

Title:

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Submission

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Naming rights sponsorship in Europe: Fan reactions to stadium renamings in Premier League, Bundesliga and Ligue 1

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Abstract

Football stadiums have traditionally been named after local sites (e.g. *Goodison Park* (Everton FC) or regions (*Ruhrstadion* (VfL Bochum))). As big business takes increasing precedence in decision making in football at large (e.g. associations and leagues, regarding fixtures, media coverage, kick-off times, player transfers, etc.) and within individual football clubs (e.g. regarding kits and sponsorship), such toponyms are increasingly being replaced by company or product names (e.g. *bet365 Stadium* (Stoke City)).

In this paper, we will consider corporate renamings from German Bundesliga, English Premier League and French Ligue 1 and particularly fan reactions to controversial, badly received corporate renamings. As revealed by earlier studies, in our data here we also find the discourse and practices of the fans celebrating local identification with their city or region, often with the stadiums constituting the homestead of a tradition. Where corporate stadium renamings are badly received, this discourse clashes with the discourse of big business and thus a number of tensions are revealed. More specifically, in fans' reactions to controversial corporate stadium renamings we find a number of recurrent themes – for example, concerning consequences to fans' identity to the club; in managing (anticipated) humorous retorts from rivals consequent from the stadium renaming; in resisting, but also feeling resigned to, financial pressures in selling the stadium name; etc. – some of them across our three national contexts and other specific to one national context.

## 1. Introduction

Applied linguistics is oriented towards practical problems that include a linguistic dimension.

In line with this general thrust, this paper attempts to describe linguistic issues surfacing in the renaming of football stadiums in the framework of naming rights sponsorship. According to a

recent report by a financial consultancy, 80 % of German Bundesliga, 30% of the English Premier League and 20% of the French Ligue 1 have contracts for naming rights sponsoring (Duff & Phelps, 2019, 2, cf. also KPMG, 2020 for more numbers from European leagues). These high stakes financial transactions are struck with a view to marketing and economic considerations, but linguistics can offer some important insights by considering fan reactions to past deals from Germany, England and France.

The renaming of stadiums is part of the general trend of commodification in football (Giulianotti, 1999). “To brand football teams is part of the broader trend to market spaces and elements of life that were hitherto not commoditized, including experiences and symbolic concepts.” (Edensor & Millington, 2008, 176). This may lead to a clash between two competing discourses: the practices of the fans often represent a celebration of local identification with their city or region with the stadiums usually constituting the homestead of a tradition (Boyd, 2000). On the other hand, big business takes precedence in decision making within the clubs (and associations and leagues), decisions about fixtures, media coverage, kick-off times, kits, player transfers, but also the naming of leagues, clubs and stadiums. This article will focus on the renaming of stadiums as a particularly visible and highly controversial practice

This contribution complements literature in economics and sports marketing focusing on the linguistic side of corporate renamings. It appears that these high stakes decisions of naming rights sponsorships are undertaken with little or no regard to (socio)linguistic factors, even though it is general knowledge how important language and naming are to people. After all it is precisely because of the impact of language choices and naming that these deals are struck.

After a literature review on stadiums renamings, we briefly explain our data and methodological approach and subsequently provide a short historic overview of stadium

renamings in Germany, England and France and their development across time. In the main analytic section, different cases will be considered from a linguistic perspective with the help of press articles, fans sites and supporters' protests in different forms. In our conclusion, we discuss the findings and provide an outlook.

## **2. Research on stadium renamings**

The renaming of buildings is a hotly disputed practice, not only in the context of corporate renamings for marketing purposes, but also in the case of historical developments and political reassessments (e.g., buildings named after Ku Klux Klan' men in the US (Brophy, 2010) or Nazis in Germany (Knab, 1995). For this reason, corporate sponsoring deals are often struck when new stadia are built (KPMG, 2020). For the purposes of this article, we will consider as renamings cases that include a new building or a major refurbishment (following Bering, 2007) since we conceptualise stadiums as a homestead of a club and its fans (Boyd, 2000) rather than an architectural structure.

The names of football stadiums have been discussed in the first publication on *The Linguistics of Football* (Lavric, Pisek, Skinner & Stadler, 2008): Calderón classifies them onomasiologically as oecodonyms or chrematonyms (2008, 163). The most substantial linguistic publication on the corporate renaming of stadiums has not been widely received since it has been published in German (Bering 2007). Bering classifies name changes for German Bundesliga from the beginnings of football until 2003 describing a general trend from micro- to macrotoponym to corporate naming (Bering 2007). Of interest for applied linguistics is the observation that onomasiologically, names do not trigger semantic interpretations, e.g. Düsseldorf is not heard as meaning “the village next to the stream Düssel”, but as a reference to the city (onomasiologische Dissoziationsgesetz, Lötscher, 1995, 453f.). So once a name such as Allianz-Arena is well-established, frequency or ubiquity being

necessary steps in attaining the marketing goals of corporate renamings, the company name will vanish behind the denomination for the stadium. To reactivate the company name in the minds of the fans, permanent presentations of the company logo or their products inside and outside the stadium will be necessary (Bering, 2007, 446). Other topics Bering discusses are the loss of tradition and the mismatch between the symbolic value of naming and economic considerations.

In US context, Boyd discusses corporate naming as “selling home” in that places of public memory and identity evoked through commemorative naming practices are sacrificed (2000). Critical toponymy stresses the neoliberal nature of commodifying public space (Medway, Warnaby, Gillooly, & Millington 2019). Socio-economic and socio-political processes are influenced by the longevity of the stadium, the toponym and the site. Also, the apparent clash between local tradition and global finance is not a clear-cut as one may think: clubs such as Bayern Munich or Manchester United themselves constitute global brands so that “new” fans are not part of and may even be unwelcomed by the local community (Medway et al. 792).

By far the largest work on sponsoring deals for stadiums originates in economics and sports marketing. These fields discuss the corporate renaming of sports stadiums from different perspectives and with a number of tools which cannot all be reviewed in the framework of an article in applied linguistics (for a recent overview, cf. Gillooly & Medway, 2019). Generally speaking, these studies represent applied research orienting mainly towards an increase in profits for the sponsors. In other words, e.g. critical fan reactions are not studied in their own right, but as a factor endangering important investments. Selling naming rights represents one option maximizing revenues to compete for the best players (Duff & Phelps, 2019, 3, behind shirt sponsorships and kit supplier deals, KPMG, 2020, np). The goals of corporate renamings are sizeable, sometimes with quantifiable outcomes, sometimes not:

“Like other sponsorship programs, naming rights programs are meant to develop brand equity via increased exposure, heightened brand awareness and stronger more positive brand associations. Other benefits, which have been linked to naming rights programs include: market efficiencies, incremental sales, more positive employee relations, various hospitality options, comarketing opportunities and a means for developing strong customer relations” (Becker-Olson, 2003, p. 9).

