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(eds.)

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THE GLOBALIZED FOOTBALL TEAM: A RESEARCH PROJECT ON MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

International football teams can be seen as complex linguistic ecosystems in which players and coaches with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds interact with each other. In particular, mixed international teams with large numbers of foreign players might seem likely to meet problems caused by language and communication barriers.

Despite linguistic (and cultural) barriers, effective communication within the team is vital for efficient and goal-oriented interaction and co-operation at all times. Types of communication range from everyday practice sessions, tactical instructions and analyses before, during and after a match, to conflicts with referees and contact with fans and the media.

In communicative processes, multilingualism (foreign-language communication), lingua franca communication and non-verbal semiotic systems interact in many different ways, while improvisation and proactive language strategies (language training, translation services) all complement each other.

The problems arising and the coping strategies in such situations are the subject of the research project described, which will focus on international clubs from various countries; data will be collected through interviews, observation of practice sessions and matches, as well as audio and video recordings, including both examples of difficulties and of successful approaches to the problems in question.

Apart from a detailed description and analysis, the aim of the project is to produce a handbook of guidelines as a service to international football clubs.

The first part of this paper gives an overview of the planned project, while the second part presents first results based on interviews with an international player/trainer and a referee.

1. Introduction

The international structure of modern football teams (but of other sports teams as well) represents a great challenge for clubs. A trainer with a specific language and cultural background has to form a team with players speaking different mother tongues and coming from countries with different cultures; this team has to be as successful as possible, also from a financial point of view. In this context the question arises how communication works in multilingual teams and how team members understand each other on the verbal and non-verbal level. At the same time there might also be questions concerning the integration of the players in the club and their cultural identification with a club, with its culture and country.

We may suppose that multinational football teams have developed special communication strategies for dealing with the challenges typically present in a "globalized team". The Innsbruck Football Group is planning a research project, "Communication strategies in multilingual football-teams: Achieving exemplary

practice”¹, which aims at studying these strategies in great detail and which will be presented in this article.

Despite linguistic (and cultural) barriers, effective communication within the team is vital for efficient and goal-oriented interaction and co-operation at all times. Types of communication range from everyday practice sessions, tactical instructions and analyses before, during and after a match, to conflicts with referees and contact with fans and the media.

A corpus of transcribed tape- and video recordings of different international clubs from several European countries represents the basis for this analysis, which aims at examining and subsequently improving the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies that have been developed to cope with communication problems as well as all the characteristics of communication in multinational football teams. The study focusses on communication within the team, that is, communication between trainer and players on the one hand, and communication between the players themselves on the other hand. It will also deal with the linguistic and cultural integration of new players.

Applying the methods and procedures of conversation analysis, a detailed corpus analysis will be carried out. This analysis is approached by the researchers without prejudices and expectations; even so, certain hypotheses will need to be formulated. So it can, for example, be supposed that in coping with communication barriers, multilingualism and, as a consequence, the phenomena of ‘code choice’ and ‘code switching’ play an important role. Lingua-franca communication could – at least in some cases – be important as well. Moreover, it can be assumed that in the process of mutual understanding an important role is played by non-verbal semiotics systems (like facial expressions, gestures, body language, graphic representations of game situations etc.), other players acting as interpreters, the common frame of reference and the fact that football playing is mainly a practical activity.

2. Purpose of the research and its aims

This project aims at analyzing communication in multilingual international football teams. The following three questions are of particular interest: (1) How does communication work in multilingual teams? (2) What are the reasons that make communication work – or not work, i.e. what strategies and structures have been developed by the different clubs to make communication successful? (3) How can these strategies be improved to make communication more effective and to enable new players to integrate more quickly?

In order to answer these questions, selected teams will be examined. In a **pilot study**, three Austrian clubs will be analysed, namely Red Bull Salzburg, FC Wacker Innsbruck and SV Josko Fenster Ried. First of all, this study will contribute to exploring the technical possibilities (for instance, recording the discussion of strategies before the game and during half time). At the same time, by critically analyzing the pilot study itself, the best way of combining the different methods for gathering data (observation, video- and audio recording) should be found.

