

LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION IN POLISH PUBLIC DISCOURSE (EXAMPLE OF POLISH FOOTBALL FANS DISCOURSE)

PAWEŁ KOWALSKI

Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

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Abstract: In the urban space of Łódź, this paper studies some anti-Semitic aspects of discriminatory discourse of football fans. Its main goal is to present how anti-Semitic discriminatory meanings are formulated and spread in the urban space and how particular social groups (football fans) organize the urban discourse. In the multimodal material from the urban discourse, we scrutinize verbal and visual forms of discrimination captured on the walls of buildings, parks, or shopping centres in various stickers, posters, and flags. This paper implies that the language of particular social groups goes beyond closed internet communication or stadium discourse to a more open social sphere. A consequence of the social polarization found in the analysed data may be the radicalization and vulgarization of language in general.

Key words: antisemitism, discrimination, football fans discourse, Polish language, the city of Łódź

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper studies some antisemitic aspects of discriminatory discourse of football fans in the urban space of the city of Łódź.¹ The main goal is to present how anti-Semitic discriminatory meanings are formulated and spread in the urban space and how particular social groups (football fans) organize the urban discourse. I take a close look at verbal and visual forms of discrimination; in a narrow perspective it comes down to functioning of language expressions that one can observe in the city area and in broader perspective to different kinds of signs and symbols in the form of images and pictures, other than linguistic codes. The multimodal material is taken from the urban discourse, which appears on the walls of buildings, on streets in the form of inscriptions, as well as in parks and shopping centres in various stickers, posters and flags.

In the first three sections, I briefly introduce the historical context of the city, shortly describe the understanding of discrimination and antisemitism in common language and in academic discourse; further, I give insight of the applied methodology and an in-depth analysis of collected material. I end the article with a brief summary.

¹ I would like to thank the reviewers for insights, comments and helpful suggestions on the paper. Of course, for any possible shortcomings the responsibility lies with me.

Although the paper is a case study research and gives a picture of one particular city in Poland, some general conclusions on the character of discriminatory and antisemitic discourse might be drawn.

Studies on discrimination in football have proliferated over the last years. Not only racist excesses were studied (see, for instance, Cable – Kilvington – Mottershead 2022; Carrington 2012; Garland – Rowe 2001), but also those relating to the phenomenon of antisemitism from both historic and synchronic perspective (Burska 2019; Burski – Woźniak 2021; Poulton 2016; Rosół 2022; Reisigl – Wodak 2001). This fact is not surprising, because various types of information related to the activities of fans such as fights, obscene chants, and banners occur in the media (in the diverse public discourses) on a regular basis. It confirms the importance of the topic under consideration in this paper.

2. BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Łódź is the third largest city in Poland granted town rights in 1423 by Polish king Władisław Jagiello. However, a rapid development of the city started in the 19th century as a result of dynamically developing textile industry. Today, there are two major football clubs in the city, both founded in the first half of the 20th century: Łódzki Klub Sportowy (with acronym ŁKS) founded in 1908 and Robotnicze Towarzystwo Sportowe Widzew (with acronym RTS Widzew), which dates back to 1910 or 1922.² The history of both teams differs. ŁKS was one of the founders of the Polish football league before the WWII, celebrated triumphs in the 50s of the 20th century, won the national championship in 1958 (the second championship ŁKS won in 1998) with a large group of fans in the city from the beginning. At that time RTS Widzew, not widely recognized, played in lower divisions as a local team. The club started to grow in the 70s and 80s, when it played in the Europa Cup, reached a semi-final in 1983 and won national championship in 1981, 1982, 1996 and 1997. Along with the successes, the group of the club's supporters grew in number: from a small number of local people to a large number across Poland. Today both clubs have a large number of supporters and play in the major league (Polish ekstraklasa) or in the first division (Polish first league).