Hence, a direct increase in sales is not necessarily in the foreground. Strong traditions may hurt purchase intentions of sponsors’ products (Eddy, 2013) and there seems to be a minimal effect only on increasing the likelihood of purchasing from the sponsor (Haan & Shank, 2004). Instead, these deals mainly pay off as a signal of confidence in the future of the company (Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt 2002)

“Today the programs have evolved from simply a placard on a stadium designed to develop goodwill with the local and perhaps even regional community to more inclusive programs which allow companies to participate in the planning of an arena, incorporate their technology into the venture, design their own signage space, customize hospitality options and engage in co-marketing programs with the teams and their players.” (Becker-Olsen, 2003, p. 10-11)

Financial firms (28%) and car manufactures (21%) are the most likely to strike such deals (KPMG 2020, np). The achievement of these multiple marketing goals does not only come with a hefty price tag (e.g. at €17,1m per season Manchester City by Etihad or eight venues on four continents sponsored by Allianz at €30m annually, KMPG, 2020, np) with estimated values lying even higher (e.g. for Real Madrid or FC Barcelona at €36,5m per season, Duff & Phelps, 2019, 4 and KPMG, 2020, np).<sup>1</sup> More importantly, in the framework of this article,

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<sup>1</sup> The global pandemic caused by Covid 19 Coronavirus has had an impact on the market (e.g. Banc of California terminating its €6.67m/year deal in Los Angeles that was supposed to run until 2033), but is not interpreted as a game changer (KPMG, 2020, np).

corporate renamings are considered “a sensitive issue” (KPMG, 2020, np) or may involve “high controversy” (Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt, 2002, 17), mainly because of the reactions from fans. For this reason, a careful linguistic consideration of the factors involved seems called for.

In non-historic sites, companies can present team-related brand identities to enhance sponsor-stadium fit (Nakazawa, Yoshida, & Gordon, 2016). Refurbishments or newly built venues are recommended as right moments for corporate name deals, often as part of larger contracts in which the sponsor must be a reliable partner (KPMG, 2020, np), while historic stadia may cause greater fan resistance (Crompton & Howard, 2003). Factors influencing “consumers’ perspectives” are “beliefs about naming rights sponsorship, attitudes toward commercialization, team and stadium identification, perception of financial status, and perceived fit” (Chen & Zhang, 2011, 103). A clear communication of benefits, regional identification, and sincerity are perceived as important factors for a good sponsorship fit (Woisetschläger, Eiting, Haselhoff, & Michaelis, 2010). Fans mention their “sense of tradition and their regional identification, their fan identity, and their attitude towards commercialization,... the sponsor’s regional identity as well as the perceived benefit of the sponsorship for the soccer club,... [and] the perceived fit between the sponsor and the sponsee (Woisetschläger & Haselhoff, 2009, 775). In other words, attitudes towards the sponsor (perceived fit, perceived benefits and perceived regional identification of the sponsor) and self-identities (identification with club, tradition consciousness, regional identification and attitude towards commercialization) are decisive factors (Woisetschläger, Haselhoff, & Backhaus, 2009, 775). Fans feel anger since they perceive a threat to the team’s distinctiveness (Reysen, Snider, & Branscombe, 2012, Kim, Shin, Walker & Koo 2017). Sponsors must fit the teams, e.g. in terms of location and attitude, so that they may cross-fertilize each other’s image (Gillooly & Medway, 2019). Existing work focusing on fan reactions is scarce in the field and mostly survey-based:

“[it] has arguably not really got ‘under the skin’ of what changing a football stadium name to one with corporate associations really means socially, politically, and culturally for a club’s fan base and the wider place and community in which it is embedded. We contend that more work is needed to understand these issues, ideally adopting a phenomenological and potentially quasi-ethnographic perspective [also through the study of] fan forums, Twitter feeds and Facebook groups” (Gillooly & Medway, 2019, np).

With the help of this article we would like to complement those works with linguistic considerations. By examining the fans’ protests this article can be read with a view to celebrating resistance, however, it can also be seen as a small contribution to uniting fans’ interests and economic necessities that do exist for most clubs.

### **3. Methodology**

Having noted above that existing work studying fan reactions to corporate sports stadium renamings is scarce and mostly survey-based, this article takes a general discourse analytic approach (for sports, cf. Caldwell et al., 2018) in an attempt to determine apparent themes in how fans react to, particularly controversial, stadium renamings.

The data consist of press articles from local and national newspapers, including interviews with fans, from fan websites and blogs, and from social media posts. Our approach is explorative and we do not claim our data to be in any way comprehensive and/or representative. Rather, we hope our study here can provide a launch-pad for large-scale, more systematic studies of various kinds from different discourse analytic traditions.

In this article, we mostly disregard legal proprietary rights and follow the fans’ conceptualization of ownership in ethnomethodological tradition (Garfinkel, 1984). The fans reaction to corporate renamings usually position the clubs or fans as owners, irrespective of



legal possessorship. Hence, we will disregard whether the stadiums are owned, or partly owned, by the clubs themselves, the city or other political entity, or a sponsor, unless the fans themselves discuss legal ownership as a meaningful category in their debates.

Before we turn to this discourse analysis of fan reactions to the commodification of their stadium names in controversial cases (§5), we will first provide some context by giving an account of the major historical trends and the current state of stadium naming in the three important European leagues in question: Germany, England and France.

#### **4. Overview of stadium renamings in Germany, England, and France**

As a backdrop to the fan reactions (§5 below), in this section we will give a short overview of the situations in Germany, England, and France which is discussed at much greater length from a onomastic perspective in Clarke, Gerhardt & Lecarpentier (forthcoming). Here, our overview of naming in these three countries is particularly focused on the current situation regarding corporate names of football stadiums in the top leagues of these countries. We assume that the different naming traditions in the three countries have an influence on the fan protests we focus on in the subsequent section.

##### *4.1. The situation in Germany*

In Germany, one could summarise the development of naming practices in the following manner (cf. also Bering, 2007): first microtoponyms were used, often with the appellative Sportplatz or Kampfbahn, simply indicating a local site to meet. Examples include Stadion an der Castroper Strasse (Bochum) or Sportplatz auf dem (Cannstatter) Wasen (Stuttgart). In the next phase, for the first major stadium constructions, some in preparation for the World Cup 1974, either microtoponyms were retained or macrotoponyms were seized to signal significance for a whole region (e.g. 1979 Ruhrstadion Bochum).

