



The use of nicknames to refer to Premier League English Football Teams in Spanish digital press

El uso de apelativos para hacer referencia a equipos de fútbol ingleses de la Premier League en la prensa digital española

A utilização de alcunhas para designar as equipas de futebol da Premier League inglesa na imprensa digital espanhola

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Abstract

Nicknames have been associated with several sports across different countries and languages for a long time; thus, their use by a number of English football clubs is not surprising. Frequently, these sobriquets are culturally bound to the origins or history of these soccer teams along with their fans. Some previous research has focused on the analysis of the use of cognomens in sports, but no recent study has been carried out in the area of English football clubs. This paper intends to provide data on the employment of agnomens referring to English football teams participating in the Premier League during the 2023-2024 season in the particular context of the Spanish digital press. It uses the anglicisms search tool 'Observatorio Lázaro' to excerpt real media examples from various Spanish online newspapers from April 2020 up to February 2024. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sample reveals that Spanish news reporters tend to use many of the examined cognomens to refer to English football clubs. The motivations that encourage Spanish journalists to employ these English nicknames are discussed considering some pragmatic linguistic functions of these sobriquets.

Keywords: nicknames; English football clubs; Spanish press; anglicisms; pragmatic functions.

Resumen

Los apelativos se han asociado a varios deportes en diversos países y lenguas desde hace mucho tiempo, por lo que no es sorprendente que se empleen para hacer referencia a diferentes clubes de fútbol ingleses. Con frecuencia, estos sobrenombres están ligados culturalmente a los orígenes o la historia de estos equipos de fútbol, así como a sus aficionados. Diversas investigaciones previas se han centrado en el análisis del uso de apelativos en el ámbito deportivo, pero no se han encontrado estudios recientes que versen sobre el área concreta de los clubes de fútbol ingleses. Este artículo se propone proporcionar datos sobre el empleo de apodos referidos a equipos de fútbol ingleses que participaron en la Premier League durante la temporada 2023/2024 en el contexto de la prensa digital española. Se ha utilizado el buscador de anglicismos 'Observatorio Lázaro' para extraer ejemplos de uso reales de varios periódicos en línea españoles desde abril de 2020 hasta febrero de 2024. Un análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo de la muestra revela que los periodistas españoles tienden a emplear, para referirse a clubes de fútbol ingleses, muchos de los apelativos examinados. Se discuten las motivaciones existentes tras estos usos, teniendo en cuenta algunas funciones lingüísticas pragmáticas de dichos sobrenombres.

Palabras clave: apelativos; clubes de fútbol ingleses; prensa española; anglicismos; funciones pragmáticas.

Resumo

As alcunhas estão associadas, há muito tempo, a vários desportos em diferentes países e línguas, pelo que não é de estranhar que sejam utilizadas para designar diferentes clubes de futebol ingleses. Muitas vezes, estes apelativos estão culturalmente ligados às origens ou à história destas equipas de futebol, bem como aos seus adeptos. Investigações anteriores centraram-se na análise da utilização de alcunhas no domínio do desporto, mas não foram encontrados estudos recentes que abordem a área específica dos clubes de futebol ingleses. Este artigo pretende fornecer dados sobre a utilização de alcunhas referentes a equipas de futebol inglesas que participaram na Premier League durante a época 2023/2024 no contexto da imprensa digital espanhola. O motor de busca de anglicismos 'Observatorio Lázaro' é usado para extrair exemplos de utilização real de vários jornais espanhóis em linha, de abril de 2020 a fevereiro de 2024. Uma análise qualitativa e quantitativa da amostra revela que os jornalistas espanhóis tendem a utilizar muitos dos apelativos examinados para se referirem a clubes de futebol ingleses. As motivações subjacentes a estes usos são discutidas, tendo em conta algumas funções linguísticas pragmáticas destas alcunhas.

Palavras-chave: alcunhas; clubes de futebol ingleses; imprensa espanhola; anglicismos; funções pragmáticas.

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1. Introduction

Nicknames have been delved into for a long time in an array of different contexts, such as village communities (Holland, 1990), the child's world (Holland, 1990), jazz musicians (Jeppesen, 2017; Skipper, 1986), blues singers (Evans, 2008; Skipper and Leslie, 1988, 1989), and sports (Quintero, 2019). Within the latter, several studies have focused on the specific field of baseball (Shih and Rudin, 2021; Skipper, 1984, 1985) or basketball (Galindo and López, 2021), whereas others have concentrated on football (Nyambi, 2018; Mambwe and Da Costa, 2015). As Lawson (1990, p. 323) asserts, “[n]icknames in our culture have a long history, going back to the Greeks, Romans, Israelites, and Egyptians”. According to Harre (1980), nicknames tend to provide a richer and more explicit denotation than given names do.

The use of cognomens to refer to football clubs has been widespread for a long time. Some scholars have studied this phenomenon from a global perspective. In their approach to the 2022 FIFA World Cup football teams sobriquets, Olimat *et al.* (2023, p. 9) concluded that “football team nicknames can be complex in their construction from a socio-onomastic perspective and capitalize on different national, animal, metaphorical, and cultural symbols”. Feng *et al.* (2020, p. 59) carried out a study of 315 agnomens of all the 211 FIFA national football teams in January 2020, and they found that the use of nicknames “have statistically significant differences, suggesting subtle intercultural variation worthy of further investigation”. Awad (2012) focused on the 2010 FIFA World Cup that took place in South Africa, examining the sobriquets of the 32 football teams that participated in this tournament and classifying them into six conceptual metaphors: color, animals, war, dancing, masculinity and others.

