

# *Free kicks, dribblers and WAGs. Exploring the language of “the people’s game”*

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*“Football and English are the only truly global languages.”*  
Sir Bobby Charlton

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 “The people’s game” – “the world’s game”**

Football comes in many shapes and colours and goes by many names. One of them, of course, is its synonym *soccer* – an “odious little word” in comparison with *football*, according to Seddon (2004:3) – used especially to distinguish it from the American variety, as in *World Soccer*, the well-known football magazine. Other expressions are of a less objective, descriptive nature. Thus, among football aficionados, football is often, and lovingly, referred to as “the beautiful game”, a phrase gaining currency in the wake of the brilliant – and aesthetically pleasing – football displayed by Brazilian national teams in the 1950s and 1960s. Another widely used term, of older standing, is “the people’s game”.<sup>1</sup>

The present-day status of football as the world’s most popular sport – “the world’s game”, another frequent appellation (cf. e.g. the title of Murray 1996) – is almost a truism. It may be illustrated and supported by some relevant figures, drawn from the so-called Big Count carried out by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) in 2006: 265 million players (239 million males, 26 million females), 5 million referees and officials, 1.7 million teams, 0.3 million clubs (cf. Kunz 2007). In other words, the grand total of people actively involved in football amounts to some 270 million worldwide, a staggering figure, to which should be added all those more passively involved as spectators, “live”, via television or on the web. For example, as noted by Goldblatt (2007:x), “[a]round half the planet watched the 2006 World Cup Final – three billion people have never done anything simultaneously before.”

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<sup>1</sup> As to the phrase “the beautiful game”, whose origins are unclear, cf. the English title of Pelé’s autobiography: *My Life and the Beautiful Game* (1977). (The great Brazilian himself was in all likelihood more used to the corresponding Portuguese phrase: *jogo bonito*.) Incidentally, both “the beautiful game” and “the people’s game” figure prominently as headings for two separate parts of Goldblatt’s (2007) monumental history of football, as well as in the titles of various books on the game.

Thus, in terms of numbers alone, football in the early 21st century may be seen as an unrivalled, still unfolding success story, the culmination of a cumbersome journey where the road has been long and winding. The story, in outline, is well known by now. The standard version will include at least the following ingredients (cf. e.g. Goldblatt 2007):

- football’s humble beginnings in “the mob game of medieval Britain” (Wilson 2008:10), a largely unregulated, often brutal, kick-and-rush village pastime, where rioting was never far away – certainly “the people’s game”, hardly “the beautiful game”;
- the adoption and development of the traditional, wildgrown “street football” by English public schools in the late 18th and early 19th centuries;
- the birth of the modern game by regulation (Laws of the Game) in the 1860s, in a distinctly upper-class context;<sup>2</sup>
- its somewhat paradoxical, increasing appeal to British working-class people, alongside its gradual international spread, mediated by sailors, engineers and businessmen, within and outside Europe, from the late 19th and throughout the 20th century;
- its close financial ties with the international media industry, in particular since the mid-1990s, ever-extending TV coverage paving the way for the big money.

The last few decades have seen football undergo an accelerating process of commercialization, where merchandise, private ownership of clubs, sponsorship deals, multi-billion TV contracts and stock market introductions have become glaring features of its present-day environment. Top-level football has long ceased to be a mere sport; it is just as much a socio-economic phenomenon, an arena for big business and big businessmen around the globe.

In short, “the people’s game” has indeed become “the world’s game”, the global sport par excellence, commanding the close attention of untold numbers of people, regardless of social and political conditions, in most parts of the world. In a local context, a successful football club may contribute substantially to the perceived identity, and projected image, of smaller or larger places and communities (cf. Andersson 2002, 2011). Internationally, today’s football – especially of the professional, big-club brand – finds itself, more than ever, at the crossroads of sport and the entertainment industry. In terms of coverage, the FIFA World Cup makes up the world’s biggest media event, bigger than the Olympics. Football, of course, has long been a conspicuous part of mass culture in many countries, of historical and political importance, well beyond the domain of sport alone. Goldblatt (2007:xiv) argues that “[n]o history of the modern world is complete without an account of football.” In a similar vein, in a postwar European context, the impact of football as a political factor is stressed by Judt (2007:782): “What really united Europe was football.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a partly different, revisionist view of football’s early history, see Harvey (2005).