- (1) Den Namen für die Spielstätte [Ruhrstadion] hatte man sich übrigens bereits 1972 gesichert, als die Oberen in Gelsenkirchen auf die Idee kamen, das künftige WM- Stadion des FC Schalke 04 könne doch „Ruhrstadion“ heißen. So bekam der VfL seine Kult-Spielstätte mit Kult-Namen, den Schalkern blieb nur der Umzug ins „Parkstadion“.<sup>2</sup>  
‘Incidentally, the name of the stadium [Ruhrstadion] had already been secured in 1972 when the people responsible in Gelsenkirchen had the idea that the future World Cup stadium of FC Schalke 04 could be named “Ruhrstadion”. This is how the VfL [Bochum] got its iconic stadium with its iconic name and Schalke had no other choice than to move to the “Parkstadion”.’

This quotation from VfL Bochum’s website portrays the club as having won an undeclared race for the most desirable macrotoponym that references the whole region (Ruhrgebiet) illustrating the renown of macrotoponyms. The building of new high-tech stadiums associated with the World Cup 2006 often included corporate naming sponsoring so that arenas are typically associated with sponsor names (e.g. Allianz Arena in Munich 2005). A recent development consists of compounds uniting the traditional and the sponsor’s name: Sandhausen’s stadium, originally called Hardtwaldstadion, has been renamed BWT-Stadion am Hardtwaldt in 2017, BWT being an Austrian company for water treatments, or Greuther Fürth could reclaim its old name Ronhof in now being called Sportpark Ronhof | Thomas Sommer after a local property developer. Hence, in the last few years, a number of companies or clubs have found creative solutions that respect local traditions or supporters’ wishes and fulfill the associated marketing goals.

To give an overview, current Bundesliga stadions with sponsor names are Allianz Arena (München), BayArena (Leverkusen), Deutsche Bank Park (Frankfurt), Mercedes-Benz Arena (Stuttgart), Opel Arena (Mainz), PreZero Arena (Sinsheim/TSG Hoffenheim), Red Bull Arena (Leipzig), RheinEnergieStadion (Köln), SchücoArena (Bielefeld), Signal Iduna Park (Dortmund), Sportpark Ronhof | Thomas Sommer (Fürth), Veltins-Arena (Gelsenkirchen), Volkswagen Arena (Wolfsburg), Vonovia Ruhrstadion (Bochum),

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vfl-bochum.de/vonovia-ruhrstadion/vonovia-ruhrstadion/ueber-das-stadion/stadiongeschichte-ii/>

Wohninvest Weserstadion (Bremen), WWK Arena (Augsburg) (Season 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 1. Bundesliga). Conversely, only four stadiums do not have sponsoring deals, three of which have retained their original names throughout: An der alten Försterei (Berlin/SC Union Berlin) from 1920, Borussia-Park (Mönchengladbach) from 2004, Olympia Stadion (Berlin/Hertha BSC Berlin) from 1936. SC Freiburg who only just moved into the new SC Stadion, had reinstated the original name of its Schwarzwald-Stadion in 2014 after two sponsoring deals (Badenova-Stadion in 2004 and Mage Solar Stadion in 2012).

#### *4.2. The situation in England*

Our English case study comprises stadiums of clubs who were present in the top tier, the English Premier League, for at least one season between the 2008-09 and the 2017-18 seasons. This amounts to forty-nine clubs. Of these, twenty have never changed their stadium name in the club's history. Of the remaining twenty-nine clubs, the vast majority (twenty-five) have only done so since the inception of the Premier League as English football's top tier in the early 1990s.

Toponyms are by far the most popular type of stadium naming, and various kinds of toponym are observed: after roads adjacent to the stadium (e.g. Blackpool's Bloomfield Road, Norwich City's Carrow Road and Watford's Vicarage Road); after the wider area (e.g. Crystal Palace's Selhurst Park and Southampton's St Mary's Stadium); after various buildings or structures in the locale: hospitals (e.g. Newcastle United's St James Park), churches (e.g. Birmingham City's St Andrews), hotels (e.g. Stoke City's Victoria Ground) and even railways (e.g. Portsmouth's Fratton Park).

Although eponyms are generally rare in the stadium names for the English clubs in this study, they mostly persist in the stadium's history. Three of the six eponyms found for these forty-nine English clubs (Fulham's Craven Cottage, Sheffield United's Bramall Lane and

Wolverhampton Wanderers' Molineux Stadium) have been the clubs-in-question stadium names throughout their history; a further example, Cardiff City's Ninian Park, was only changed in 2009 as the club relocated to a new stadium.

Concerning the introduction of corporate namings of English stadiums – at the start of the 2017-18 season, there were fifteen clubs whose stadiums were named after corporate entities. The earliest example of a corporate stadium renaming was Huddersfield Town's Alfred McAlpine Stadium in 1994; formerly named 'Kirkless Stadium' ('Kirkless' being the local council) while Huddersfield Town built this new stadium, once constructed it took the corporate name of 'Alfred McAlpine Stadium' after the constructor who built the ground as part of the ground building agreement (a ten year naming rights term of contract). Other early examples in England are Bradford City's Pulse Stadium (1995), Middlesbrough's Cellnet Riverside Stadium (1995), Bolton Wanderers' Reebok Stadium (1997), Stoke City's Britannia Stadium (1997) and Wigan Athletic's JJB Stadium (1999). It is interesting that all these early examples are of clubs in England's geographical north.

While some corporate renamings have persisted (e.g. Brighton and Hove Albion's American Express Community (AMEX) Stadium, Leicester City's King Power Stadium, Manchester City's Etihad Stadium and Swansea City Liberty Stadium), others have had a turbulent, inconsistent lifespan which has then often been in flux. For example, Bournemouth, Bradford City, Huddersfield Town, Middlesbrough and Newcastle United have all had at least two further stadium name changes subsequent to their first corporate renaming (five in both Bournemouth's and Bradford City's cases), all within twenty-five years and often less (e.g. ten years in Newcastle United's case; eighteen years in Bournemouth's case). The causes for this seem to be various and include simply the ending of commercial naming rights deals (e.g. Bolton Wanderers' Reebok Stadium and Stoke City's Britannia Stadium). However, as

discussed in §5 below, a negative, hostile reaction to the corporate stadium renaming by the clubs' fans also appears to be a cause for this instability of some of these corporate renamings.

#### *4.3. The situation in France*

The corporate naming of stadiums in Ligue 1, unlike in England and Germany, still remains infrequent, facing significant resistance from supporters. During the 2020-2021 season, only four out of twenty stadiums had a naming contract: the Allianz Riviera in Nice, Le Matmut Atlantique in Bordeaux, the Groupama Stadium in Lyon (Décines) and the Orange Vélodrome in Marseille.