¹ The project was presented to the Austrian Research Fund (FWF) in February 2008. It has so far received grants from the Austrian-Czech Cooperation 2008 and Innsbruck University (through the Swarovski sponsorship programme 2007).

Afterwards the **main study** of the project will focus on major international clubs in Europe. Visits to one club in each of the following countries are planned: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, England and Russia. The selection of clubs will, of course, have to be flexible, depending on which clubs are interested in participating in this project at all. The first clubs which will be contacted are the ones that regularly hold their summer training camps in Austria: Lazio Rome, Arsenal London, Real Madrid and Spartak Moscow.

By observing the training sessions and team discussions and by interviewing trainers and players, the difficulties and strategies for successfully coping with communication barriers will be found out and analysed. The starting point of the study is the hypothesis that successful clubs have also developed successful strategies to overcome difficulties.

The project is interdisciplinary in its nature (Romance languages, English, Slavic languages, translation studies)². It aims at describing the football team as a multilingual and multifaceted ecosystem. Our study will record, describe and analyse the communicative behaviour of all the participants within this complex system. Our aim is to develop an efficient strategy that can serve as a model, integrating existing strategies that have proved to be successful and discarding those that are less successful.

We aim first and foremost at producing a (descriptive) scientific study of the specific communication processes and strategies in multilingual football teams; the results of this study will be published as a book. But our approach is also prescriptive, one of the aims being the development of a handbook based on our research results, which will provide the clubs with the specific know-how generated by our study. Ultimately, this might even lead to a consulting service offered by members of the research team.

Interviews with trainers (for instance, Costantini 2006) and the study of the scanty secondary literature on this topic (especially Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006) suggest that communication does indeed play an important role in multinational football teams. However, until now research has largely ignored this topic, and only the way communication takes place has been examined to some extent; improving the strategies has not been dealt with at all, and a reference model has not been created yet, either.

3. State of research

Football has always attracted the interest of researchers. Linguists have mainly dealt with the language of football reporting and commentary (for instance, Brandt 1983 and 1988, Müller 2004, Mackenzie 2004/2005), with the use of metaphors in the language of football (for example, Döring / Osthus 1999, Buchauer 2004), with football jargon or with the terminology of football (for instance, Puyal Ortega 1972, Nomdedeu Rull 2004). There are also some works which analyse football from a media studies or

² See the composition of the research team, with Eva Lavric and Irene Giera coming from Romance linguistics, Gerhard Pisek and Andrew Skinner from English linguistics, Wolfgang Stadler from Slavic philology and Erika Giorgianni from translation studies. (We are grateful to Carmen Konzett, an English and Romance linguist specializing in conversation analysis, who contributed to the methodological part of the article without actually being a member of the research group.)

cultural studies point of view (for instance, Horak / Reiter 1991, Adelman / Parr / Schwarz 2003, Settekorn 2007). Works from the fields of psychology and sports science (for instance, Brosius / Tullius 1993, Winkler / Reuter 2000) can be quoted as well.³

Only very few works deal with real interaction in team sports. Three decades ago Digel (1976) wrote on language and speaking in team handball, and in 2005 Fiedler wrote a paper – in the form of an interview – on communication between trainer and players in basketball teams from the point of view of the trainer. Until now the specific topic of football has only been dealt with in a book by Schilling (2001), who writes about communication between trainer and players in amateur football, and in an article (Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006) in which the language situation in Dutch and British football clubs is examined.