3. DISCRIMINATION AND ANTISEMITISM

Discrimination as a notion has got a variety of definitions that differ regarding the scope and sources. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, in the common language understanding it is: "the practice of treating somebody or a particular group in society less fairly than others" with some common collocation,

² There are some historical controversies about both dates, but they are not the subject of discussion here.

such as age/racial/gender/sex discrimination.³ A broader definition delivers an American law dictionary: “unequal treatment of persons, for a reason which has nothing to do with legal rights or ability. Federal and state laws prohibit discrimination in employment, availability of housing, rates of pay, right to promotion, educational opportunity, civil rights, and use of facilities based on race, nationality, creed, colour, age, sex or sexual orientation (Law). In academic understanding of the notion, definitions of discrimination emphasized negative approach towards an individual or a group. For instance, Sociology dictionary defines it as “the unequal treatment of an individual or group on the basis of their statuses (e.g. age, beliefs, ethnicity, sex) by limiting access to social resources (e.g. education, housing, jobs, legal rights, loans, or political power)”⁴

Anti-Semitism is a more exclusive notion (narrowed down to a particular ethnic group) but is strongly connected with the discrimination. In 2016, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance adopted a working definition of anti-Semitism that is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.⁵ As M. H. Gelber emphasizes, anti-Semitism refers to showing prejudice against Jews, fearing, or disliking everything that is associated with the Jewish community (Gelber 1985).

The beginnings of football systematic anti-Semitism among fans in Poland dates back to the turn of the 80s and 90s. It has got a historical background. It appears mostly in those Polish cities where the Jewish community lived and there are at least two rival football clubs. In Poland in the city of Łódź (with two major clubs ŁKS and Widzew), Krakow (with teams Wisła and Cracovia), and Rzeszów (with Resovia nad Stal). However, football fans from other Polish cities use this antisemitic rhetoric when referring to the supporters of both teams. In the sport fan discourse, the antisemitism might be considered as “a discursive communication strategy used by some fan groups to build the foundations of a collective identity – a symbolic community that allows to distinguish one’s own group from the opposite group” (Burski 2015, p. 227).

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I adopt a multimodal discourse analysis based on different approaches and research theories (Halliday – Matthiesen 2004). The main perspective is a conceptual-

³ cf. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/discrimination?q=discrimination>

⁴ https://sociologydictionary.org/discrimination/#definition_of_discrimination

⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combatting-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combatting-antisemitism/definition-antisemitism_en

discursive paradigm from Elena Kubriakowa and Krystyna Waszakowa that contradicts the modular description of phenomena on particular levels of grammar (see, for example, Kubriakowa 2006; Waszakowa 2021; also Langacker 2009). In this paradigm word-formation derivatives are components of utterances that occur together with other means in specific cases of language use (usage event in Langacker's terminology). The usage event is bipolar; consists of an expression plan and a content plan (Langacker 2009, p. 610). The plan of the expression includes: a) full phonetic specifications of the speech, b) any other signals such as gestures and body language as well as pictures, images, different symbols. The content plan consists of full contextual understanding of the statement, which concerns: what has actually been articulated, what the statement implies (see, for instance, Waszakowa 2021).

On the linguistic level, an instrument for discrimination might be derivative formations and derivational mechanisms that are different from those appearing in the standard language. Irena Kamińska-Szmaj in the context of language aggression and discrimination listed: (1) primary systemically evaluating (axiological) vocabulary; (2) connotationally evaluating (axiological) vocabulary, (3) words derived from a derivational basis with a negative value, morphological means, as well as negative phraseologisms and their modifications (phraseological derivation) (Kamińska-Szmaj 2007, pp. 62–66).

5. DERIVATIONAL DISCRIMINATORY STRUCTURES

Frequent derivational structures with discriminatory antisemitic meanings are created by suffixation, where the derivational basis is a noun. For example, by the addition of Polish suffixes *-isko*, *-ol*, *-uch*, *-aszek*, *-ek*, *-owina*, *-as*, *-uś*; the following derivatives arise: *Żydzisko*, *Żydol*, *Żyduch*, *Żydaszek*, *Żydowina*, *Żydas*, *Żyduś*. These are mostly expressive suffixes with different function in Polish (for instance *-isko*, *-uch* might be considered as augmentative suffixes and *-aszek*, *-ek*, *-uś* as diminutive suffixes). However, all these forms have negative or ironic connotations. The basis of the negative connotation is, on the one hand, the diminutive and augmentative suffix itself, but primarily negative meaning is brought to the structure by the word-formation basis, the lexem *Żyd* [Jew]. In different Polish dictionaries this word has several definitions, some of which refer to a follower of Judaism; colloquially also to a stingy person or a smart, clever person who always looks at their own interests (cf. *Słownik SJP.PL*; *Miejski.pl*). Lexicographic meanings do not reflect negative connotation; however, Agnieszka Wierzbicka noticed that the neutral meaning applies only to a small group of Poles: in general, the word is perceived as negative (Wierzbicka 2015, p. 58). In the language usage, depending on communicative situation and context, it might carry strong negative connotational meanings.⁶

⁶ In colloquial expressions for instance as an offensive: *ty żydzie* [you Jew].