The introduction of corporate stadium naming in France started in 2009 when the banking and insurance group Arkéa offered the Stade Rennais to become a partner in exchange for naming the stadium under the name Fortuneo Stadium. Revealed by the press<sup>3</sup>, the project faced hostility from supporters and was quickly withdrawn<sup>4</sup>. The first successful naming partnership occurred in 2011 with the inauguration of the MMArena du Mans, the new stadium for Le Mans FC, then just relegated to Ligue 2. The Mutuelles du Mans Assurance (MMA) signed a 10-years contract for 1 million Euros per year to affix their name to the new enclosure<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, Le Mans FC did not manage to recover in Ligue 1 and filed for bankruptcy in 2013 while returning to the amateur level, abandoning the stadium until 2019 when they returned to professional status.

Naming contracts in France tended to be developed in parallel with the construction of new arenas for Euro 2016 with, in 2012, the inauguration of the Allianz Riviera in Nice, followed by the new Bordeaux stadium in 2015, named Matmut Atlantique. Only in 2016 was the first naming contract affixed to a (renovated) old stadium, with the phone operator Orange appending its name to the Stade Vélodrome in Marseille, for €2.45 million per year for ten

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ouest-france.fr/bretagne/rennes-35000/rennes-le-stade-pourrait-devenir-le-fortuneo-stadium-432686>

<sup>4</sup> Following the result of a popular consultation in 2015, the stadium took the name of "Roazhon Park".

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mmarena.com/le-mmarena>

years<sup>6</sup>. The following year, the Olympique Lyonnais, which built its own stadium in 2015, signed a naming contract with the insurer Groupama, thus becoming Groupama Stadium for €6 million per year for three years, extended since until 2022<sup>7</sup>.

The most recent corporate stadium naming contract in France's Ligue 1 at the time of writing was signed in July 2018 between the Crédit Agricole Brie-Picardie bank and Amiens SC to associate the name of the bank with the club stadium, becoming the "Stade Crédit Agricole La Licorne" in exchange for €500,000 per year over 12 years<sup>8</sup>. Since this, corporate renaming of stadiums no longer progresses in football in France, unlike other sports such as rugby, basketball or hockey. The lack of renaming in France suffers both from the fans' reluctance (see §5 just below), but also from its negative public image and from reluctance of the stadiums owners, which belong to municipalities or metropolises. Only the Olympique Lyonnais owns its stadium, the other clubs in France's Ligue 1 only having the agreement for the enjoyment or its management.

## **5. Trends in fan protests to stadium renamings**

In this section, we report the results of an explorative discourse analysis of fans' reactions to the corporate renamings of football stadiums and linguistically-relevant considerations these reactions raise. Our focus are mainly cases where the stadium renaming was badly received by the fans by sparking protests. This section is therefore organized by the predominant trends found in the data of such cases, as they are relevant to clubs in our three country contexts. We will start by examining linguistic considerations by the fans (§5.1). These include the fans considering the official denominations irrelevant for or invalid in everyday speech (§5.1.1)

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<sup>6</sup> [https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/ligue-1/om-le-naming-du-velodrome-rapporte-gros\\_AN-201810040333.html](https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/ligue-1/om-le-naming-du-velodrome-rapporte-gros_AN-201810040333.html)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.actusnews.com/fr/ol-groupe/cp/2020/10/05/groupama-poursuit-le-naming-du-stade-de-l\\_olympique-lyonnais](https://www.actusnews.com/fr/ol-groupe/cp/2020/10/05/groupama-poursuit-le-naming-du-stade-de-l_olympique-lyonnais)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.amiensfootball.com/news/8583>

and the (original) referent of the new denomination inappropriate (§5.1.2). The fans also exploit inappropriate word-choice for humorous purposes (§5.1.3). The following sections discuss stadium names as part of regional identities (§5.2). In English contexts, the club owners may be perceived as outsiders (§5.2.1). Finally, exogenous factors such as financial matters are also important in the fans' assessments of the deals (§5.2): The fans can either resist economic considerations (§5.3.1) or resign (§5.3.2). These are thus the sub-sections into which this section is organized. However, "categories are convenient, invented artefacts that make it easier for us to interpret the world. Boundaries are fuzzy and overlap is inevitable." (Council of Europe, 2020, 250). This also applies to the following discussions. The examples may help focus on one particular aspect, but for the most part other concerns or issues are concurrently taken into account by the fans.

### *5.1. Linguistic considerations by fans*

Our data indicate that the fans as social actors are aware of the social significance of naming and different linguistic levels that may be relevant in this respect. The quotations from press articles and fan sites discussed in this section contain linguistic considerations the fans voice. Albeit without the use of technical terms, their contributions to the discussion of renamings demonstrate an awareness of language use and functioning.

#### *5.1.1. Non-validity/irrelevance of official denominations in everyday speech*

Prominent in the fans' protests are claims that they will refuse to use the new name. This is often accompanied by an alternative suggestion that shows an awareness of the fact that official names are not necessarily used in everyday speech (cf. Duckert 1973: 154 about the difference between the spoken and written mode in the use of place nicknames).

- (2) Nur ist die Frage, ob sich dieser Name [...] bei den Fans durchsetzen wird. Michael Thomas hat darauf eine klare Antwort. "Nein", sagt er. "Bei uns hat das auch nicht geklappt. [...] Die meisten Fans sagen eh immer noch Ronhof." <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fussball-sponsoring-zwischen-daimler-und-playmobil/239958.html>

‘The question is if that name [...] will persist with fans. Michael Thomas has a rather clear response to that. “No,” is what he says. “That didn't work for us either. [...] Most of the fans still say Ronhof anyway.”’

The most frequent fan reaction to sponsoring deals becomes apparent in Thomas’ account in this newspaper article: the fans’ claim that they will not use the name anyway (eh immer noch). This strategy by the fans depicts and strengthens the limits of sponsoring deals. Since there is freedom of speech and everyday language does not follow style manuals, for the fans, there is no obligation to use the new name. Importantly, this refusal also turns the fans into agents: they do not passively have to endure the renamings, but they can reclaim power in not playing along. In this way they resist the commodification of public space (Medway et al., 2019) and marketisation of names (Bering, 2007, 442). This act becomes more visible when the refusal to comply is codified, such as on Nürnberg’s fansite glubbforum.de. When posting in their forum, easyCredit-Stadion, the sponsor name at the time, was automatically changed into Max Morlock Stadion<sup>10</sup>, the name suggested by the fans in commemoration of the Nuremberg player legendary for his goal in the World Cup final 1954.