Schilling (2001), who bases his work on ethnographic and conversation analytic methods, is not interested in multilingualism and in communication within the team. Instead, he focusses his attention on the way trainers interact and on “representing the structures of the social world of top-level amateur football.” (Schilling 2001: 17)

The article by Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen (2006) examines the language situations in Dutch and – to a lesser extent – British clubs from the point of view of club managers and trainers, as well as from the perspective of the players. This study is an analysis of the present situation; the authors are, on the one hand, interested in studying the language situation in the clubs and, on the other hand, in depicting the attitudes of both sides – i.e. club management and players – towards the topics of language, language choice and language acquisition. The article also analyses how foreign players are helped by their clubs in learning the new language. As mentioned above, the main focus is on the Netherlands, whereas the situation in English clubs is only briefly touched on.

This article can basically be seen as a summary of the opinions of Dutch clubs playing in the first and second leagues on the relevance of language, and especially the knowledge of the Dutch language, with some comments on the situation in England. The way team members (players and trainer) really interact is not examined in any detail. The survey was made through telephone interviews (with the manager or the press spokesperson) and questionnaires sent to the players by post. The teams were not directly observed by the article’s authors.

To date, no descriptive study has been made that describes the (linguistic) interaction in multilingual football teams and that aims at improving the observed processes on the basis of a prescriptive approach, even if successful communication and the knowledge of the club’s language are generally considered to play an essential role (see Fiedler 2005, Constantini 2006, Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006).

The very fact that no other article in the present volume focusses on multilingualism phenomena in football teams confirms how little this issue has been addressed so far and encourages us to include this project description in the volume, in spite of it being merely ‘work in progress’.

³ See also the comprehensive football (/sports) and language bibliography at the end of this volume.

4. Communication in football: Tasks and functions

This project starts from the three main tasks communication has in football: 1) Communication in order to convey information; 2) Communication as a means of facilitating integration in the team, which is associated with feeling at home in the club and, as a consequence, in the society and culture of the respective country as well; 3) Communication in order to convey emotions.

Communication in order to convey information relates to the trainer especially, in so far as he has to communicate with all the players in the same way. He must make sure – in particular during training sessions and strategy discussions, but also in private conversations – that he can be understood by all the players, at least to the extent that it is clear what he wants them to do. In this respect the trainer can, if necessary, make his message more efficient by also using non-verbal communication. If the team fails to perform, the mass media may well attribute this failure to the trainer’s lack of linguistic competence and argue that he is not able to provide the correct instructions to the players so that they can play successfully.

The fact that players are sometimes not able to communicate with each other is often perceived to be less relevant. Unsuccessful communication among players may, however, lead to the formation of subgroups within the team, which also jeopardizes the **integration** and the personal well-being of a player in his new environment. Furthermore, it can be assumed that this, in turn, influences the performance of both the individual player and of the whole team. Moreover, the knowledge of the club language in certain cases seems to contribute to a more effective integration in so far as the effort of the new player to learn the foreign language makes him better accepted by the other players.⁴

Parallel to the integration into the new team, social integration into the new country and its culture takes place (see Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006). Communication outside the team (i.e. communication between individual team members and people outside the club, for instance, journalists, doctors, postmen, mechanics, et al.) is, of course, also relevant. In our study, this type of communication will not be directly accessed through observation, but only through interviews.

Finally, language appears to be an important tool for **conveying emotions** (for example, towards the referee, the other players, on the field, during the training sessions or interviews). Being unable to speak the language of the club can also be frustrating when, for example, a player has scored three times in a single match and cannot be interviewed because he doesn’t even understand the questions asked by the reporter (cf. Constantini 2006). In this context it is interesting to observe that the first words players usually learn in a new language are words expressing strong emotions (insults, swearwords, words expressing feelings of happiness).⁵

⁴ In particular this might be the case when a well-known player joins a club in a so-called ‘football developing country’, which may cause a certain social gap between him and the rest of the team. On the other hand, in international clubs with many foreign players this aspect might play a less important role.

⁵ The Innsbruck Football Research Group has already done research on emotions in sport, taking into consideration different cultures (see Lavric / Pisek / Skinner / Stadler / Giorgianni in this volume).

