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English summary

She, the Rapid — Football club names and their gender in Austrian German

Even as a non-linguist follower of Austrian football one might notice that especially in the language among fans, parts of football club names

- a) are used with the (in)definite article
- b) take feminine gender (*die*): *die Vorwärts*, *die Admira*, *die Rapid*, *die Hakoah* etc.

Is feminine gender with football club names a general rule and if so, why? Using data from fan discourse (online fora, fanzines, blogs, conversations in the football stadium), this thesis aims at answering both questions.

Official football club names generally consist of three parts:

- (1) SC *Wacker* *Wien*
 abbreviation agnomen geographic name

The agnomen is best defined in an exclusionary way, i. e. anything that is not an abbreviation or a geographic name. Words of any type can function as agnomina: adverbs, English words, Latin words, words of the German lexicon, proper names . . . When looking at the data, a clear picture emerges: agnomina generally take feminine gender when used with an article (with the exception of *der Wacker* which takes masculine gender, see below), although there is no uniform geographic distribution, both in club naming practices and acceptability of feminine gender with club names. Football clubs outside of Vienna rarely have agnomina in their names as distinctivity can be achieved by geographic name alone — there can only be one “Vienna FC” in a city with over 250 football clubs, but a small village in Styria is unlikely to have more than one football club and “[abbreviation] [village name]” is sufficient for unique identification. While it is possible to use any kind of agnomen with feminine gender in Vienna, speakers in other parts of Austria do not readily accept things like “die Sturm” (for *SK Sturm Graz*), although one can find “die Vorwärts” (*SK Vorwärts Steyr*) in Upper Austria and some names (those ending in /-a/: *die Viktoria*, *die Austria*, *die Vienna*) always take feminine gender, even in non-fan level discourse. Moreover, the use of (in)definite articles (and feminine gender) with agnomina seems to be a feature unique to Austrian German in that it covers the whole language area, albeit with differing intensity and there is no complete equivalent in German German – in Germany, only some football club names are used with an article and feminine gender (latinised names ending in /-a/: *die Borussia* [Prussia], *die Alemannia* [Aachen]), while others (e. g. *Werder* [Bremen]) never take any article.

The second part of the thesis tries to explain the gender assignment the data show, focussing on the agnomina. Gender determination with full names is straightforward. The name gets its gender from the abbreviation: *der SK Sturm Graz* (= *der Sportklub*, “the sports club”), *der FC Wacker Innsbruck* (= *der Fußballclub*, “the football club”), *die SV Ried* (= *die Sportvereinigung*, “the sports union”). With the agnomina, the case is not so clear. There is a number of purely linguistic explanations to account for the asymmetric gender distribution including: gender determination mechanisms in loanwords (which many of the agnomina are), most notably the gender in the original language (cf. Ibrahim 1973: 61f.); NP ellipsis (*die Maccabi* instead of *die Maccabi-Mannschaft*, “the Maccabi team”); hyperonymy (from *die Mannschaft*, “the team”) or morphonological rules for gender determination in German where words ending in /-a/ assign feminine gender (Hickey 2000: 650). As football discourse is heavily tied to masculinity and heterosexuality, it is also possible that extralinguistic factors might have played a role: perhaps male fans view the club as female and thus assign grammatical gender based on natural gender. After all, football was and still is a male-dominated sport, with only about one third of the total attendance being women in Austria (Zeeh 2008).

To find out which explanation is the most plausible, one might look at language use in the past. Unfortunately, a diachronic analysis cannot be based on fan language alone because there do not exist any primary fan language sources dating back to the beginning of football in Austria around 1890. Instead, newspaper reports had to be used, providing information on the use of agnomina (if on a different language level). Things are further complicated by the fact that until around 1940, “Austrian football” (or at least mass-media coverage of Austrian football) was basically synonymous with “Viennese football”. Even so, some trends emerge:

- Some agnomina are used with both definite article and feminine gender (*Hertha*, *Teutonia*, *Admira*, *Vienna*, *Austria*).
- In contrast to today’s usage, a few agnomina are used with masculine gender (“ein Spieler des Vorwärts”, “gegen den Rapid”).
- The usage of definite articles with agnomina is not widespread (which is still the case today in language on a non-fan level — match reports in newspapers will not use “die Rapid”).

Taking the historical findings into account, two of the hypotheses posited in the beginning provide the most likely explanation: words ending in /-a/ and/or gender of the loan word in the original language. These actually work together, as many words ending in /-a/ take feminine gender in their original language (e. g. words of Latin or Italian origin). The gender of the hyperonym (*die Mannschaft*) might also have played a role. Little to no evidence was found for the remaining hypotheses. The feminine gender of football club names in Austrian German thus appears to have been influenced by purely linguistic factors (morphonological principles, gender of loanwords), but was also made possible by name choice — around 1900, Latin or latinised names ending in /-a/ were popular as football club names, alluding to the naming preferences of

fraternities and gymnastic clubs. A feminine default gender was formed and the gender of football club names in Austrian German is determined by semantic grouping, much as in car names (which are all masculine in German).

Every rule has an exception and football club names are no different. *FC Wacker Innsbruck* takes masculine gender when the agnomen is used alone: *der Wacker*. Things are further complicated by the fact that the same agnomen exists in a Viennese club (*SC Wacker Wien*) where it is feminine: *die Wacker*. Unfortunately, little can be said about the origins of the masculine gender and divergence because few sources using the agnomen alone exist for either club. It is likely that both club names originally were of masculine gender (as in *der Vorwärts* and *der Rapid*, above) based on the full name *der Fußball-/Sportclub Wacker* and that the masculine gender was dropped due to the large number of feminine agnomina in Vienna (whereas there were almost no other agnomina in Tyrolean football club names), but this is only speculation.

While the original motivation for feminine gender with club names seems to be based on intralinguistic factors determined by the names of the first few football clubs in Austria, today gender assignment works just as well without linguistic motivation, e. g. we have *die Vorwärts* although “Vorwärts” neither ends in /-a/ nor does it have a gender in the original language because it is a German adverb. Current usage also includes representation of the club as a female person, likely owing to the distinct social conditions of football. Sometimes, there is even an overt connection between grammatical and natural gender. This is reflected in texts about the love for one’s football club, fan club merchandise, gendered insults and folk etymologies.