<sup>3</sup> In this connection, cf. Seddon (2004:10), who argues that football is “routinely sidelined by historians” – a judgment that may no longer be quite accurate, as evidenced by Judt (2007) above.

## 1.2 Communicating about football: the English bias

In view of the fact that 19th-century Britain stands out as the undisputed cradle of modern football, conquering countries and continents in a matter of decades around the turn of the century 1900, it is no wonder that English was the first language used in connection with the game, not only in Britain. For example, the early 20th-century inaugural statutes of the White Rovers, an English-named club in Paris, even stipulated that “all players must use the English language exclusively when playing together” (Goldblatt 2007:116). At an everyday level of cross-linguistic influence, obvious traces of the early English impact in the form of loanwords like *forward*, *dribble* and *offside* are to be found in a number of languages, although not to an equal degree (cf. Bergh & Ohlander 2012). With the passage of time, however, many English football terms came to be rendered by native-language equivalents across the globe, often in the form of semantic loans or loan translations, such as Swedish *hörna* or *hörnspark* for *corner (kick)* and German *abseits* for *offside*, but also as more independent native expressions, like Italian *calcio* ‘football’.

In the past hundred years, as is well known, English has attained a historically unique position as a global language, *the* lingua franca of the world (see e.g. Crystal 2003, Mauranen & Hynninen 2010). During the same period, by a twist of fate, football has become the world’s number one sport. In simplified terms, it took a thousand years for English to achieve world dominance as a global language, whereas football needed a hundred years to attain its present status as the world’s most popular game – two separate developments coalescing, as it were, in the latter part of the 20th century. Although not causally related, these two historical circumstances, working in tandem and strengthened by the fact that modern football was invented by English-speaking people, have created a strong bond between football and the English language. The connection between football and English as lingua franca may be seen at many levels. For instance, three Swedish football magazines are called, respectively, *Goal*, *Offside* and *FourFourTwo*, the latter two reflecting a well-known rule and a specific tactical formation, respectively. At a more basic, interpersonal level, English is often used in communication between coaches and players, as well as between players, in many of today’s clubs, where multilingual backgrounds are the rule rather than the exception (cf. Giera et al. 2008; Ringbom, forthcoming).

Thus, despite the global nature of today’s football, English continues to play a prominent role in it – more so, in fact, than British national teams in recent years. There may indeed be some truth to the statement – overstatement, some might say – by the legendary English footballer Bobby Charlton, already quoted, to the effect that “[f]ootball and English are the only truly global languages” (cf. Thaler 2008). On a similar note, Seddon (2004:8) argues that “*football* is the world’s best-known word”.

It would seem, therefore, that English football language, loosely defined as the English used in communication about football, in various contexts and settings, is well worth exploring on a scholarly basis. A linguistic study of football language

may take its departure from a variety of perspectives, ranging from its characteristic features – lexicological and other – as a “special language” to its historical development and cross-linguistic repercussions over the last hundred years or so.

## 2. Football language

### 2.1 A “special language” – and a public one

As noted by Seddon (2004:4), Dr Johnson’s famous English dictionary of 1755 does include the word *football* – but only in the concrete sense of the spherical object itself, the ball. The sense of ‘footballing activity’, i.e. the game of football, is missing, despite the fact that football as a rough sort of pastime was not unknown in Dr Johnson’s days, although in decline (cf. Goldblatt 2007:19ff.). It was only some hundred years later that football staged its great comeback, gradually spawning what may today be regarded as the world’s biggest “special language”.