5. Peculiarities of multilingual football communication

The specific structures of football teams also raise some special questions concerning language and communication. First of all, a multilingual football team represents an extremely complex field from a linguistic point of view; it can be seen as a special case of a multilingual working environment.⁶ In a team consisting of international members each individual player and each trainer has his personal “linguistic biography”, that is, each player and trainer acquired one (or maybe even two) mother tongue(s) as a child and has learned other languages during his education and/or his football career. So in the team several different mother tongues will be spoken which co-exist with other languages which each player can speak at different levels.

This leads to the following questions: Who in the club speaks which language(s) with whom? Which language(s) does the trainer speak and how does he communicate with his team? How effective is the communication by means of the languages used between trainer and players, on the one hand, and among the players themselves, on the other hand? In this context, strategies of ‘code choice’ and ‘code switching’ have to be described. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that each player is able to communicate with all the other players. Trainers also work with interpreters in some cases to communicate either with individual players or with the whole team.⁷ When looking at the structure of a team, one also has to take into account possible groupings of players of the same nationality and language (though one should not disregard internal rivalries within players of the same group).

Moreover, one should not forget that language acquisition is a dynamic process, i.e. the individual linguistic development strongly depends on the amount of time a player or a trainer spends with a club or in a country. It is a fact that a new language can be more or less ‘foreign’ (for a Spanish-speaking player Italian is obviously less foreign – foreign in the sense of new and different – than for a Russian player) and that the speed of the language acquisition process may be largely determined by the origin and linguistic background of a player or a trainer and by the language of the new team.

Finally, one has to examine the role of communication that involves using a ‘lingua franca’, which by no means has to be English, but depends on the country and the mother-tongue and/or foreign language backgrounds of the players (cf. Constantini 2006). The central question is what the criteria are according to which a certain language becomes a ‘lingua franca’ in a team or in a club. One has to examine not only the role of the respective country’s, language but also the influence of the linguistic situation within the team and the influence of the club’s management (in this regard, see Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006).

Besides the complexity of the linguistic field, the specific kind of communication in a football team also has to be taken into account. In football (as in other team sports as well) the participants communicate not only verbally but also in a non-verbal way. Facial expressions, gestures and body language, on the one hand, and graphics illustrating strategies and tactical moves as well as video studies of the

opponents, on the other hand, are essential for conveying information. Verbal and non-verbal means of communication act synergetically, the non-verbal aspect helping to make multilingual communication more successful.

In order to achieve the intended optimization of the integration process in general and of the adopted communication strategies in particular, it is important not only to analyse how communication works within the team, but also to scrutinize the tools for learning the language provided by the club. The following questions have to be addressed in this context: Does the club promote linguistic integration at all and, if so, how does this happen? How are new trainers supported? Do players and trainers accept the offer to help them improve their language skills? If this is not the case, why do they not accept it? Finally, it is important to find out how effective the measures taken by the clubs really are. Are these just token gestures or does language promotion really matter to them?⁸

Since language acquisition is a dynamic process and players often stay for several years with a club or in the same country, one should distinguish between short-term strategies, used when a player or a trainer joins a new team (for example, interpreters, language courses, etc.), and long-term strategies, which are instrumental for players for developing their linguistic abilities and for integrating into the team, and for trainers to communicate fluently with the team. At this point the role played by ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ interpreters has to be acknowledged. The latter are usually experienced players who have been with the club for a long time and therefore speak the language of the club and of the country well enough to be able to act as interpreters for new players (above all for those coming from their own country) and to help them integrate. The question also arises whether the language(s) spoken by the players and especially by the trainers – who have to communicate with all the players of the team, as explained above – play(s) an important role when they are signed on. How important is, for instance, the correct use of the target language, or is it enough simply to communicate? In this respect one should not forget that in football communication has to be conveyed not on a theoretical level, but practically. Language acquisition on the pitch during training sessions (and perhaps during the game as well) may be seen as following the principles of ‘total physical response’ or of ‘trial and error’.