In Zimbabwe, Nyambi (2020, p. 23) highlighted the relevance of sport as “one of the major sites for the performance of ‘patriotic’ and subversive notions of ‘unity in diversity’”. In Perú, Lovón and Jiménez (2016) focused their analysis on the employment of nicknames to call Peruvian footballers.

Other studies have shed some light on the use of cognomens in the field of football in specific geographical contexts as well. In their analysis of the impact of globalization on identity change within the English Premiership, Špehar and Lončar (2022, p. 228) claim:

[c]lubs that once had a strong local identity have gradually begun to lose it under the influence of globalization. For example, Arsenal or West Ham, clubs founded by members of the arms factory or ironworks workers, are slowly losing their identity. Today, they are associated with the local identity by the nicknames The Gunners and The Hammers and the location of the stadium. As these are 19th century clubs, new stadiums have been built which are still located in the same parts of London.

Nowadays, there is an important and growing tendency to use English lexical items and anglicized expressions in the Spanish domain of sports, particularly football. The justification for this study lies in the need to explore more deeply in this field, which counts some previous research, as shown in this and the next section of this paper. However, this study intends to shed more light specifically on the adoption of English sobriquets by Spanish sports journalists when writing in the Spanish mass media. Thus, the main objective of this manuscript is to examine the uses of English agnomens in the Spanish digital press to refer to football clubs playing in the Premier League during the 2023-2024 season. The following specific research questions have been drawn:

- Which nicknames for English football teams of the Premier League (2023-2024 season) are employed in the Spanish digital press?
- What is their frequency of use?
- What pragmatic functions do these uses fulfill in the analyzed Spanish press?

This paper is organized in different sections, namely, theoretical framework, methodology, analysis and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Castañón (1993, pp. 21-22) informs that the massive use of foreign words in the field of football is not a new fact in Spanish, since it may be traced back to the period between 1938 and 1950 in the case of Spain. The efforts made by national institutions, which intended to reduce the presence of English loanwords in this area, obtained a considerable decrease in the use of English lexical units.

Tracing back the origins of many names of Spanish football clubs, according to the website Eurosport (2014), the title of *Real* was given during the reign of king Alfonso XIII. The club had to apply to the Spanish Crown for this title and the King accepted its honorary presidency. In Spain, there are currently 33 football clubs having *Real* in their name, and the first ones to obtain this title were Club Deportivo de la Sala Calvet and Sociedad Deportiva Club Coruña, as reflected in the General Archive of Palace. Additionally, this same source clarifies that the English term *Athletic* was adopted in Spain, and the first club in doing so was Athletic Club de Bilbao. However, during Franco's dictatorship, this club had to change its name to Atlético de Bilbao, because throughout that period, no designation which included Anglo-Saxon terms was allowed. Other Spanish football clubs such as Racing de Santander or Racing de Ferrol use the English term *Racing*, since these football clubs were originally founded with the support of societies related to the area of motor racing.

Going deeper into this issue, Relaño (2016) reproduces the fifth section of the Spanish federative circular 6/1940, which was issued on 20th December 1940 as the vehicle to materialize the Decree Law of the Head of State that aimed to eradicate the use of foreign words throughout Spanish territory:

En virtud de la disposición dictada por el C.O.E.C.N.D. y de acuerdo con las disposiciones superiores, todos los Clubes sujetos a la disciplina de la Federación procederán a suprimir de su denominación todo vocablo extranjero, y a reformar aquellas cuya construcción no sea gramaticalmente correcta en nuestro idioma. Por ejemplo, no podrán utilizarse la denominación “X Fútbol Club”, sino “X Club de Fútbol” o simplemente “Club X”, ni tampoco los vocablos Racing, Athletic, Sporting, etcétera, que deberán ser sustituidos por los castellanos correspondientes. (par. 1)

According to Relaño (2016), it was not until 18th July 1972 that this decree law was repealed and the Spanish football clubs could request a return to their original designations. These historical facts that surround the nomenclature of the above-mentioned teams reveal the traditional impact that English has had on Spanish football clubs’ names since their origins.

On a different note, it is far from doubt that football is a game with tens of millions of fans across the globe. Castañón (2012, p. 344), as an scholar who has examined deeply the language of sports, pointed out that “[e]n el siglo XXI, las expresiones del lenguaje periodístico del deporte han establecido recorridos sin fronteras y un viaje Oeste-Este del Atlántico”.

The impact of football in Western societies is such that news about this sports game is generally present in every newspaper and, additionally, many newspapers —whether in their paper or digital editions— have a specific sports section, whose main protagonist is frequently football. Some decades ago, Gumperz (1975) asserted that football has its own linguistic community which encompasses not only footballers and coaches, but also the press and, last but not least, the audience – that is composed of people who merely follow football teams and watch their matches as well as those who also play football. According to this author, this sport has its own language with its special features and terminology, on the football field and in the sports press.

Martínez (1992) has stated that almost in all newspapers, including the most serious and rigorous, the sports always have their own section which, to a certain extent, works as an autonomous newspaper within the newspaper to which it belongs. In modern times, sports constitute one of the main free time activities for current people.