Now, special languages are obviously used to talk and write about special subjects, whether of an abstruse nature, like theoretical physics, or of a more readily accessible, down-to-earth kind, like football. They are defined as follows by Sager et al. (1980): “Special languages are semi-autonomous, complex, semiotic systems based on and derived from general language” (p. 68); further, they are made up of “the totality of means of expressions used by specialists in messages about their special subject” (p. 74).<sup>4</sup>

Transferred to the “special subject” of football, the “specialists” are simply all those people around the world involved in today’s football one way or another, on or off the pitch. Collectively, when communicating about football, they produce and are exposed to vast amounts of specialized language, i.e. football language in a wide sense, in a multitude of different countries and languages. Nonetheless, despite the diverse settings in which it can be talked and written about, football as a subject can be seen as “a well-delimited special domain” (Schmidt 2008:20). It follows that football language, the original variety of which is football English, is indeed a special language, albeit somewhat unusual in that its use is not restricted to a relatively small number of specialists. On the contrary, it may well be argued that it is the most widespread special language of all as far as the number of people using it, in different parts of the world, is concerned. This also means that, despite its function as a *special* language, football language is arguably, more than any other, also a *public* language, a somewhat paradoxical state of affairs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Since the terms “ESP” (English for Specific/Special Purposes) and “LSP” (Language for Specific/Special Purposes) tend to be linked to language teaching with a special orientation (as in the fields of Business English, Academic English, etc.; cf. Dudley-Evans & St John 1998:1f., 19f.), we prefer the term “special language” with reference to football language; cf. also Svensén (2009:70f.).

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the notion of “football language”, cf. Dankert (1969). Public recognition of football language as a special language, in a non-technical sense, is reflected in terms like *footballspeak*

The public aspect of football language is not least due to the present-day media coverage of the game. This, in turn, is closely related to the link between football and the entertainment industry, with great commercial potential, as noted earlier. However, today’s football can also be seen as “the most universal cultural phenomenon in the world” (Goldblatt 2007:xii; cf. Herzog 2002). Like rock music or computer games, it is part of popular culture in a wide sense. The term “mass culture” is equally well suited to capture its divided identity between sport and entertainment. As further testimony to the presence of “the beautiful game” in modern consciousness, football has increasingly come to provide the setting for fiction and films with a wider focus, e.g. Nick Hornby’s novel *Fever Pitch* (1992; later made into a film), Friedrich Christian Delius’s *Der Sonntag, an dem ich Weltmeister wurde* (1994) or films like *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano’s book on football, *El fútbol a sol y sombra* (1995; Swedish translation 1998) may also be mentioned in this connection, as a sign of the attention nowadays paid to football as part of contemporary entertainment and culture in a wide sense.

The broad interface between football as sport and football as entertainment or popular culture will naturally leave its mark on our perception of football language as a special language, e.g. in terms of the vocabulary used when communicating about various aspects of the game. Thus, football language is not only about teams, free kicks, dribblers and offside; it is also about transfer windows, silly seasons and signings, as well as chanting, fans and hooligans. It is the language used about football in the *Laws of the Game*, on the pitch and on the terraces, in the media, and beyond – a special and a public language rolled into one. Speakers of football language literally run into millions, not to say billions, from active players to armchair fans watching the game on TV or online.

In view of its public nature, an interesting question relating to football language concerns precisely its degree of “specialness” or specificity. In particular, how specific, i.e. how sharply delimited, is it from general language? As quoted above, a special language is “based on and derived from general language” (Sager et al. 1980:68). In the case of football language, the boundary between football language and general language is arguably more porous than in the case of most other special languages, e.g. Aviation English and Legal English. For one thing, it is impossible to talk or write about football without using ordinary general-language items like the nouns *goal*, *player* and *team*, or verbs like *win* and *lose*. These, as well as a host of other everyday words, make up an indispensable part of football language at large.

In the opposite direction, as it were, English general-purpose dictionaries as well as learners’ dictionaries regularly include many lexical items that may reasonably be regarded as typical of the football domain, technical football terms such as *free kick* and *offside*, which may thus also be seen as part of general

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and *football talk* (cf. Seddon 2004). Cf. also *footballese*, mostly used about hackneyed phrases and clichés in football reporting and commentary, like “It’s a game of two halves” or “The ball is round”; see e.g. Hilton (2007).

language (cf. Svensén 2009:71f.). In this way, it may be argued, there is a partial fusion of football language and general language. A further indication of this state of affairs is that it is not unusual for what are in fact technical football terms and phrases to be adopted as metaphorical expressions in general-language contexts, outside football. This applies, e.g., to an expression like *score an own goal*, as evidenced by the following “headlines” example given in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2010; henceforth *ODE*): “Government scores own goal by assisting organized crime in London”. In other words, the interface between general language and football language is a blurred one, with a good deal of overlap: “[i]t 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” (Lavric 2008:5).

