

Redesigning and alienating a neighborhood: An analysis of the critical reception of *Takanawa Gate Way Station*

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In December 2018, the East Japan Railway Company (JR) unveiled the name of its newest station on the Yamanote Line in Tokyo to be *Takanawa Geeto Wei* 'Takanawa Gate Way' (*TGW*). This choice was met with wide criticism from local community members, scholars and the media, in part because it was chosen over the popular vote choice, *Takanawa*. Nonetheless, its poor reception stood out given the similarities *TGW* has with other recent station names such as *Toranomon Hiruzu* 'Toranomon Hills', particularly the combination of English loan words (*geeto wei*, *hiruzu*) and historical place names (*Takanawa*, *Toranomon*). This leads to several pertinent questions, particularly what characteristics of the name *TGW* led to its pointedly poor reception, and what the reception of *TGW* says about the role of place names in the process of building local communities. This paper approaches these questions through a close discourse analysis of news articles following JR's announcement. Unsurprisingly, the analysis shows that negative criticism of the name *TGW* focused on JR's choice of a low-ranked name in the popular vote. In addition, criticism often focused on the structure of the name itself, and in particular the combination of *Takanawa* and *geeto wei*, which was frequently described as being *imi fumei* 'nonsensical'. Examining the choice of *TGW* in light of greater place naming practices suggests it is aligned with a general trend to use more English loan words (c.f., Kubota, 1998). However, *TGW* is exceptional amongst place names in that it failed to use loan words in accepted and socially meaningful ways: Whereas *Toranomon Hiruzu* came from a pre-existing building complex and recalls other prestigious areas such as *Roppongi Hiruzu* 'Roppongi Hills', *geeto wei* was only used prior within redeveloping plans by JR. Finally, many articles expressed concern that the choice of a two-part name would erase the area's connection to the historical name *Takanawa* (see Urban Commerce Research Institute, 2019). While it remains to be seen if the name *TGW* will come to be viewed positively as its role in the linguistic landscape strengthens through repeated use within the community (Yamaguchi & Haraguchi, 1999), analyzing the controversy surrounding *TGW* leads to several important insights. It is often argued that English loan words are associated with prestige (reviewed in Miller, 1997), but the case of *TGW* suggests that, when not organically developed, this strategy can be ineffective. In addition, although choosing names through popular vote is increasingly popular—and occasionally problematic for other reasons (e.g., the Boaty McBoatface incident: NERC, 2016)—as in the case with *TGW*, when not followed through it can alienate the local community. Given the role that station names have in labeling neighborhoods, the controversy behind *TGW* also speaks to the struggle between business developers and local communities for control over local identities.

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