

Eva Lavric / Gerhard Pisek  
Andrew Skinner / Wolfgang Stadler  
(eds.)

# The Linguistics of Football

*Language in Performance* 38

Edited by Werner Hüllent and Rainer Schulze

Advisory Board:

Thomas Herbst (Erlangen), Andreas Jucker (Zürich),  
Manfred Krug (Bamberg), Christian Mair (Freiburg i. Br.),  
Ute Römer (Hannover), Andrea Sand (Trier),  
Hans-Jörg Schmid (München), Josef Schmied (Chemnitz)  
and Edgar W. Schneider (Regensburg)

**gnV** Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen 2008

## INTRODUCTION

EVA LAVRIC

The language of football offers many rewarding topics for linguistic research. One such topic is the lexicographic analysis of football vocabulary. Since, on the one hand, a football match is made up of a relatively small number of ever-recurring events (shots, passes, referee interventions, etc.), but, on the other hand, myriads of texts (written reports, spoken commentary, etc.) are produced every day which describe these events, a vocabulary has been developed in many languages which abounds with synonyms, with fine-grained semantic distinctions and with subtle stylistic variation. (SCHMIDT, in this volume)

This volume is meant to illustrate the richness of linguistic analysis in connection with football. Combining these two fields of activity – football and linguistics – has hardly been attempted before, but the articles in this book clearly show how promising and fruitful, in terms of insights into both domains, such an undertaking can be.

### 1. Football terminology

The language of football is first and foremost football terminology. Therefore the volume starts with several articles dealing with football terminology: in the first article, SCHMIDT presents his *Kicktionary*, a multilingual (English, German, French) electronic resource of the language of football, which combines methods from corpus linguistics, the theory of frame semantics and the concept of semantic relations in order to enable the user to explore relationships between lexical units in various ways. The *Kicktionary* also served SZCZESNIAK / CALLIES as the basis for their investigation of the syntactic and semantic properties of verbal constructions that carry an idiomatic interpretation of 'obtainment' effected in a specified manner. Using examples from German, Polish and English, they show the great similarities regarding the effects of certain particles and prefixes observable in the three languages. It comes as no surprise that the constant action on the pitch is closely related to verbs describing such action. UCHECHUKWU looks at such verbs – in the Igbo language of Nigeria, where a Root Schema of verb roots is used to express concepts like 'kick football'.

Due to its great popularity, football has become an area with a special terminology known all over the world; this is one of the reasons why it can be difficult to draw a clear line between words belonging to the general language, on the one hand, and special football terms, on the other. Several articles show that, in many languages, the question of football terminology is, above all, a question of English loan words and loan translations – which is, of course, due to the origin of the game. In this context, PAVIĆ PINTARIĆ analyses the Croatian language of football, while SEPEK deals with POLISH, DOSEV with Bulgarian, and BERNARD with French; EL SAYED and GAMAL both look at Egyptian Arabic.

## 2. Football language

Not surprisingly, the language of football is characterised by a great variety of idioms – as shown by MATULINA / ČORALIĆ in their analysis of Croatian, Bosnian, German and Austrian newspapers – and metaphors, which can mostly be found in live football commentary. Several articles suggest that, although conflict, war and peace are the basis of many metaphors in all cultures and languages (cf. NORDIN on German and English, VIERKANT on German – both based on Lakoff / Johnson 1980), there exist interesting differences regarding their frequency or individual variation. AnCHIMBE, for example, shows that in the West Bank a shot at goal can be called a ‘ground-to-ground missile’, while in Cameroon ‘banana shots’ are possible. Focussing on phrases containing the words ‘net’, ‘minute(s)’ and ‘whistle’, LEVIN shows that the language of English football reporting largely consists of semi-fixed phrases with conventionalized functions to describe recurring events in a game.

In relation to the language of football reporting, onymic aspects like the nicknames of players, the names of stadiums or terms used to describe one’s own or the opposing teams are also worth investigating (cf. the article by CALDERÓN). Onymic aspects are, among others, dealt with by SHAMSUDDIN / KAMARUDDIN, who present a general overview of the language of football reporting in Malaysian newspapers. SONNENHAUSER analyses the use of the indefinite article *ein* + proper name in German (e.g. *ein Franz Beckenbauer*), showing how proper names develop from demonstratives to common nouns.

## 3. Football discourses

(Critical) discourse analysis is applied by RICHARD in his study of the French TV commentary of the 1976 European club championship final between Bayern Munich and St. Étienne; he shows with which linguistic means a defeat can be euphemised. Using the example of the Agnelli family and its close ties to Juventus Turin, KUHN investigates how politics and football are intertwined in Italy, while HALLETT / KAPLAN-WEINGER draw interesting parallels between sports and religion in their study of football and soccer halls of fame and their respective websites, which are intended to mobilise sports fans into demonstrating their respect and devotion.