Similarly, in France, the naming of the new stadium in Bordeaux, Matmut Atlantique, caused strong disagreement with the Bordeaux supporters. They wanted to dedicate it to René Gallice, legend of the Girondins de Bordeaux with 390 matches played between 1938 and 1955. This name was chosen after a vote by supporters among five other names attached to the club<sup>11</sup>. On October 25, 2015, during the Bordeaux-Troyes match, the Ultramarines – Bordeaux fans group – deploy a flag in René Gallice honour and symbolically rename the stadium (see Figure 1 below). The denunciation of the naming is accompanied by a denunciation of the business in football, since the contract, due to a lack of a candidate, was

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.glubbforum.de/forum/thread/657-der-club-in-den-medien/?postID=473503>, cf post by Der Clubberer 19. November 2019

<sup>11</sup> [https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/ligue-1/bordeaux-les-supporters-proposent-un-autre-nom-pour-le-stade\\_AN-201509160227.html](https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/ligue-1/bordeaux-les-supporters-proposent-un-autre-nom-pour-le-stade_AN-201509160227.html)



sold off at €2 million per year for ten years, instead of the €3.9 million expected by the manager of the stadium<sup>12</sup>.



Figure 1: Stade René Gallie

While the French suggestion is in line with general naming practices (eponyms), in the German contexts this is less common.

To return to the article from Tagesspiegel<sup>13</sup>, the president of a fan club is later cited as follows: “Wir haben vorher auch nur gesagt: Wir gehen ins Stadion [...] Und das sage ich weiterhin.” ‘Also before [the deal] we had only said, we’ll go into the stadium [...] And that’s what I continue to say’. The fixed expression “ins Stadion gehen”, literally, ‘to go into the stadium’, is a common way of expressing that one will attend a game live in the stadium. In other words, in informal everyday interaction, often there is no need to name a specific stadium, since it is usually common ground which one a specific speaker is referring to.

The examples illustrate that the fans protests impart non-applicability of the official denomination in their own everyday talk-in-interaction. However, the strong bids to rename stadia after local heroes, e.g. in Nuremberg or Bordeaux, also suggests that this irrelevance

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sudouest.fr/2015/09/03/stade-matmut-atlantique-de-bordeaux-un-nom-brade-de-50-2113663-2780.php>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fussball-sponsoring-zwischen-daimler-und-playmobil/239958.html>

does not lessen the symbolic value the fans attach to the official name of their stadium. This seemingly contradictory discourse, “We do not care what the stadium is officially called” and “We do care what the stadium is officially called”, reveals a nuanced understanding by the fans of the difference between registers and modes, between the pragmatics of everyday informal interaction and the social significance of official naming practices.

### 5.1.2. *Inappropriateness of referent*

At times, the fans’ protests also discuss the origin of the new name, problematizing its (earlier) referent. A difference is made between naming a stadium after a sponsor and naming a stadium after a product. While the first seems to have become more acceptable, at least in a German context, the second is considered a failure (four years after the renaming) by the following Nuremberg fan:

- (3) Das besondere bei uns ist aber, dass der Name [easyCredit-Stadion] nicht Bezug auf eine Firma hat, sondern auf ein Produkt, und dieses Experiment kann man wohl als gescheitert betrachten.<sup>14</sup>  
‘What’s special here is the fact that the name [easyCredit stadium] does not refer to a company, but to a product, and this experiment can probably be regarded as having failed.’

In contrast, the fan from Fürth below problematizes the local rivals (Nuremberg)’s name and other names, with a different stance on the matter:

- (4) Ich persönlich jedenfalls habe genug Größe, gut damit zu leben, dass das Stadion meines Vertrauens nach dem beliebten Spielzeug auch meiner Kindheit oder einer Süßigkeit, beides ja auch aus erfolgreicher, fränkischer Produktion, benannt ist. Besser auf jeden Fall als mit dem Namen irgendeiner Versicherung oder dem «schnellen Pump" von nebenan!<sup>15</sup>  
‘I personally have enough self-esteem to live well with the fact that my stadium of trust is called after a popular toy of my childhood or a sweet, both also of successful Franconian production. In any event better than the name of some insurance company or the “fast loans” from next door [Nuremberg].’

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.clubfans-united.de/2010/10/11/easycrredit-stadion-sponsor-stellt-engagement-in-frage/#comment-39563>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nordbayern.de/2.7498/die-further-fans-sind-gestahlt-1.605608>

Even though the two names of Fürth's stadium, Playmobil and Trolli, referred to by the fan also represent companies, the fan here evokes the products, namely the toys and sweets produced by these companies. Instead of criticizing the use of a product name, he conceptualizes a difference between an acceptable choice (gut damit zu leben 'to live well with') and a less acceptable one (the one in Fürth being better, besser). On the one hand, the choice of names is characterized as beliebt 'popular', meiner Kindheit 'my childhood', erfolgreich 'successful', fränkisch 'franconian', positively connotated and local or known. On the other hand, irgendeine Versicherung 'some insurance company, i.e. not local, not known, and schneller Pump 'fast loans', i.e. negatively connotated consumer credits. Similarly, the use of a brand associated with e-cigarettes was heavily criticized with a view to public health, especially since schools were also using the stadium (TSG Sprockhövel, German Regionalliga West, Stadion im Baumhof to GermanFLAVOUR Travel Arena).<sup>16</sup>

The examples illustrate that the referent of the name is considered important by the fans and may add to or lessen their outrage. Obviously, it is preferable to be associated with a positively connotated produce than one that is critically received. Also, regional brands can more easily match the conceptualization of the clubs and their stadiums being part of the local identity.

### *5.1.3. Inappropriateness of name // Exploitation for humorous purposes*

Not only the referents can cause criticism, often it is some property of the names themselves (as linguistic items) that spark objections. This may allow rival fans to tap into controversies relating to stadium renaming in a competitive manner – i.e. to point-score against, as they see it, their rivals' misfortune, as also seen in (4). An example from England, of Leicester City, is relevant here. In 2002, the club moved from their ground of over a hundred years, Filbert

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<sup>16</sup> www.stadionwelt.de (06.102016): „Umstrittener Stadionname in Sprockhövel“

Street, into a new stadium, initially called ‘City Business Stadium’ but soon changed to the ‘Walkers Stadium’, Walkers being a crisps company resident in the area. It emerged that one name that had been considered at this time was ‘Walkers Crisp Bowl’, which was subsequently used pejoratively both in self-deprecation by Leicester City fans themselves ((5) and (6)) but also by rival fans ((7) and (8)) – the double interpretation of ‘bowl’ as synonymous with ‘stadium’ and also as synonymous with ‘crockery’.