There are also structures based on the use of stereotypes functioning among the Jewish society (inner perspective) and non-Jewish society (external perspective). Creators of these structures draw attention to the physical features of the representatives of the Jewish nation: the custom of wearing a beard and sidelocks, hair colour (black or red), nose shape, eye colour, etc. References to these features are also present in derivatives and are used in other than language symbolic codes. There are numbers of small and larger word formation families with synonymic (or quasi-synonymic) discriminatory meanings. They have got mainly two meanings: structural and lexical.

From the type of hair: *pejs* [sidelock] – *pejsik*, *pejsowiec* with suffixes *-ik* and *-owiec* and structural meaning “person who has got a sidelock” and a lexical meaning “supporter of opposing, rival team”; *pejsiaty*, *pejsiasty* with suffixes *-aty* and *-asty* “attribute of sth/sbd with sidelock” and “attribute of supporter of rival team supporter”; *pejsownia* with suffix *-ownia* “place for people with sidelock” and “place associated with an opponent team or a group of opponent team supporters”.

From the type of nose: *garbate nosy* [humped nose] – *garbatki*, *garbaciarze* [fans, supporters of rival club/team]. These forms are a result of univerbation of the phrase *garbate nosy*.

From the name of a disease: *parch* [scab] – *parchek*, *parchawiec* with suffixes *-ek* and *-awiec* “a person associated with a scab”, *parchaty* “attribute of a person associated with a scab” and “attribute of a person who supports an opponent team”.

From the cap: *jarmulka* [kippah, koppel] – *jarmulkowiec*, *jarmulek*, *jarmulkiewicz* with suffixes *-owiec*, *-ek* and *-ewicz* “a person who wears a kippah” and “a person who supports an opponent team”.

From international name of Jews: *Jude* – *judek*, *judkowicz* with suffixes *-ek* and *-owicz* “person” *judowy* “attribute of a person associated with Jew”.

From Polish name of Jew: *Żyd* – *Żydzisko*, *Żydek*, *Żydus*, *Żyduś*, referring also to the name of club: *Żydzew*, *Żydzewek* that is a transformed original name from *Widzew Łódź*.

The derivational family constructed from the word *parch* is interesting due to semantic changes. The word originally meant a certain disease of plants, animals and people. For example, in Linde’s dictionary from the beginning of the 19th century, these meanings are described in great detail (Linde 1811, p. 639). The association with Jew occurs in Karłowicz-Kryński dictionary where the authors noticed that

parch [scab] can be offensive for Jews (Karłowicz – Niedźwiedzki 1908, p. 57). The same can be found in Doroszewski’s dictionary, but the meaning “contemptuously about a Jew” occurs with a qualifier *przestarzały* (archaic) (Doroszewski 1964).

On the city walls very frequent and popular are blends, such as *Żydzew*, *Żydkiewki*, *Brodowici*, *Jewdzew*.

Żydzew – *Żyd* + *Widzew*

Figure 1.



Source: facebook.com

The blend derived by merging of two onyms (proper names): the official name of the club *Widzew* and *Żyd* “member of the Jewish community”.

Żydkiewki – *Żyd* + *rzodkiewka*

That blend derived by merging a proper noun *Żyd* [Jew] and a common noun *rzodkiewka* [radish] that refers to Widzew club colours which are red-white-red. The creators of this structure refer to the red colour of the vegetable and the red colour associated with the Widzew club.

Jewdzew – *Jew* + *Widzew*

Figure 2.