At present, the employment of English borrowings is not only applicable to football, but to many other sports, some of which are called with their English names: *stretching*, *boxing*, *spinning*, *trekking*, to list some of them. Thus, it may not be surprising that this tendency is extended to the use of English sobriquets to refer to football clubs and football players.

The emergence and use of nicknames has been the object of research by some authors. Scholars such as Lovón and Jiménez (2016, p. 191) aptly asserted that:

[...] en el habla cotidiana, la selección y los jugadores suelen adquirir sobrenombres con los que se busca identificarlos, por ejemplo, con los colores de la bandera nacional (*albiceleste*), las cualidades de la región en la que se sitúan (*cafetero*), una parte de la historia por la que se conocen (*samurái azul*).

Therefore, it is undeniable the traditional association of football clubs and the use of sobriquets to designate those clubs and/or their football players.

3. Methodology

The first step to carry out the present study was to select the sample of nicknames that were to be analyzed. In order to do so, the Premier League was chosen as the source for the clubs whose agnomens would be examined. Since a temporary limit had to be set, the 2023-2024 season was opted for, as it is the most recent one. The list of the 20 football teams that participated in the above-mentioned season was excerpted from the official website (Premier League, n. d.): Arsenal, Aston Villa, Bournemouth, Brentford, Brighton and Hove Albion, Burnley, Chelsea, Crystal Palace, Everton, Fulham, Liverpool, Luton Town, Manchester City, Manchester United, Newcastle United, Nottingham Forest, Sheffield United, Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

For the next step of the analysis, the nicknames that are employed to refer to these English football clubs were looked up in Cintas (2022) and Sloomweg (2022), among others. Then, the cognomens found in these sources were consulted in the search tool of Anglicisms in the Spanish digital press ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, which was created in 2020 by Álvarez (2020). ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ currently examines 22 different media, most of which are newspapers. This automatic loanwords extractor allowed us to find the pieces of news which included uses of nicknames associated with the previously listed football clubs in Spanish digital newspapers. All the sobriquets were consulted in the “Search” option of the ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ website. The number of occurrences for each cognomen was recorded, and illustrative examples of their use in context were selected. The analysis was focused on the period from the creation of this tool in April 2020 until February 2024; thus, it covers almost four years.

4. Analysis

In this section, we will examine the agnomens of the 20 above-listed football clubs and their impact on the Spanish digital press (subsection 4.1.). Furthermore, the pragmatic functions that these sobriquets perform in the recipient language media will also be discussed (subsection 4.2.).

4.1. Qualitative and quantitative analysis

First, those teams having nickname(s) which are employed in the Spanish digital press will be dealt with (4.1.1.). Afterwards, the football clubs whose agnomens are not present in the texts analyzed by ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ up to now (time span: April 2020 to February 2024) will be introduced (4.1.2.). Last but not least, the use of the cognomens will be approached from a quantitative perspective (4.1.3.).

4.1.1. Nicknames that are employed in the Spanish digital press

Arsenal Football Club, founded in 1886, is one of the most successful football clubs in the UK, since it has gained 13 top-flight titles to their name alongside a record of 14 FA Cups. The footballers of this team are popularly known under the sobriquet of “the gunners”, which, as well as the name “Arsenal”, is due to the fact that this club was originally founded by members of an arms factory (Špehar and Lončar, 2022). In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, this nickname occurred 215 times in several pieces of news published in the Spanish digital press from April 2020 up to February 2024. It seems that, most of the time, the Spanish press employs the cognomen to refer to this football club. Example 1 provides evidence of this use.

- (1) El duelo de este fin de semana entre el Arsenal y el Liverpool, los dos equipos más fuertes de la Premier League, dejó una de las imágenes más sorprendentes del año en la jugada que instigó la goleada de los gunners ante el líder de la competición inglesa con Van Dijk y Alisson Becker como protagonistas. (20 minutos, 04/02/2024)

There is also one case of the use of the “gooners” to refer to Arsenal fans (see example 2). As explained by Smith (2024).

while the players and the club in general are usually referred to as ‘Gunnery’, the fans tend to go by the nickname ‘Gooners’ (hence the song ‘Ooh, to be a Gooner’, for instance). (...) The term ‘Gooner’ is widely believed to have stemmed from the ‘Goon Squad’, a well-known Arsenal hooligan firm in the 1970s. (...) The loud and rowdy nature of Arsenal’s firm led to them being referred to as ‘goons’, and the Gooners nickname for Arsenal fans stemmed from there. (...) But there is also a theory that the word ‘Gooner’ first came into being in the George Robey pub in Finsbury Park, coined by an Irishman who would mean ‘Gunnery’ but famously pronounce [sic] it ‘Gooners’. Whatever the case, Arsenal’s ‘Gooners’ have used the term for years now, and it seems set to remain as the club’s unofficial nickname. (par. 11)

In example 2, the use of this popular sobriquet may be observed in a piece of news of a Spanish newspaper.

- (2) En otras circunstancias, sobre todo después de ver el gran recibimiento que le dispensaron los ‘gooners’ (el nombre con el que se conoce a los aficionados del Arsenal), podría pensarse que Wenger cuatro años y medio después regresaba para quedarse, aunque solo estuvo de visita. (*El Confidencial*, 28/12/2024)

Aston Villa, founded in 1874, is another football club playing in the 2023-2024 season of the Premier League. They are known as “the villains”, “the villa” or simply “villa.” According to the archives of this club, “[t]he term Villan - often inaccurately assumed to be a misspelling of the word Villain - has been used to describe a claret and blue enthusiast since 1879. The ‘Villa Villan’ appeared in the Sports Argus initially and you’ll have seen him on football cigarette cards issued by Sweetule products in 1959” (Aston Villa FC, 2016).