- (5) With all the chat on here recently about the lack of atmosphere at our crisp bowl, was wondering what stands out as peoples best memories of city fans being at their most vocal.<sup>17</sup>
- (6) I never liked "Walkers Stadium" either - looked incredibly tacky with the logo and adverts plastered everywhere, regardless of the connection of the brand to the city, and was easily p\*ss-taken as the "Crisp Bowl" by opposition fans. So I wasn't in the least bit sad to see it renamed, as some were at the time.<sup>18</sup>

In (7), for the purposes of his and his audience’s humour, a fan of Nottingham Forest – Leicester City’s big local rivals – mimics being at Leicester City fan with a stadium named so clearly after a corporate entity, while in (8), another club’s fan extends the metaphorical play at having a stadium named after a receptacle for holding savoury snacks:

- (7) I quite like being a souless corporate \*\*\*\*\*er.<sup>19</sup>
- (8) Anyhoo for our first visit to the Walkers Crisp Bowl we had filled the cheese and onion corner, watched with attentiveness from the police control centre, the smokey bacon box. The lads and lasses were in good voice from the outset and were prepared to overlook (code for block out of memory) last weeks defeat at Millwall.<sup>20</sup>

Similar reactions by rival fans could be found for Fürth’s Playmobil-Stadion in our Germany data:

- (9) "Wir spielen Fußball, ihr spielt Playmobil", schreiben die Gästefans nun regelmäßig auf ihre Transparente.<sup>21</sup>  
 ““We play football, you play Playmobil,” the guest fans regularly write on their

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.foxestalk.co.uk/topic/26424-loudest-ever-city-match/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.foxestalk.co.uk/topic/118622-questionnaire-for-leicester-fans-on-the-significance-of-football-stadium-names/page/2/?tab=comments#comment-5112674>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.forestforum.co.uk/threads/26458-Leicester-City-rename-the-Crisp-Bowl>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.readytogo.net/archives/001452.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fussball-sponsoring-zwischen-daimler-und-playmobil/239958.html>

banners.’

Such humour, whether as self-deprecation or in anticipation of soon being made the laughing stock by the rivals’ fans, is also seen in Nuremberg’s stadium renaming to easy Credit Stadion, which will be discussed further in §5.2. Handelsblatt, Germany’s most important business newspaper, brings a linguistic problem to the foreground in their heading to the article in (10):

- (10) STADIONUMBENENNUNG IN NÜRNBERG KOMMT NICHT GUT AN  
Isigreddid – eine Region schreit auf<sup>22</sup>  
‘REBRANDING OF THE STADIUM IN NÜRNBERG NOT WELL RECEIVED  
Isigreddid – a region protests’

Isigreddid is a phonetic folk transcription in the local accent East Franconian. The difference to Standard German here lies in the lenition of voiceless stops [k] to [g] and [t] to [d]. This rendition of the new name highlights a perceived mismatch between the phrase from Global English, easy credit, and its pronunciation in the local German accent. The incongruities (also through the use of the @sign in the name and the lack of capitalization) between regional identification and conservation of traditions with vicissitudinous financial considerations brings about these concerns:

- (11) Ich hätte weit weniger Probleme mit einer Siemens-Arena als mit der komödiantischen „Isiehgräädidd“-Einlage der vergangenen 4 Jahre.<sup>23</sup>  
‘I’d have less problems with a Siemens-Arena than the comic “Isiehgräädidd” contribution of the last 4 years.’

By using komödiantische Einlage, also translatable as slapstick performance, the fan skillfully frames the naming not only as comic, but also as temporary. The absurdity of turning naming

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.handelsblatt.com/sport/fussball/stadionumbenennung-in-nuernberg-kommt-nicht-gut-an-isigreddid-eine-region-schreit-auf/2641000.html?ticket=ST-1478126-bSU54qGAEv7BwEjEVFBH-ap2>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.clubfans-united.de/2010/10/11/easycredit-stadion-sponsor-stellt-engagement-in-frage/#comment-39570>

into a continuous process is also brought to the foreground by expanding the selling of naming rights to the players themselves, a comic rendition similar to (8):

- (12) Vielleicht sollte man ja noch jedem Spieler einen Produktnamen geben. „Bifi“ strebt auf der Außenbahn unwiderstehlich davon und legt quer auf Always Ultra...  
Maybe they should just give every single player a brand name too. “Bifi” progresses irresistibly on the outskirts and forwards to Always Ultra across the pitch...

In this case, a fan replaces the players’ names, anthroponyms being semantically empty and purely referential, with product names. Also, the names and products chosen seem to have a certain inherent humour, a sausage called Bifi and a sanitary pad called Always Ultra<sup>24</sup>. With the help of this humorous rendition of a broadcast in which the fan carries renaming to the extreme by choosing as referents human beings and as names “funny products”, the fan manages to illuminate and expose the inappropriateness of corporate renamings.

The examples in this section illustrate the fans as skillful linguistic performers seizing the opportunity for banter and word play, often against the backdrop of local rivalry. Concurrently, the fans move from passively enduring corporate decisions to actively constitute a discourse of ridicule and disdain.

### *5.2. Stadium names as part of regional identity*

The second major topic conceptualizes the renamings as a loss of regional identity. A case in point, again, is the renaming of Nurmberg’s stadium from the regional toponym Frankenstadion to the product name of a nationally operating local bank e@sy Credit Stadion mentioned above. The fact that Handelsblatt, the national German economics paper, commented can be seen as prove for a national debate in Germany.

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<sup>24</sup> This is potentially more a problem of the referents than the words Bifi and Always Ultra. For the sake of coherence, though, we decided to discuss this excerpt with the other examples of humorous contributions from fans.

- (13) Doch nirgendwo kochte die Volksseele so sehr wie in Nürnberg.<sup>25</sup>  
'Nowhere else were people as enraged as in Nuremberg.'

The fans conceptualize the renaming as cause for persistent grievance (cf. also a perception of pain in example 19) since they perceive a loss of identity, the the earlier name of the stadium standing for the region Franconia:

- (14) Ich trauere immer noch dem Frankenstadion nach und fand Easy Credit völlig daneben. Erkennbarkeit, Linie und Stil finde ich viel wichtiger als das letzte Hemd zu veräußern und die eigene Identität Stück für Stück aufzugeben.<sup>26</sup>  
'I'm still grieving for the Frankenstadion and found Easy Credit completely unsuitable. I find recognisability, a clear vision, and style way more important than to give the shirt of our back and give up our identity bit by bit.'