Source: facebook.com

The structure – that might be considered as a hybrid word combining international and domestic elements – derives from the two proper names: international word *Jew* and the official name of the club *Widzew*. These blends are commonly used on walls in longer phrases with some typical clubs' symbols. For instance, very offensive: *żydzew dziwko derby blisko* [*żydzew you whore, derby is coming*]. The message is aimed at the fans of the opposing team. It underlines that a match between the two city teams is coming. The purpose here is to offend, intimidate the opponent, show one's own strength before the upcoming confrontation:

Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Source: facebook.com

Other stereotypical roots are references to the beard. The common well-known nickname of ŁKS fans is *Rodowici Łodzianie* [native citizens of Łódź]. The nickname emphasizes attachment to the city and local affiliation. *Widzew* fans using the stereotype of a bearded Jew coined a structure *Brodowici Łodzianie*. The first element is a blend of the noun *broda* [beard] and the nickname in the form of adjective *rodowici* [native citizens] that is connected with ŁKS fans to emphasize local affiliation. Therefore, the blend is a form of conceptual amalgamate of two mental spaces: one related to the functioning of a social stereotypical concept and other related to conceptual nomination among the particular groups of ŁKS fans. In this context, the creators of a given structure combine their prejudice, their view of the world with the view of the world of the other group.

The stereotype associated with the beard is used for various names: *brodacze z kaliskiego* “the men with the beard from the railway station Łódź Kaliska”,⁷ *brodowici z galery* “the men with the beard form the stand for ardent supporters”. These forms of nomination juxtapose a stereotypical concept associated with Jews with a concept directly or metaphorically associated with a particular club.

⁷ Railway station Łódź Kaliska is located near the ŁKS stadium and commonly associated with ŁKS. As a local concept it functions with the negative connotation “a place where drunkards gather”.

These types of offensive blends are widely disseminated in the Polish football fan discourse. Below, there is an example from the city of Rzeszów. In 2019, during the second league football match between Resovia Rzeszów and Widzew Łódź, hooligans of the visiting team who came to the match exhibited a flag with a slogan *Jebać Pejsovie* [Fuck Pejsovia]. It blends the offensive word *pejs* and the official name of the club Resovia. This blend fits into a typical structure mentioned above: a pejorative stereotypical element refers to Jewish attribute + formal or informal name of the club. An element which emphasizes the negative connotations is the crossed out Resovia club crest:

Figure 5.



Source: [nigdywiecej.org](https://www.nigdywiecej.org)⁸

6. PEJORATIVATION IN THE NAMES OF STADIUMS

The discriminatory phrases relate directly not only to fans but also to entities associated with both clubs. The mutual terms referring to the stadiums of both clubs are also depreciating. The Widzew stadium is named *Kurnik* [henhouse] which refers to its small capacity; *Blaszak* [tinplate] which refers to its sheet metal structures built with cheap material. The old stadium of ŁKS was named *el stadio da gruz* to present a time-worn stadium. *Wiata* [shed] referring to the shape of a bus stop or *Amfiteatr* [amphitheater] referring to only one stand which was open for some time before all stands were built (the whole stadium). In these structures, we can observe only a semantic derivation (neosemantization) and profiling some non-obvious features. From the point of view of discrimination, structures referring to objects (stadiums) do not have such a strong negative character as those related to people, but rather they are a form of a language game or a word play.

7. GRAPHODERIVATION AND GRYPSERYZATION OF DISCOURSE

Another formal mechanism used in the discriminatory discourse is the mechanism of graphoderivation. It is a way of derivation that creates occasionalisms

⁸ https://www.nigdywiecej.org/docstation/com_docstation/172/brunatna_ksiega_2019_stowarzyszenia_nigdy_wiecej.pdf

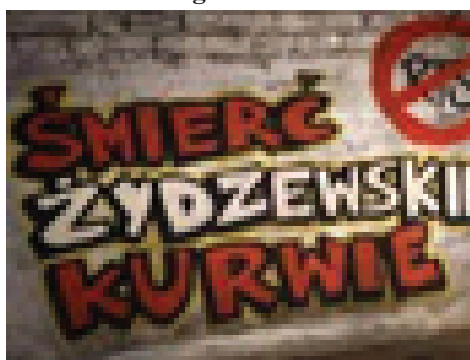
by using and violating the graphic structure of the word with changing or adding some extra meanings to the whole structure. In general, grafoderivation is considered as a main tool for language play. It is popular and it can spread into different discourses, such as press, advertisement, etc. (see Popova 2008; Stramljič Breznik – Voršič 2009).