In the Spanish press, no case of the use of the nickname “villans” was found, whereas three cases of the misuse of this cognomen, ‘the villains’, were identified. See example 3.

- (3) El brasileño dio una asistencia y marcó el tercero para los ‘villains’... Junto a Danny Ings impulsaron al conjunto entrenado por Steven Gerrard [...]. (*La Vanguardia*, 05/03/2022)

Bournemouth was founded in 1890 and is nicknamed “the cherries”. In relation to the reason for this agnomen, there are two explanations: the first of them refers to the kit color (black and cherry red stripes), whereas the second one states that it is because the club’s stadium was built next to a country estate where there were cherry trees (Cintas, 2022). Furthermore, another sobriquet for this team is “Boscombe”, since the club’s stadium is in the Boscombe district (Slootweg, 2022).

In this case, although only four occurrences of the term “cherries” were recorded in ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, three different variants were found when looking this nickname up, as shown in examples 4, 5 and 6.

- (4) El Bournemouth tiene previsto presentar una queja formal a la Premier League por un error de la tecnología del ‘ojo del halcón’ en un encuentro entre el Aston Villa y el Sheffield United, que ha resultado decisivo para la salvación del equipo de Birmingham y el descenso de los *cherries* a la Championship. (*La Vanguardia*, 28-07-2020)
- (5) Las ‘cherries’ eran penúltimas, a dos puntos de la salvación tras sumar tres unidades de 27 posibles. (*Marca*, 04/12/2023)
- (6) Ser capaces de marcar seis goles es algo realmente bueno”, reconocía Pep Guardiola tras golear a ‘the cherries’. (*Marca*, 06/11/2023)

Example 4 shows the cognomen accompanied by the Spanish definite article “los”, which is the typical form of referring to a male football team. Number 5 illustrates the use of the feminine article “las”, certainly due to the influence of the gender that “cerezas” (Spanish translation for “cherries”) has. In instance 6, the English article “the” is employed. For “Boscombe”, no example is found in ‘Observatorio Lázaro’.

Brentford FC was founded in 1889. Its nickname, “the bees”, has an interesting story. According to Cintas (2022), one of the football player’s college mates cheered him on at matches by chanting a battle cry: ‘Back up B’s’. However, the press understood this chant as ‘Back up Bees.’ For this reason, today this animal is a symbol of the club, appearing on its crest, and one of Brentford’s mascots is ‘Buzz Bee’ (Slootweg, 2022; Brentford FC, n.d.). In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ there were only two instances of the use of this agnomen. One of them is shown in example 7.

- (7) El pichichi de los ‘bees’ fue acusado de romper en 262 ocasiones las reglas sobre apuestas de la Federación Inglesa (FA) entre febrero del 2017 y enero del 2021. (*La Vanguardia*, 01/03/2023)

Brighton and Hove Albion is the name of an English football club founded in 1901. They are popularly known under the nicknames of “the seagulls” and “the Albion.” The reason for the cognomen “seagulls” is traced back to “a ‘derby’ fixture with fierce rivals, Crystal Palace; a few away supporters started chanting “Eagles, Eagles” to which a group of Brighton and Hove Albion fans responded with a chant of ‘Seagulls, Seagulls’” (Hougham, 2023). This origin confirms the following statement, claimed by Negrea-Busuioc and Simion (2021, p. 279): “[nicknames] tend to be intensely used in competitive situation, when differentiating from other teams and/or fans and, thus, activating the “us” vs “them” scenario”. The players of this club were previously recognized as “the shrimps”, and as “the dolphins” due to the opening of the local Dolphinarium of Brighton in 1969 (Cintas, 2022).

The use of the nickname “seagulls” appeared on 12 occasions in the Spanish digital press. In example 8, we can see one of these cases. However, the cognomens “the Albion”, “the shrimps”, and “the dolphins” did not present any case.

- (8) Un choque en el que las ‘seagulls’ fueron aplastadas (6-1) pero en el que el extremo cedido por el Barcelona fue la única noticia positiva para el club del sur de Inglaterra. (*Marca*, 05/10/2023)

Example 8 displays the use of the feminine article “las”, certainly due to the influence of the gender that “gaviotas” (Spanish translation for “seagulls”) has.

Burnley FC was founded in 1882. Their nickname is “the Clarets” due to their kit color, which is a burgundy red tone (Slootweg, 2022). When looking it up in ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, 3 cases were found. See example 9.

- (9) El triunfo garantizó al Burnley un resultado entre los dos primeros, con aún teniendo siete jornadas por jugar [...] una demostración de fuerza de los ‘Clarets’. (*Marca*, 07/04/2023)

Chelsea FC (founded in 1905) is an “English professional football (soccer) team based in the Hammersmith and Fulham borough of London. Chelsea Football Club (FC), nicknamed ‘the Blues,’ is one of the world’s richest, biggest, and most-supported football clubs. It is known for its star players and an offensive style of play” (*Britannica*, 2024, n.p.). In addition to “the Blues”¹ —due to the color of their kit—, they also receive the cognomen “the Pensioners” —because of their relationship with the Chelsea Pensioners, who were war veterans that lived in a nearby hospital— and “the Blue Lions”, even in their badge having a roaring lion standing looking backwards (Cintas, 2022).