This fan positions the name of the stadium as one part (Stück für Stück 'bit by bit') of the identity of his club counterweighing different values against the financial considerations of the club. Erkennbarkeit 'recognisability', interestingly, echoes concerns in marketing about brand recognition (cf. distinctiveness, Reysen et al, 2012; Kim et al., 2017). Not only do fewer people know which stadium is being referred to, also the stadium itself loses its identity in the sense that Frankenstadion evokes a whole history of games and events that are constitutive for the club and its fans as a community (Boyd, 2000). The more vague Linie, translated as 'clear vision' here, evokes continuity, an understanding of the history and the future of the club. Finally Stil, the positive outer image the club wants to convey, also reflects the linguistic category focusing on the author of texts, on individual word choice (Biber & Conrad, 2019). So, to this fan, an English noun phrase also simply represents bad style as choice for the name of a stadium.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.handelsblatt.com/sport/fussball/stadionumbennennung-in-nuernberg-kommt-nicht-gut-an-isigreddid-eine-region-schreit-auf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.clubfans-united.de/2010/10/11/easycredit-stadion-sponsor-stellt-engagement-in-frage/#comment-39574>

A related example is seen in (15) where a Newcastle United fan relates their club's stadium renaming (see §5.3.1 below for context) to an attack on the club's integrity and so a diminishing of its identity:

- (15) The owners are chipping away at the integrity of this club. Slowly but surely it is being denigrated.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly to the Nuremberg fan, here too some integral whole is evoked, the name of the stadium representing one part that is chipped away. Also, in a moral sense, this wholeness is being corrupted by the corporate deal, as stressed by the use of the term denigrated.

In line with the literature (e.g. Boyd, 2000, Woisetschläger & Haselhoff, 2009), the fans ground their protest in conceptualizing the name of their stadium as one integral part of their club's identity.

#### *5.2.1. Club owners perceived as outsiders*

In the case with Newcastle United (cf. also section 5.3 below), the perceived and problematic greed of the club's owners who oversee the stadium renaming is intertwined with another semantic motif: resistance to an outsider. The club's owner, Mike Ashley (referred to derogatively in examples (4) and (5) above) is the target of much of this hostility to the name changes. Ashley is judged as the cause of the club's financial greed to the loss of its identity and this is all the more possible because Ashley is judged by the club's fans as an outsider; Ashley grew up in the south of the country, in Buckinghamshire<sup>28</sup>, and thus does not share the identity of the club, nor hold its interests to heart:

- (16) Get out of our club! Get out of our club-b-b!  
You fat cockney.....yeah you guys know the rest!  
@ St James Park? When did we become a email address?! Mike

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/fans-fury-as-newcastle-rename-stadium-429334>

<sup>28</sup> 'Cockney', in example (16), referring to someone from certain areas within London, England.



Ashley...embarrasment<sup>29</sup>

Even though Ashley is indexically constructed as being part of the club (get out), by referring to him as a cockney, he becomes an outsider from the identity of Newcastle as Northern English. Given that club ownership is not possible in German and French football the way it is in English football, this divide between club and owner is not displayed in our Germany or French fan data (but for similar sentiments, see e.g. the more recent controversies at TSG Hoffenheim concerning their main sponsor software billionaire Dietmar Hopp).

### *5.3. Economic considerations by fans*

The third most important strand in our data consists of financial considerations by the fans. It is clear to them that budgets are an important factor for success in football. The following examples illustrate the different facets of their deliberations concerning their clubs' financial needs.

#### *5.3.1. Resistance to financial considerations in selling the stadium name*

In November 2009, English club Newcastle United's controversial owner Mike Ashley changed the name of the stadium to 'sportsdirect.com@ St James' Park Stadium'. The change was brief with another coming in November 2011 – then to 'Sports Direct Arena', Ashley (also owner of company Sports Direct) citing the chance to "showcase the sponsorship opportunity to interested parties". This was, however, badly received by fans, the Newcastle fans well known for their partisanship (e.g. large stadium attendances at games, even when the club has dropped out of the top tier). They protested, destroyed signage at the ground advertising the new name<sup>30</sup> and even took the issue to parliament for discussion. In October 2012, Newcastle United's main sponsor of the time, money leader wonga.com, purchased the stadium naming rights and restored the original name, St James' Park, as a part of the deal<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.avforums.com/threads/newcastle-united-worst-name-for-a-stadium-ever.1116435/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2102505/St-James-Park-sprayed-graffiti-sign-removal.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/newcastle-united/9596399/Newcastle-United-sponsorship-deal-with-Wonga-sees-stadium-becoming-St-James-Park-again.html>

Comparable hostility to the name changes seen in online forums. One theme in this criticism centres on the fans' perception that the club's identity is being waned in the interest of financial greed; for example:

(17) (Ashley's a money grubbing \*\*\*\*\*! Out with him!<sup>32</sup>

(18) Stop going to the games [...] Fat ashley is laughing at us. Hit him where it hurts, his wallet. Boycott the club its the only way<sup>33</sup>

In these examples, an opposition is made between the true fabric and identity of the club and the perceived greed represented by owner Ashley and the stadium name change he instates. Opposing this greed, even if it means non-attendance to games and fans more generally disengaging from the football club, is seen as the solution to this financial greed and the way of removing the owner from the club (see §5.2.1 above).

In a similar manner, the Nuremberg fans voiced their protests with a banner reading: 'Jersey sponsor: 3 Mio €, Stadium name 10 Mio €, Tradition: priceless?!



Figure 2: 1. FC Nürnberg<sup>34</sup>

In doing so, they claim that tradition (printed larger and as the bottom line) outweighs the sponsoring deals not only in importance, but also as being unmarketable and not for sale.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-AhorBvLbU>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-AhorBvLbU>

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.ndr.de/sport/fussball/50\\_jahre\\_bundesliga/Von-Stadionnamen-und-Tradition,arenen103.html](https://www.ndr.de/sport/fussball/50_jahre_bundesliga/Von-Stadionnamen-und-Tradition,arenen103.html)

The implication is that no amount of money can outweigh the value of tradition. While these examples indicate that money does not, the following section will indicate the opposite.

### 5.3.2. *Resignation and acceptance of financial pressures*

In significant contrast to the examples in the last sub-section, we also see elsewhere in our data that fan protests against the renamings are often accompanied by an overt recognition of the importance of financial considerations for the clubs. We can see this resignation and recognition of financial pressures in the following press reportage. To our knowledge, the sponsoring deal by SpVgg Greuther Fürth in 1997 was the first in German Bundesliga: Sportplatz am Ronhofer Weg gegebenüber dem Zentralfriedhof (Sportsground on Ronhof lane opposite the central cemetery) to the newly built Playmobil-Stadion. The move was made necessary because of Fürth's advancement to Bundesliga.