An additional aspect not to be disregarded when clubs offer conventional language courses is the fact that players may not be familiar with the Latin alphabet, but with the Cyrillic or the Arabic alphabets instead. Moreover, as explained above, each player has his own linguistic background. This background determines whether a player needs individual help, for example, or more or less time for learning a new language than other players who are in the same situation. A winning strategy should always address the individual needs of the players or of the trainer.

Even though verbal and non-verbal communication are the central topics of this study, more general cultural aspects also have to be taken into account in so far as they affect communication within a team. For example, political and ethnic conflicts may hamper communication and have negative effects on the homogeneity of the team and its ability to perform successfully.

⁶ See a series of publications by Lavric: Bäck / Lavric (forthcoming), Lavric 1991, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007 and forthcoming a, b, c, d, e, f, g, as well as Lavric et al. (forthcoming).

⁷ Cf. Karl Ritter and Alfred Riedl, Austrian trainers of the Saudi Arabian U-19 and U-17 national teams (Constantini 2006), as well as Otto Rehagel in his highly successful work with the Greek national team.

⁸ Regarding these questions, it is necessary to bear in mind that only clubs seriously interested in language promotion can be expected to be sympathetic to this project. On the other hand, measures in clubs with active language promotion may fail for various reasons.

6. The method: Interaction analysis and sociogram

The first phase of the project will be centered on the collection of empirical data. We are planning to closely observe the chosen teams and to interview players and trainers (in addition to observation and interviews, audio- and video-recordings will be made), thus collecting a large data basis for our research. Approximately 45 hours of interaction will be recorded, transcribed and analysed. All material will, of course, be anonymised.

This first phase of the project will focus on fundamental communication schemes within the teams (choice of a specific language or of a specific medium/channel of communication, involvement of translators, etc.), in order to generate questions and hypotheses for the analysis of the recorded and transcribed material.

The analysis itself will be guided by the methods and principles of **conversation analysis** – and thus of **ethnomethodology** – as developed by Garfinkel (1967). This approach has the advantage of giving a very complex and comprehensive account of communication, allowing researchers to analyse the interaction of all means of communication (facial expressions, gestures, pauses, overlaps, etc.). Hence communication is not only reduced to what is explicitly said. This is of particular importance in football communication, where gestures and diagrams of strategic and tactical moves play a special role. Our analysis will therefore include elements of linguistic anthropology, which focuses on the situational interplay of language, gestures, body postures and the use of artefacts (e.g. a football). (See the groundbreaking studies by Goodwin 1981 and 2000.)

One of the great advantages of conversation analysis is that it allows an analysis 'from the inside', i.e. one that is based on the linguistic and visual data collected. This is possible thanks to the principle of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), according to which participants in a social interaction (= 'members') always make clear to each other the meaning of their actions (e.g. of their linguistic utterances). This means that they will always 'contextualize' their utterances (Gumperz 1976, 1992), showing, for example, by switching their code or by using a specific lexicon that they are passing from the official, formal part of the interaction to a more informal, private part. Conversation analysis thus allows, on the basis of the hints given by the participants themselves, to pinpoint and analyse the relevant contexts and structures of a given interactional episode. For our project this means distinguishing different moves of the conversation (e.g. greeting, trainer's instructions, analysis of the game, private and professional chat, etc.) as well as the individual acts of communication (e.g. 'explaining something', 'defending one's opinion', 'telling a story', 'complaining', 'praising / blaming somebody', etc.) and analysing in detail their sequence, function and structure.

Another principle of conversation analysis is the concept of interactional, collaborative construction of all aspects of social reality. Participants interact with their different perspectives towards social reality; they negotiate as to which perspective (or which combination of perspectives) will constitute the relevant frame, the relevant context, for the current interaction. This is of great importance especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts like football teams with players of different origin. Here, negotiating the context means first and foremost negotiating language choices. This is an issue that has to be settled anew in every encounter, even and especially if there is no extrinsic authority to set up rules. Language choice has to be negotiated in every single

situation, and this choice also affects and indicates the relationships between interactants. This can take place through different channels: verbal, paraverbal (prosody), non-verbal (facial expressions, gestures, body posture), but also through discourse-structuring features like pauses, overlaps or repairs. All these factors are taken into account and put into relation in a conversation analysis study. Our project aims to show how this negotiation works in the context of multilingual football teams in the context of spontaneous informal speech as it occurs during training sessions and matches, as well as how language issues are dealt with in a long-term perspective: a football team is a very closely related group – at least for one season – and its members are likely to develop special techniques, be they conscious or unconscious, to settle their language choice conflicts.

