codification.

The text further revealed that we are observing a continuing process where things happen without clear rules. This is a trend characteristic of moments of crisis in history, which, moreover, have not only a rational but also an emotional dimension – which ultimately resulted from the reactions of the media, but also of the linguists themselves.

At the same time, the study pointed to a phenomenon the origins of which have a much deeper origin. The very observation that this is a “brick” in the long-lasting Ukrainian emancipation struggle that offers opportunities for deepening and cultivating the discussion, or further treatment of the topic. From the point of view of media theory, several possible approaches are offered. In addition to answering the question about the role of the media in enforcement, or supporting political goals, there is also space for research in receiving repeated messages by the recipient (reader or viewer) either by using the agenda setting theory or the method of discursive analysis (Trampota & Vojtěchovská, 2010).

As indicated in the previous parts of the study, the effort of the Ukrainian government for the international acceptance of Ukrainian versions of place names cannot be reduced to just a “campaign”. It is not just a “name for a name” exchange. It is part of a long-term emancipation strategy, which is growing in importance and strength through the prism of today. The authentic effort to cut ourselves off from Soviet language heritage is so persistent that it has laid solid foundations for a change in our everyday thinking. And not only in the issue of language within its normal verbal use, but also in the issue of a change in the perception of the importance of the Ukrainian struggle for self-determination. Unlike the Slovak one, which was completed in 1993, it is evident that the formal creation of the Ukrainian state in 1991 was far from solving the question of the real national emancipation of the Ukrainian nation.

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