

Dr. Cornelia Gerhardt

c.gerhardt@mx.uni-saarland.de

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The re-naming of sports stadiums: Club stances and media and supporter reception

In FIFA men's football, two discourses may clash. On the one hand, the practices of league club fans often represent a celebration of local identification with their city or region, a site for identity construction, with the stadiums usually constituting the homestead of a tradition. The same is true of national teams and stadiums relative to national identities. On the other hand, big business takes precedence in decision making within the clubs, national teams, and governing bodies; including decisions about fixtures, media coverage, kick-off times, kits, player transfers. These competing discourses are also seen in the naming of leagues, clubs and stadiums. In this paper we will consider the (re-)naming of stadiums from a sociolinguistic perspective based on textual data such as the clubs' websites, fan sites, media coverage in newspapers, magazines and television (Meier 2017).

Stadiums have traditionally been named after local sites (Anfield (Liverpool F.C.)) or regions (Ruhrstadion (VfL Bochum)). Such toponyms are increasingly being replaced by company or product names (Playmobil-Stadion (SpVgg Greuther Fürth)) or bet365 Stadium (Stoke City)) (cf. Boyd 2000 for the US). We will consider (re-)namings within the German Bundesliga (Bering 2007, Stellmacher 2010) and the English Premier League. As past studies have found, stadiums can serve as sites for identity construction, commemoration (Boyd 2000), and as public memory (Browne 1995). Starting from an onomastic enquiry, we will analyse the clubs' official stance during the ensuing debates, the media reception and the reaction of the general public to such name changes as well as the fans coming to terms with such re-namings.

References

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