In order to discover these long-term strategies and to analyse them in a larger context, it is necessary to go beyond traditional conversation analysis methods by carrying out a **broader ethnomethodological field study**. Only if we combine a detailed analysis of various 'snapshots' (i.e. the data gained through audio- and video recording) with a thorough longitudinal study based on observation and interviews can we hope to gain relevant findings.

Furthermore, several 'data sessions' (another conversation analysis method: analysis sessions in a group) will have to be held in order to prevent a biased approach to the data (expectations, hypotheses, etc.) and to examine them from various angles. Such data sessions can be held within the project group, but they will also have to be organized (e.g. in the context of scholarly conferences) with researchers who are not familiar with the project in order to get different views concerning the data. Data sessions consist, at first, of an uncommented presentation of the data, which generally leads to a refinement of the transcriptions. Then the group either tries to answer a specific research question dealt with by the researcher who has presented the data, or it looks at the material without a specific aim and just comments on and analyses any relevant issues that might come up.

One more method that seems very promising when it comes to the study of communication in multilingual football teams is the **sociogram** (see Oswald 1977), where relationships and communication processes within a group are depicted graphically through a kind of network. In our case it will be the choice of language as well as additional aspects like gestures, illustrations, etc. that can be shown through a multi-coloured scheme. The adaptation of the sociogram method to the study of communication and especially language choice issues was suggested in Lavric (2000) and Lavric (2001); it was then applied by Mrázová (2005) in her study of the communication processes in the foreign department of a Paris bank. Her scheme showed, however, only the communication network surrounding one single working place. In the case of a football team, the graphic depiction would have to show the communication processes within the whole team, as well as with the coaching staff, their languages and their modalities/channels. Such a graphic overview can be very revealing, as it is known that there are similar schemata showing the interaction of the players during a game, which could be compared with the sociogram of the training and strategy meeting sessions, for example. Significant parallels are likely to emerge between the two.

In general, our research needs to have two dimensions on the time axis, which have to be investigated through different methods: on the one hand, there is a **long-term**

and habitual aspect which can be analysed through questionnaires and interviews (Who speaks which language with whom? How much is spoken, when and why?), dealing with long-term solutions and changes (see the studies by Lavric 2000 and 2001 in a university language department). And there is a snapshot-like short-term aspect which has to be investigated through observations, recordings, and transcriptions (e.g. How did the team communicate during a particular strategy meeting or training session?). Both aspects are complementary, the first one providing the background for the second. And both are of great importance. Of course, in all these aspects the study has to include not only the team itself, but also the coaching staff, team doctors, physiotherapists, et al.

In order to develop our study and to test our hypotheses about communication problems in multilingual football teams, we carried out interviews with two persons directly involved in the football 'business'. The results of these interviews are presented in the following sections.

7. First findings: Interview with a referee (Plautz 2007)

In January 2007 the Innsbruck Football Group had the opportunity to interview the Austrian international referee Konrad Plautz, considered by FIFA to be among the top 30 European referees (see www.konradplautz.com). He offered a unique perspective on international football games, explaining that language and communication are indeed important, and that English as a lingua franca, together with non-verbal semiotic systems, usually guarantees successful communication. This communication not only takes place within the football teams, but also among the teams of referees.