‘Observatorio Lázaro’ provided us with 61 instances of “blues”, one of which is reproduced in example 10.

- (10) De los nombres citados, Chelsea y Tottenham son los principales candidatos. Los ‘blues’ han sido campeones de Europa bajo la batuta de Thomas Tuchel. (*La Vanguardia*, 05/08/2022)

¹ Note that “the blues” is also applied to Everton (see below).

However, neither “Pensioners” nor “Blue Lions” offer results when looked up in the Observatory.

Crystal Palace was founded in 1905. Since this football club is named after the “giant glass-and-iron exhibition hall in Hyde Park, London, which housed the Great Exhibition of 1851” (*Britannica*, 2024, n.p.), it used to receive the sobriquet “the Glaziers”. Nevertheless, it is now obsolete; indeed, in the 1970s, the club underwent a complete renovation, and a new cognomen was introduced —“the Eagles”, as the one of Benfica in Lisbon—, the eagle becoming the club symbol and being incorporated into the team’s badge (Hougham, 2023; Cintas, 2022). ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ identified only one occurrence of the nickname “eagles” (see example 11) and none of “glaziers”.

- (11) En el minuto 75, el guardameta español volvió a negarle el gol a los ‘eagles’.
(*Marca*, 18/01/2023)

Everton was founded in 1878. They are known as “the Toffees”. Cintas (2022) explains why. On match days, there were two shops selling these sweets, called ‘Ye Ancient Everton Toffee House’ and ‘Mother Nobletts Toffee Shop’. Both of them vied for the largest number of these sweets. Eventually, the former won, and owner Old Ma Bushel got the team’s permission to hand out the sweets inside the stadium in a blue and white wrapper in homage to the team’s kit. ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ recorded 21 instances of the use of “toffees” with this meaning. See example 12.

- (12) Alejandro Garnacho marcó este domingo uno de los goles del año ante el Everton, silenciando las protestas de los aficionados ‘toffees’ por la deducción de 10 puntos a su equipo en la clasificación por incumplir el ‘fair play’ financiero de la Premier League. (*La Vanguardia*, 27/11/2023)

This sobriquet has a variant, “the Toffeemen” (Pubquizhelp, 2009), but ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ did not identify any occurrence of this form. According to Slootweg (2022), when David Moyes managed the club between 2002 and 2013, he provided it with the cognomen “The People’s Club”; moreover, since 1901 Everton has played in blue, so it also receives the nickname “the Blues”. In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ there were no occurrences for the former, while the ones for the latter referred to Chelsea FC (see above).

Liverpool is a club that was founded in 1892 and receives the nickname of “the reds” because of their kit color. In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, the word “reds” was employed 78 times and the expression “the reds”² appeared only once. That makes a total of 79 occurrences. In example 13, we can observe the use of “reds” between single quotes to refer to Liverpool football club.

- (13) La mejor noticia para los ‘reds’ fue la reaparición de Thiago, que no jugaba desde el 26 de abril por una lesión de cadera, y que Robertson, que reapareció el 28 de enero tras tener que operarse el hombro derecho, que se lesionó en Sevilla en el España-Escocia de octubre, sigue sumando minutos. (*La Vanguardia*, 04/02/2024)

Luton Town was founded in 1885 and is nicknamed “the Hatters” as a tribute and reference to the famous hat industry that Luton had in the 18th and 19th centuries. As Slootweg (2022) states,

² Note that “the reds” is also applied to Manchester United and Nottingham Forest (see below).

the club logo as well as the town's crest feature a straw boater. When looking up this agnomen in 'Observatorio Lázaro', only one result was retrieved, which is reproduced in example 14.

- (14) "(...) Estaba corriendo hacia la mitad de cancha y empecé a marearme", continuó explicando el capitán de los 'Hatters', que se fue al suelo en el minuto 66 de partido y con 1-1 en el marcador, haciendo saltar todas las alarmas. (*20minutos*, 20-02-2024)

Manchester City is a very popular football club in England and was founded in 1880. They are called by their fans as "the citizens," "city" and "the sky blues". The reason for the use of "city" and "citizens" is related to the name of the club: from *city*, you derive *citizens*. As for the agnomen "sky blues," it is due to the color of their kit.

In the Spanish press, we found 176 instances of the nickname "citizens" to refer to this football club (see example 15).

- (15) El argentino, que había enamorado a Pep Guardiola, seguirá en River hasta final de año para finalmente incorporarse a los 'citizens' en enero de 2025. (*El Confidencial*, 26/01/2024)

There is also another variant form, "cityzens", which appeared on 54 occasions. This misspelled version of the sobriquet may be produced because *city* has a final '-y', and so the Spanish news reporters might have interpreted that "cityzens" should also be spelled with a 'y', as in example 16.

- (16) Hoy volveremos a entrenar y después de la sesión decidiremos [si juega contra el Leeds]", ha comentado el técnico 'cityzen' sobre De Bruyne. (*Marca*, 05/05/2023)

Considering "city", this word was not employed as a cognomen for this team in the texts analyzed by 'Observatorio Lázaro'. With regards to the agnomen "sky blues", a total of 47 cases were identified in the Spanish press. The following example illustrates its use.