- (19) Fürth hatte [...] keine andere Wahl, sagt er [Michael Thomas, Fanbeauftragter von Fürth]. Das Stadion war marode, der Klub pleite. [...] "Die Umbenennung des Stadions tat den alten Fans verdammt weh", sagt Thomas. "Andererseits waren wir heilfroh, dass er [der Kreditgeber Horst Brandstätter] den Klub gerettet hat."<sup>35</sup>  
'Fürth didn't have [...] any other choice, he [Michael Thomas, fan liaison officer] says. The stadium was ramshackle, the club skint. [...] "The renaming of the stadium was very painful for the old fans," Thomas says. „But on the other hand, we were very glad that he [the sponsor Horst Brandstätter] saved the club."

In this case, there is an open acknowledgement of the benefits of sponsoring deals. The sponsor who instigated the name change is portrayed as salvager. So the fans can live with a certain amount of pain, tut verdammt weh 'hurts a lot', that outside circumstances imposed, rather than the sponsors' conscious decision to change the name of the stadium (that he also owned, in this case). Similarly, the president from one of Hamburg's HSV fan clubs states further down in the same article about the renaming of their stadium from Volksparkstadion (People's Park Stadium) to AOL-Arena: "Außerdem seien "dreißig Millionen ein gutes

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/sport/fussball-sponsoring-zwischen-daimler-und-playmobil/239958.html>

Geschäft. Das ist die kommerzielle Entwicklung des Fußballs." 'Besides, "thirty million are a good deal. This is the commercial development of football"'. This fan accepts economic considerations as valid and relevant and assesses the deal as acceptable. The fact that he mentions the amount (cf. e.g. to the deal with Bordeaux above), indicates that the fans carefully strike a balance between the financial gain and their (non-financial) stakes concerning identity and tradition. In this case, apparently, the price tag (30 Million DM in 2001) made the deal acceptable.

To sum up, while at times clubs' fans resist the financial incentives for their clubs in the renaming of their stadium, at other times we see fans accept – while lament – the predicament that financial considerations cannot be ignored and that their clubs' success also hinges on money. This tendency is more evident in our German fan data than its English and French counterparts, seemingly a reflection of the greater acceptance of corporate renamings of football stadiums in Germany compared to England and France (see §4 above.) The (non)-acceptance appears linked to the prices paid. Whether or not this can be extended to general cultural dispositions (Meân & Halone, 2010) remains outside of the spoke of this article.

## **6. Conclusion**

Having explored here how fans react to corporate stadium renamings when they cause controversy, we have seen various issues raised. One major category in our data consisted of linguistic considerations by the fans §5.1). The examples illustrated a fine understanding of the difference between everyday usage and official naming (§5.1.1), a classification of the original referents (§5.1.2) and the names themselves (§5.1.3) as more or less acceptable for naming a stadium. These considerations are accompanied by a refusal to comply and alternative suggestions that resist the marketisation and commodification of public space

(Medway et al, 2019). Furthermore, we could witness the exploitation of mismatches for humorous purposes both self-deprecatorily by the fans themselves and derisively by rival fans (§5.1.3). The fans perceive a discrepancy between the symbolic act of naming and economic considerations, an incongruity between tradition and money (cf. also Bering, 2007, 451). Bering's differentiation between the timelessness of naming and short-term labelling (Bering 2007, 445) is used by the fans to create humour. The creative language use by the fans and their folk linguistic assessments have not been discussed in earlier studies. These findings illustrate how the supporters construct themselves as deliberate and skillful social agents in the process rather than passive victims of outside will.

In line with Bering (2007, 451 ff), clearly too in the present study issues of identity-loss and -denigration (e.g. concerning authenticity and local rootedness) are at stake (§5.2). In our cases this was also conceptualized as separating or diminishing the identity of the club as an integral whole causing grieve or pain. In the English data, we can also witness the fans' firmly resisting a perceived 'outsider' owner (§5.2.1, cf. Bering's dissociation between the club and its members 2007, 449). Such discriminations or separations perturbate the ideal(istic) unity of the clubs, where "we" win games, i.e. the members, the players, the managers, the supporters, the audience in the stands... all strike as one. The final section (§5.3) visits similar considerations from the opposite direction: Here economic considerations by the fans are the starting point of our analyses. No matter whether the fans resist (§5.3.1) or comply (§5.3.2), they consider their club's identity and tradition as a major factor in their considerations striking a balance between the financial gain and the non-financial stakes (cf. Bering, 2007, 451).

Our three spotlights on the data, the name itself (§5.1), tradition (§5.2) and financing (§5.3), helped us disentangle different strands in the fans' stances regarding stadium renamings. However, the data indicate that these are inseparable in that the discussion of one

aspect usually leads to the consideration of another. Hence, the research also indicates that linguistic expertise may have prevented some of the issues. In brand or company naming or in the localization of brand names, linguistics offers services (e.g. <https://easybrandcheck.com> or <https://catchwordbranding.com> or <https://www.rewindandcapture.com/why-you-shouldnt-skip-linguistics-analysis-pick-company-name/> ). It seems highly desirable that such services would also be consulted when renaming stadiums for advertising purposes, as highlighted by the linguistic considerations of the fans, their dislike of certain names and referents (§5.1.3). After all, only an acceptable choice, for the company, the club, the supporters and the local community will allow to reach the goals of the partnership and sponsoring deals (Becker-Olsen, 2003).

A number of points were outside our scope here. Future research in applied linguistics with regard to corporate stadium deals should include, in the tradition of linguistic landscapes, a consideration of ensuing mismatches between the new stadium names and the traditional street names or local train stations. While some cities or authorities changed names accordingly, in many cases the older names were retained in the local landscapes. More research is also necessary with regard to the entanglement of the press. Under UEFA regulations, stadiums are often referred to with non-corporate names. This begs the question why there is no more resistance, especially in publicly financed broadcasting, to function as an advertising platform by using the corporate denominations. One could easily imagine a style manual with formulations such as “Nuremberg’s main stadium”, “the stadium of Manchester United” or a list of informal nicknames (mostly historic microtoponyms) such as Anfield or Betzenberg. To begin with, there is usually no need to mention the stadiums’ official names in sports-reporting. For instance, mentioning the name of the city would usually suffice in broadcasts or press reports. In contrast to the usage by journalists, the fans do show an awareness of the insignificance of official denominations for everyday interaction (cf. §5.1.1). An enquiry into the power relations in this Sports/Media Complex regarding this

question would surely be of interest. Also, a more pronounced focus on the different media or modes of the fan protests is called for. For instance, how the use of banners or the role of fan forums is used to construct an identity for the fans (File, 2015). Finally, a more careful investigation into the exogenous factors influencing the fans' protests is desirable. While we focused on supporter reactions, a more minute discussion in the form of case studies with concurrent considerations of all elements including e.g. the ownership of the stadium or the fit between the specific identity of the club and the image of the sponsor would be of interest (cf. the economics literature, e.g. Woisetschläger & Haselhoff, 2009).

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