In fact, the latter is described by Konrad Plautz as being very important, though a large part of it functions non-verbally. The gestures and flag signals employed during the game (which have to be unequivocal) are not, however, the whole story, as the referee and linesmen also communicate through radio (beep signals). In Champions League matches the referee and his assistants meet some time (30-40 minutes) before the starting whistle in order to discuss the game. Trouble-free communication within this team is considered so important that UEFA employs referees only in teams, i.e. all referees of a game come from the same country and hence speak the same language.

For communication with the players, especially with the captain, English as a lingua franca is of crucial importance.⁹ Not having learnt English at school, Konrad Plautz had to take a series of courses in order to be able to work as an international referee. The specialized vocabulary is of course part of the referee training courses. Konrad Plautz reports that about 75% of the players and all of the team captains speak English to some extent; if necessary, another player or the captain (or a coach) has to act as interpreter – but this, in practice, never really happens. Of course, in the Austrian national league, the lingua franca is German – with some exceptions for certain players with whom the referee has to speak English.

Konrad Plautz also pointed out the importance of non-verbal means of communication, like the yellow or red card, or the conventional whistle signals for fouls, etc. These are international and should be clear and not subject to discussion. In

critical situations, it might happen though that the referee has to explain a yellow or red card to a player. In fact, every red card must receive a written justification after the game, to which the player is allowed to react.

When insulting the referee, players tend to use their mother tongue, which often enables them to escape possible sanctions. Only when the referee understands the words being used to insult him can he give the player a red card, as he is required to give a written report of the insult after the game.¹⁰ In this respect, it is relevant to consider non-verbal communication as well. Insulting gestures, for example (which according to Plautz, are internationally understood), can be sanctioned by the referee with a yellow card without having to speak the same language as the player.

8. First findings: Interview with a player/trainer (Constantini 2006)

Many of our ideas and expectations regarding communication problems in football teams were confirmed and developed by our interview, in December 2006, with Dietmar 'Didi' Constantini, a former Austrian international player and, at present, coach of Austria Wien, one of the country's top clubs.

He provided us with his perspective on a football team 'from the inside', drawing mostly on his experience as a trainer. In fact, he pointed out that the communication problem is much more urgent for trainers than for players. Players face different kinds of problems when coming to a new club, but they are usually well looked after: they receive language training and often even have a personal language coach, for their difficulties are often more cultural than linguistic. As for the trainer, he has to communicate with all players and therefore faces a much greater language challenge.

Constantini himself had to deal with different types of situations in his career: coming to a foreign club without knowing a word of the local language, both as a player and as a trainer. Working as a trainer for various Austrian clubs, he has been responsible for integrating a great number of players of diverse origins (e.g. Africa, Latin America, Russia). In this function, he once had to coach a team of eighteen players from nine different nations.

He reported that he was always very open towards new languages and, instead of relying on a lingua franca, tried to learn the local language as quickly as possible. This was the case when he came to Greece as a player (where he was lucky to have a coach who spoke German but still had to communicate with his teammates), and also when he came to Saudi-Arabia as a trainer, where his willingness to learn Arabic helped him to be accepted by the team and, of course, to convey instructions. Even when he was working as a trainer in Austria, he once had three Spanish-speaking players in his team; instead of getting them to learn German (as would have been normal), he preferred to take a Spanish course himself in order to be able to communicate with them. The common linguistic basis, he says, helps in gaining the trust and respect of the players.

Constantini's remarkable multilingualism, so it seems, is by no means exceptional in the training profession; he mentioned, for example, the Austrian coach

⁹ Konrad Plautz reports that, when he started as an international referee in 1996, UEFA still used to work in three languages, i.e. German, English and French. (These are also the languages in which the rules are available.) Since then, English has emerged as international football's lingua franca.

¹⁰ Plautz adds that it also depends on the loudness of the insult, as the referee does not always have to acknowledge everything he has heard (but his authority should by no means be undermined). He himself has never given a red card for being insulted in an international game.

Heinz Peischl, who, when working in Switzerland, had to speak five different languages in order to communicate with the whole team.