- (17) El gallo llegó a los 'sky blues' en 2017 por una cifra cercana a los 60 millones de euros. (*Marca*, 20/11/2023)

Manchester United is another English club, founded in 1902, which enjoys a great popularity. They are known under the nickname of "the red devils", which is connected to the color of their kit and also to the fact that they show a devil in their club badge. According to the journal *The Sun*, the origin of this sobriquet may be traced back to the 1960s, as it states that:

the nickname 'Red Devils' goes back decades and traces its roots to a whole different sport. Salford's dominant rugby league team earned the nickname Red Devils during a tour of France in 1934, when they were so dazzling and ruthless that a French journalist labelled them '*Les Diables Rouges*'. United's early nickname was 'The Heathens' due to the fact they came from Newton Heath and were the first ever team to play on Sunday. But they eventually decided that Salford's nickname effectively meant the same thing and sounded more intimidating. (n.p.)

In the Spanish digital press, 44 occurrences of the cognomen “red devils” were found. One of them is reproduced in example 18.

- (18) Algo similar sucede con el United: además de los ‘red devils’, la familia Glazer posee los Tampa Bay Buccaneers, rival de los Jaguars en el fútbol americano. (*El Confidencial*, 08/01/2024)

On the other hand, at least one case that includes the literal translation of the agnomen “the red devils” —“diablos rojos”— appears in the texts analyzed by the Observatory, as example 19 shows.

- (19) Los ‘diablos rojos’ son uno de los cuatro equipos ingleses que competirán en agosto en Europa junto a Manchester City, Chelsea y Wolves. (*El Mundo*, 27/07/2020)

Sheffield United was founded in 1889. One of their sobriquets, “the Blades”, derives from the fact that “Sheffield’s reputation for manufacturing has been the enduring identity of the Steel City” (Rotabroach, 2022, n.p.). In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, only one instance was retrieved (see example 20). The reason for the agnomen “the Cutlers” is connected to the previous one, since one of the end products of steel is cutlery (Slootweg, 2022). The club has yet another nickname: “Red and White Wizards.” For the last two cognomens, no concordances were returned by ‘Observatorio Lázaro.’

- (20) Desde entonces, se había convertido en fija en la medular del equipo, llegando a cumplir los cien partidos con las ‘blades’ a finales de la pasada campaña. (*El Confidencial*, 22/09/2023)

In this case (example 20), the Spanish feminine definite article “las” is used because the text alludes to the Sheffield United female team.

Tottenham Hotspur is a club created in 1882 by a group of schoolboys. The different agnomens that the players of this club are known by are “spurs” (a shortened version of Hotspur) and “the lilywhites” (because of the color of their T-shirts). In the Spanish digital press, the use of the nickname “spurs” appeared 62 times, one of which can be observed in example 21. By contrast, the cognomen “lilywhites” did not present any occurrence, as it seems to be obsolete.

- (21) En el día de su 18 cumpleaños, el medio llegó a los ‘spurs’ procedente del Djurgarden de su país por una cifra cercana a los 10 millones de euros. (*Marca*, 02/02/2024)

West Ham United was founded in 1895 and is named after the area of London. This club is known under two different nicknames: “the hammers” and “the irons”. These agnomens derive from their association with the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company, whose workers formed the Thames Ironworks F.C. Since 1895, they have had two diagonally crossing hammers on their crest. From the very beginning, ‘Come on you Irons’ has been sung by supporters in the matches. “The club were renamed West Ham in 1901 when they were kicked out of their Canning Town home in an ownership dispute and moved to Plaistow” (Street, 2016, n.p.).

In ‘Observatorio Lázaro’, 24 instances of the sobriquet “hammers” to refer to this team were found, being one of them reproduced in example 22. By contrast, no case of the use of “irons” appeared in the examined Spanish press.

(22) El mayor valuarte [sic] de los ‘hammers’ abandona el club de su vida en busca de un reto mayor. (*Marca*, 16/07/2023)

Wolverhampton Wanderers, founded in 1859 in Leytonstone, is the last football club under analysis. This team is recognized as “the wolves” and “the wanderers”. The agnomen “the wolves” is connected to the fact that they have an actual wolf in their team badge. As Prince-Wright (2023, n.p.) explains:

[In 985 AD], the then King of the English, Ethelred the Unready, granted lands to Lady Wulfrun by royal charter. That area then became known as the City Wolverhampton. Over the years the name of the city was often shortened to Wolves, so having an actual Wolf as their team badge and “Wolves” becoming their official nickname was an obvious choice for their football club. (...) Also, the black and gold colors of Wolves’ kit refer to the motto of the City of Wolverhampton: “Out of Darkness Cometh Light” with the black shorts representing darkness and the gold shirts representing light. A wolf appeared on their club badge for the very first time in the 1960s and since 1979 it has been a single wolf head.

In the case of “the wanderers”, it refers to a circumstance characterizing this club: they did not own a home stadium for a long time and, therefore, they used to play at various locations in London and the surrounding area. This nomadic history is explained by Fifield (2024, n.p.), who clarifies that “Wolverhampton Wanderers (...) was formed from two teams —Saint Luke’s and the Black and Hall Wanderers both of whom had no home ground for a while”.

In the Spanish digital press, 8 cases of the use of the sobriquet “wolves” were found (see example 23) as opposed to the absence of examples of “wanderers.”