Recently, the acronym *ŚŻK* used by ŁKS fans, which is an abbreviated form of the phrase: *śmierć żydzewskiej kurwie* [the death of a whore from Żydzew], has gained great popularity. Therefore, there is an accumulation of pejorative marking – in addition to the contamination directed against the Jewish nation, the Żydzewski's vulgarism appears here.⁹

Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Source: facebook.com

The phrase is a base for acronym *śżk* and from this structure fans using a mechanism of analogy started using the word *śnieżka*¹⁰ which functions in standard Polish as a normal lexem with the meaning “snowball”. At first glance, such an inscription on the wall *Rzucamy w Widzew ŚnieżKą* [we throw a snowball at Widzew] seems neutral or even funny, but by distinguishing the relevant letters graphically (the graphoderivational mechanism), it becomes understandable to those initiated.

Such acronyms as *śżk*, *jżk*, or numerical symbols *18* and *88*, often used in football fans' discourse, seem to be familiar with a form of thieves argot (in Polish *grypsera*). They encode hidden content for insiders only and fit well into the fan's environment; it is closely related to the prison environment. For instance, a simple wish, as appeared on a stadium banner *Wszystkiego „najlepszego” na 88 urodziny*

⁹ After one derby match in 2008 Arkadiusz Mysona, a ŁKS football player, ran around the pitch in a T-shirt with this inscription. The footballer said that one of the fans had asked him to wear it after the match and that he had not even noticed what was written on it.

¹⁰ The base here might be an acronym or a whole phrase; in case we chose the latter interpretation, *śnieżka* has to be considered as an univerbation.

PZPN [All “the best” for the 88th birthday of Polish Football Association], may seem neutral at first glance. However, the symbol of 88 is a white supremacist numerical code for “Heil Hitler” where H is the eighth letter of the alphabet, thus, 88 = HH = Heil Hitler.¹¹

The example of fans’ discourse proves that negative ethnic stereotypes (despite their irrationality and anachronism, the memory of the Holocaust) remain in the collective consciousness for a long time and – processed – still serve to humiliate and insult people. For example, a frequent element is the Star of David combined with different symbols of both clubs. In the picture below we can observe the devastation of the banner with the name ŁKS by drawing the Star of David:

Figure 8.



Source: expressilustrowany.pl

Abusive acronyms such as *ŚŻK* (*śmierć żydzewskiej k..ie*) and vulgar phrases in the form of stadium chants: *Zrobimy z wami, co Hitler zrobił z Żydami; pozdrowienia śle cyklon B*, or associated indirectly with Jews by referring to the Third Reich.

There are strong antisemitic elements. However, Kazimierz Sikora, who studied the stadium language of hatred on the example of the city of Krakow, pointed out that “the process of inheriting negative connotations referring to the stereotype of a specific nation and social group established in language has brought a revision of the original denotation” (Sikora 2019, p. 83). The word *Żyd* should be understood as referring to a fan or a footballer of the hated rival. This position is confirmed by sociological analyses – fans do not mean Jews in the sense of followers of Judaism or members of the community. The fans know that there are really no Jews on the other side of the stands. They seem to be using antisemitic words because this best

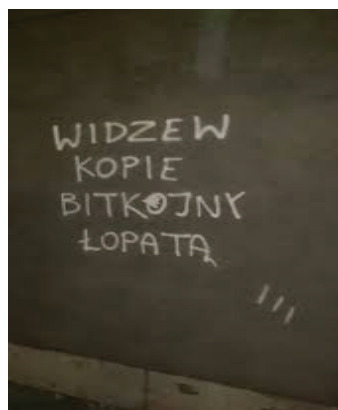
¹¹ <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/88>

reflects their negative attitude towards their opponents (Burska 2019, p. 74). We can partly agree with that, however, the elements of discourse related to Jews are mostly typical for these Polish cities where Jewish communities lived and there are still vivid direct denotations to the Jewish community. To support this argument, one can make the premise that in other Polish cities there are different discrimination strategies in football fan discourse (not related to Jews).

8. PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

The opposite tendency on the walls of the city of Łódź is the public action that concentrates on funny inscriptions referring to the rivalry between the two clubs. The initiator of the action is a person hiding under a nickname Jan III Waza (king of Poland and Sweden in the 16th century). In one of his interviews, he said that he had wanted to break the balloon of hatred between the fans of both clubs.¹² Currently those inscriptions are created spontaneously by the city inhabitants and are widely spread among city area. They are humorous as well as offensive: *Widzew kopie bitcoiny łopata* [Widzew digs bitcoins with a shovel];

Figure 9.



Source: wykop.pl

RTS zamiast do lekarza jeździ na Zdrowie [RTS goes to Zdrowie instead of seeing a doctor]; *ŁKS robi herbatę z wody po pierogach* [ŁKS makes tea from the water after boiling dumplings]; *ŁKS jeździ na wakacje do Zgierza* [ŁKS goes on vacation to Zgierz].

¹² <https://tvn24.pl/ciekawostki/stroi-zarty-z-lodzkiej-wojny-jestem-bezrobotny-mam-duzo-czasu-ra288556-3512177>

Figure 10.



Source: wyborcza.pl

The examples use a variety of proper names for a language game. They refer to the bundles of features. For instance, *Zdrowie* is one of the park areas in the city of Łódź and, at the same time, it means “health” in common Polish. *Zgierz* is a small city near Łódź, but in some specific semiotic spheres – among townspeople of Łódź – connotes meanings as “provincialism”, or “backwardness”.

This action can be seen as grassroots efforts to combat discrimination through play and humour. However, although they have become entrenched in culture (they have even been used in advertising for one of the telephone networks in Poland¹³) they do not have much of an impact on reducing discriminatory discourse among football fans.

9. CONCLUSION

The examples from the urban space of Łódź touch upon different aspects related to discriminatory and antisemitic discourse. Concepts are based on social dichotomy “us” vs “them” where one group “us” tries to humiliate others “them”. It shows that the language of particular social groups goes beyond the sphere of closed internet communication or stadium discourse and penetrates wider, to more open social sphere. It embraces not only language (in the form of texts, specific narrations) but also other codes of communication. Moreover, it spreads not only in some subcultural domains but widely into the areas where so far a standard language (or so called high register of a language) was the dominant one. Radicalization and vulgarization of language in general are the consequences of social polarization. For instance, some phrases from sport fan’s discourse are used by far-right politicians, such as: *będziesz wisiał* [you will hang], *batożyć gejów, żydów* [to whip the Gay, Jew]. It widens the research perspective on Polish antisemitic discriminatory discourses further.

¹³ <https://lodz.naszemiasto.pl/orange-kopiuje-haslo-z-lodzkiej-wojny-na-slowa/ar/c2-3141645>

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Resumé

JAZYKOVÁ DISKRIMINÁCIA V POĽSKOM VEREJNOM DISKURZE (NA PRÍKLADE DISKURZU POĽSKÝCH FUTBALOVÝCH FANÚŠIKOV)

Štúdia sa venuje niektorým aspektom antisemitizmu v diskriminačnom diskurze futbalových fanúšikov, ktoré autor nachádza vo verejnom priestore mesta Łódź. Hlavnú ambíciu autora možno rozdeliť do dvoch línií: (1) zobrazit', ako sa sociálna skupina futbalových fanúšikov podieľa na utváraní mestského diskurzu; (2) ilustrovať, ako sa v diskurze futbalových fanúšikov formulujú a ďalej šíria diskriminačné

významy spojené s antisemitizmom. Analýza verbálnych a vizuálnych foriem diskriminácie, ktoré autor zachytil na stenách budov, obchodných centier či v parkoch vo forme grafitov, nálepiek či vlajok, naznačuje, že jazyk konkrétnej sociálnej skupiny preniká za hranice uzavretej komunikácie na internete či štadiónov. Autor preto v závere naznačuje, že sociálna polarizácia, ktorú identifikuje a opisuje v diskurze futbalových fanúšikov, vedie k radikalizácii a vulgarizácii jazyka vo všeobecnosti.