The commitment to learning languages is also related to the problems that can arise through translation. Of course, football clubs always provide for an interpreter when they hire a foreign coach. The interpreter, however, might not know enough about football and hence produce bad translations, or he might know too much and wish to add his own advice and interpretation. Only by having at least some basic knowledge of the target language can the coach check whether his instructions are rendered faithfully.

In general, even with a very good interpreter, interpreting is not always a good solution when it comes to communicating with the team. It is much more difficult to address players through translation, which can never convey the whole of the message with all its emotional connotations (e.g. tone of voice, pitch). Furthermore, in some situations translation might be too slow, for example, when instructions during the game need to be received by the players without any delay.

When a new player joins a team, what often helps are of course other players with the same mother tongue who have been there for some time and have already learned the local language. (But, says Constantini, if they are three or more, they might form a subgroup and try to conspire against the coach or other players in their language). In general, language training in the local language is provided in all clubs, but players might not always be willing to accept it. If the club is wealthy and the player important, he is often provided with a language coach and interpreter, who also acts as a sort of personal assistant, helping the family to integrate in their new environment. In general, the family is often a bigger problem than the player himself, who is pampered by the club and has continuous contact with his teammates, while the wife and children often completely lack orientation in the new surroundings. Integration might still be difficult even for the player himself, for example, when he has to face a different climate - the harsh Austrian winters can really be a problem for players of African or South American origin!

What also helps a coach in his communication with the team (and a player in his communication with the coach and other players) are, not surprisingly, all kinds of non-verbal channels like gestures, as well as graphic means of communication: actually, trainers regularly use flipcharts for tactical instructions. In addition, Constantini pointed out the importance of reading a player's body language in order to learn how he feels and whether he has understood the message.

Where language becomes an obstacle to communication, the practical aspect, though, helps a lot. Players are, in general, experienced professionals who know perfectly well all the moves and tricks that can be applied in a given situation, and who understand on the spot which of them can be used effectively. This means that, even with very poor language skills, a good player will always be accepted by his teammates, as "the language he speaks is football" (Constantini 2006, translated by us).

Thus it seems that football is a kind of universal language, helping to overcome the communications problems that could be expected in globalized multilingual teams. In Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen's (2006) terms: "Feet speak louder than the tongue".

9. Relevance and effects of the project

The globalized football team is a special case of a multilingual ecosystem, worth investigating through a comprehensive sociolinguistic and ethnographic/conversation analytic study. The results of the project could be transferred to other kinds of team sports, where the mechanisms can be assumed to be very similar. Furthermore, the football team can also be viewed as a microcosm or a **micromodel of a pluralistic society**, where people from different cultures meet to constitute a new multicultural society; therefore our study is likely to have some relevance for and impact on modern society in general.

The integration of migrants is an issue that is increasingly viewed as being closely linked with language competence. In this context, a study of football teams as linguistic microcosms could lead to new insights and fresh views. In our globalized 21st century world, the questions of multilingualism, of code choice and especially of code switching have to be dealt with in a new and creative way. Since football is a very popular subject, it can serve as a vehicle for raising public consciousness for issues of multilingualism. Here again, the small world of the football team, where a multitude of nationalities meet as small groups and often as single persons, can help to provide new answers to relevant social questions. Actually, national and linguistic confrontations seem to be inevitable in a football team, which nevertheless has to function as a group and integrate every single member in order to be successful. At the same time, each foreign player has to integrate into a larger community outside the club. This leads to issues that are generally dealt with in sociology and cultural studies.

The integrational impact of a successful team on the society it is rooted in is shown by the national football teams of several countries. When the French team, composed of players of different origin, won the World Cup in 1998, this victory created a feeling of unity among the whole population, regardless of an individual's origin or colour. For a few happy moments, football made people believe that a pluralistic multicultural society was possible. When Iraq, where Sunnites and Shiites play together in the national team, won the Asia Cup in 2007, this was seen as a triumph for the whole country. The football victory became a symbol of what can be achieved by mutual tolerance and trying to live and work together peacefully.

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