(23) FULHAM 1-1 WOLVERHAMPTON Sarabia adelantó a los ‘wolves’ con un gran tanto, pero Solomon igualó la contienda en la segunda mitad con golazo mejor aún. (*Marca*, 26/02/2023)

4.1.2. Nicknames that are not employed in the Spanish digital press

As explained at the beginning of section 4.1, in what follows we will focus on those English sobriquets of British football clubs that, despite their participation in the English Premier League, do not present any occurrence in the Spanish digital press during the examined period. This is the case for the next three English clubs.

The first one is *Fulham FC*, which was founded in 1879. It has the nickname “Cottagers”, since their ground is Craven Cottage. Furthermore, this club is also known as “Whites” and “Black and White army.”

The second one is *Newcastle United*, a football club that have won four league championships, six FA Cups, the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1969 and the UEFA Intertoto Cup in 2006. The players of this team are popularly known as “the magpies”, and its fans as “the geordies” (Prince-Wright, 2022). Considering the reason for the nickname “the magpies”, it is said that two magpies would come to the northern stand of the stadium and bring the club luck. The supporters grabbed onto this and called themselves ‘The Magpies.’ The club colors are black and white, indeed very similar to those of a magpie. Regarding the cognomen “the geordies”, “[a] Geordie is defined as someone who hails from the far Northeast of England, particularly in the Tyneside area where the City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Newcastle United, are based” (Prince-Wright, 2022, n. p.).

The last one is *Nottingham Forest*, which was founded in 1865. According to Cintas (2022), the nickname “Forest” does not come from Sherwood Forest, but from the Forest Recreation Ground, where shinty and football were played. They were also known as “Garibaldians” —like Bristol City—, which alluded to the followers of Giuseppe Garibaldi, an Italian military, revolutionary, and politician. At present, they are also named “Reds” after the Red Shirts, a volunteer army of guerrilla soldiers who were led by Garibaldi in southern Italy during his Expedition of the Thousand. In fact, as van Eijden (2010) states, “[r]ight from the outset Forest were dressed in smart red shirts and matching caps, establishing the official club colours of ‘garibaldi red’”, being the Red Shirts “universally popular in England at the time” (par. 4).

As the previous sub-sections demonstrate and considering the sample of football clubs examined in this study, the number of English clubs whose nicknames are used by the Spanish press, which makes a total of seventeen cases, is unquestionably higher than that of those whose agnomens are not employed, which count a total of three clubs.

4.1.3. Nicknames in the Spanish digital press: frequency of use

After the previous detailed analysis of the presence of Premier League clubs’ nicknames in the Spanish written mass media, Table 1 presents the number of occurrences of the examined sobriquets that have been found in the Spanish press, in terms of the frequency with which they are used in the collection of texts analyzed by ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ in the time span it covers up to February 2024. Without any type of doubt, this rank is led in the first position by the employment of “gunners.” The second position is held by “citizens” with 176 occurrences. The frequency of use of the rest of nicknames can be checked in Table 1.

Table 1

Nicknames ordered according to their frequency of use

Rank	Nickname (club)	Number of occurrences
1	gunners (Arsenal)	215
2	citizens (Manchester City)	176
3	(the) reds (Liverpool)	79
4	spurs (Tottenham Hotspur)	62
5	blues (Chelsea)	61
6	cityzens (Manchester City)	54
7	sky blues (Manchester City)	47

Rank	Nickname (club)	Number of occurrences
8	red devils (Manchester United)	44
9	hammers (West Ham United)	24
10	toffees (Everton)	21
11	seagulls (Brighton and Hove Albion)	12
12	wolves (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	8
13	(the) cherries (Bournemouth)	4
14	villains (Aston Villa)	3
15	clarets (Burnley)	3
16	bees (Brentford)	2
17	eagles (Crystal Palace)	1
18	Hatters (Luton Town)	1
19	Blades (Sheffield United)	1
20	gooners (Arsenal)	1
21	diablos rojos (Manchester United)	1

The frequencies of use presented in Table 1 could be related to the popularity of these football clubs among Spanish football fans. The nicknames more commonly employed tend to be associated with the most popular English teams in the context of Spain. It is worth mentioning that, in Table 1, the misspelled form *cityzens* and the Spanish translation “diablos rojos” have been included. The latter was found by chance; it appeared in one of the concordances of “wolves”. It should be noted that, due to the kind of words that ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ is able to spot, it turns out to be impossible to know whether this is the only occurrence of “diablos rojos” in the texts analyzed by the Observatory or, on the contrary, it has been used on more occasions. The reason for this is that ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ only identifies overt lexical Anglicisms, most of them non-adapted (i.e., pure lexical Anglicisms). Therefore, other types of English borrowings —such as calques— cannot be looked up in this tool since it cannot detect them.

4.2. Pragmatic functions of the use of football club English nicknames in Spanish press

Regarding the pragmatic functions of these English agnomens and following Rodríguez’s (1996) classification of functions of Anglicisms in Spanish, we could state that different functions could be relevant in this sample.

First, the *expressive* function allows us to express values other than the denotative meaning associated with a word. Most of the sobriquets in this sample are used aiming to perform a symbolic identity function and create a sense of belonging to a group (Negrea-Busuioc and Simion, 2021), camaraderie among football fans. We must bear in mind that people who are into football seem to be familiar with all these nicknames and able to recognize which club the news reporter is referring to. Another reason to use these English cognomens may also be simply snobbery by the journalist, who wishes to sound more professional.