A special kind of football discourse – namely discourse that is not about the game itself, but that is part of the event – is studied by SCHIERING and LUHRS, who both investigate football chants performed by supporters of German and English teams. SCHIERING explains how, in the industrial area of the Ruhr, regional identity is expressed through the chants and cheers of Schalke 04 supporters, while LUHRS describes the chants of English supporters as modern-day examples of the traditional ‘blason populaire’, as an expression of one group’s outlook and self-image that often involves denigrating other groups.

In his study of Polish football language, DUDA focuses on the terms *kibic* and *pseudokibic*, the former denoting a real or ‘true’ fan, the latter a pseudo-fan or hooligan;

he describes how these two terms are used by the media to marginalize the problem of football violence in Poland.

## 4. Football and the media

Football games are media events, and the media play a decisive role in how football is staged and presented. A series of articles analyse how football games are reported in various media, ranging from television and radio to newspapers and on-line minute-by-minute commentaries. These commentaries are investigated by CHOVANEC, who – like ANCHIMBE in his article – stresses the infotainment element of such commentaries, which are also characterized by a high degree of involvement on the part of those participating in the discourse. The spectacularization of football and its language in Spanish and Argentine television broadcasts is the topic of JUNG’S article, in which features like players’ nicknames, national stereotypes and the expression of emotions are investigated.

MÜLLER presents an analysis of radio football commentary, which he analyzes in connection with the corresponding television images of the same games; these in turn allow the identification of the extra-linguistic events leading to what is described in the commentary. He shows that the type of event described – and when it is being described – have important consequences for the commentator’s verbal output (e.g. syntactic complexity, pronouns, past time markers, etc.). The interplay between play-by-play reporting and colour commentary in live football commentary (BBC) is described by GERHARDT in her micro-analysis of this particular setting, and also mentioned by LAVRIC et al.

In his article about the Past Simple and Present Perfect in English football interviews, WALKER demonstrates how the Present Perfect is used in such situations to recount events in past time, i.e. is used as a narrative tense, although conventionally in English only the Preterit is available for this purpose.

Live football commentary is always done under great time pressure; as a result, speech errors tend to occur, as is demonstrated by MAKAROVA in her analysis of Russian television commentaries of tennis and football games.

In newspaper articles the aspect post-match evaluation is of central importance, as is shown by WIREDU / ANDERSON in their study of the use of adjectives in Ghanaian newspapers, where they come to the conclusion that, despite football’s highly competitive nature, positive adjectives tend to dominate.

## 5. Media and discourse: Emotions

Emotions in football commentary are dealt with by THEODOROPOULOU, JUNG and the second article by the INNSBRUCK FOOTBALL RESEARCH GROUP (LAVRIC et al.). Here, although there may be national differences between how emotions are expressed and staged, certain features like intonation, repetition, direct address to players, or pauses can be found in all languages and cultures. The expression of emotion is closely linked to the ‘spectacularization’ of football events, as described by JUNG (Spanish and Argentine radio and television) and THEODOROPOULOU (Greek

'triumphalese' after winning EURO 2004). The following quotation from JUNG'S article illustrates the strong emotional involvement in connection with football:

1. "[...] esto ha sido un espectáculo, ¡que hemos vivido todos! ¡Que hemos sufrido todos! ¡Y que hemos disfrutado todos!!" – 'This has been a spectacle that we all have experienced! During which we all have suffered! And that we all have enjoyed!'

## 6. Football and multilingualism

The fact that international football, regardless of its presentation in the media, is also an activity where people work together in a multilingual context, is also taken into account by the INNSBRUCK FOOTBALL RESEARCH GROUP (GIERA et al.), which analyses strategies like 'code choice' and 'code switching', as well as aspects of intercultural and non-verbal communication.

The article by THALER shows how the topic of football can be used for language learning, and why football definitely belongs in the EFL classroom.

Let us give one of our contributors (ANCHIMBE) the last word:

Football is perhaps the most popular sport in the present century. It has established itself not only as the most prestigious club and national sport, but also as one of the most lucrative sports (consider player contracts, transfers, club take-overs, television transmission rights, sale of T-shirts, etc.). Football more than many other team sports is unique in its ambiguous ability to unite and divide at the same time – consider national/regional unity during football competitions and (in)famous hooligan violence during and after games or tournaments. Beside this, football is now a battlefield for several issues: the fight against racism (e.g. banners and flyers during games or information slots on television during transmission of football games); the resolution of conflicts (e.g. the match Israel-Palestine vs. World stars 2006); the alleviation of poverty (e.g. Michael Schumacher + friends vs. World stars, or Team Ronaldo vs. Team Zidane (2005 & 2006) both under the UN). What all this points to is that the sport has become so dynamic and diverse that it is used – both consciously and unconsciously – to represent reality, political and social issues, tastes in fashion, as well as racial and minority awareness.