Secondly, another function is the *textual* one. Some of the uses of the examined nicknames allow the news reporter to avoid the repetition of the same club’s name several times in the same piece of news. To a certain extent, some of these uses have the function of synonyms that allow variability in the vocabulary employed in a text. This is the case for the use of the agnomen “the citizens,” which

presents a total of 201 occurrences in the search tool ‘Observatorio Lázaro’ since April 2020 up to February 2024, the misspelled form “the cityzens” with 31 appearances, and the sobriquet “sky blues”, which occurred 47 times. Thus, these nicknames can be employed by journalists along with Manchester City for stylistic purposes.

5. Conclusions

Due to limitations of space, we have restricted this analysis to the football clubs included in the Premier League season 2023-2024. Therefore, many English teams have been excluded. Nevertheless, this study sheds some light on the importance of the use of nicknames in the field of football, which goes beyond the original language (English) and impacts the media written in another language (Spanish, in this case).

The tradition of football clubs having a sobriquet often extends back to when the club was first created. Reasons for clubs being called particular nicknames are varied: some develop from a well-known local industry (where often the early supporters were employed), the name might be related to an area or ground, to a local landmark, or the agnomen may be based on the color of the strip, whereas sometimes it is just not known for sure why a football club has a certain cognomen.

To our knowledge, one of the most important factors in nicknaming seems to be associated with the varying cultural history of each team. In order to explore the origin of the majority of the examined sobriquets in this analysis, we had to trace back to the past of these clubs and the areas where they were founded. In fact, as Negrea-Busuioc and Simion (2021, p. 279) declare, “nicknames assigned to a team across time and in different social and cultural contexts could be considered as capsule history of that team [...]. Whether they overlap for a while, become dominant or are highly ephemeral and die after only one occurrence, nicknames of a team are very contextual and dynamic in usage.”

The extent to which Spanish football fans may be familiar with the meanings of these nicknames is not within the scope of this piece of research. Judging by the noticeable number of agnomens employed by the examined Spanish online press, one could presume that there is certain familiarity with these sobriquets among the Spanish football fans, but it is only a presumption that would need deeper analysis.

It is difficult to disassociate football clubs from their corresponding and culturally bounded nicknames. Nevertheless, despite many teams having more than one cognomen, in the Spanish mass media it is normally just one of them that is employed – the only real exception being Manchester City (“citizens”/“cityzens” and “sky blues”), since “gooners” for Arsenal and “diablos rojos” for Manchester United seem to occur on only one occasion each.³ Thus, there is a tendency towards associating each club to only one sobriquet in the Spanish press. As Spanish readers are not familiar with the history of the clubs, it would be very difficult for them to get to know the origin of the various agnomens that have emerged over the years for each team. Therefore, although nicknames of English football clubs have entered the Spanish media, each team is usually linked to just one cognomen in this recipient language.

³ At least, in the data that we have been able to obtain in our study. In any case, even if “diablos rojos” had been employed with a higher frequency, the fact that this calque of the original “red devils” has a Spanish appearance makes it different from the cases in which the various nicknames have an English form; for Spanish football fans, it is easier to remember an agnomen in Spanish than in English, so adding “diablos rojos” to their agnomens repertoire is not the same as having to incorporate another sobriquet in the foreign language.

Considering the first research question established for this study, the nicknames for English football teams playing in the Premier League 2023-2024 that are employed in the Spanish digital press have been dealt with in subsections 4.1.1. and 4.1.2. Out of the 20 clubs participating in the above-mentioned season, seventeen were referred to by their sobriquet in the Spanish media; on the contrary, the agnomens pointing to the other three ones were not employed in the journalistic texts analyzed by ‘Observatorio Lázaro.’

As for the second research question, the ranking in terms of frequency of use is presented in subsection 4.1.3. The most common nicknames in the Spanish digital press have turned out to be the following ones: “gunners” (Arsenal) with 215 occurrences, “citizens” (Manchester City) with 176, “(the) reds” (Liverpool) with 79, “spurs” (Tottenham Hotspur) with 62, and “blues” (Chelsea) with 61.

In relation to the third research question, results show that the expressive as well as the textual function can be highlighted when it comes to the use of the sample of cognomens analyzed in this paper. As far as this aspect is concerned, the present article contributes to the study of the pragmatic functions performed by Anglicisms, which have been dealt with considering different languages—such as Montenegrin (Đurčević and Kostić, 2021) or Spanish (Luján-García, 2020a)— as well as several specialized domains—tourism (Luján-García, 2023), LGTB-related lexis (Witalisz, 2021) or pharmaceutical sciences (Luján-García, 2020b)— .

This paper has shed some light on the current use of English nicknames to refer to English football clubs in the Spanish press. As Cuba (2020) states, borrowings do not only constitute a linguistic phenomenon; they are also elements of cultural penetration. This way, the incorporation of football sobriquets gives clear proof of the increasing influence that the English language as well as the Anglo-American culture have nowadays in Spanish language and, consequently, in Spanish culture.

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Contribution of each author

In this paper, the alphabetical order of the surnames of the two researchers has been followed and the “Equal contribution” (EC) norm has been applied. The authors wish to state that they have worked on equal terms on this piece of research. Both of them have collected the sample, have carried out the analysis of the compiled sample, have worked on the introduction, theoretical framework, theoretical review of existing literature, and conclusions on equal terms.

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