Even so, the relationship between general language and football language is somewhat more complicated than has so far been intimated. It could, in particular, be argued that much of the transition from general language to football language is mediated through another, more inclusive special-language level, i.e. that of sports language (cf. Dankert 1969, Lindstedt 1986, Palmatier & Ray 1993, Beard 1998). This intermediate level includes all the lexical items that are also part of football language in a narrow sense, like *back-heel* and *diving header*, as well as more general expressions, like *match*, *player* and *tackle*. If the boundary between football language and general language can be characterized as porous, this applies to an even higher degree to that between sports language and general language, as well as between sports language and football language.<sup>6</sup>

The relations between the three levels are schematically described by means of the figures below. Figure 1 provides an “external” view of football language, illustrating its position within the larger notions of language and sports language, where football language is part of sports language, which, in turn, is part of, e.g., English. Accordingly, the basic question here is: “What does a language consist of?” Figure 2 reverses the perspective, taking football language as its point of departure, thus giving a more “internal” view of this kind of language, answering the question “What does football language in a *wide* sense consist of?”. Note especially that the whole of the “pyramid” in Figure 2 represents football language at large, including general-language as well as sports-language items, but also lexical items that are specific, or exclusive, to football (like the noun *striker* and the verb *side-foot*), i.e. football language in a *narrow* sense (top of pyramid).

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<sup>6</sup> Within sports language, obviously, several other special-language levels could be reckoned with, such as the special language of ball games or perhaps, from a different angle, the language of team sports; cf. e.g. Tingbjörn (2003:8).

Figure 1. The “external” view: football language as part of a language

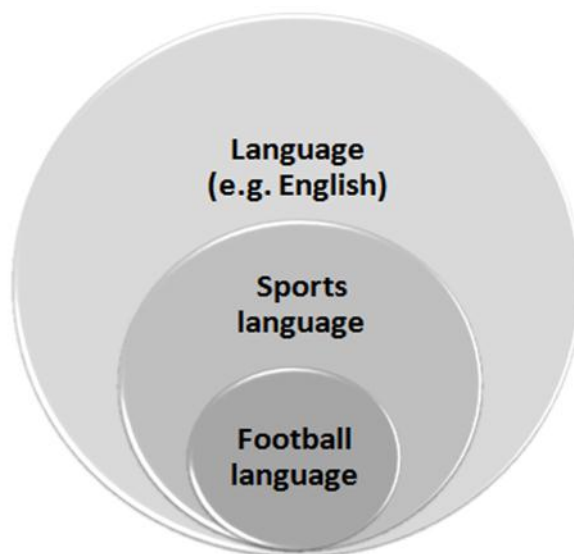
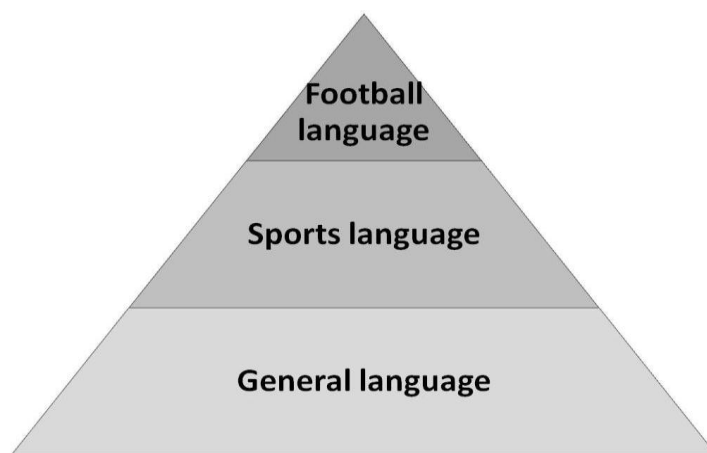


Figure 2. The “internal” view: components of football language in a wide sense



In view of the preceding discussion, the above figures should be largely self-explanatory. It should be pointed out that Figure 2 is not intended to mirror the real quantitative proportions between general language, sports language and football-specific language. In a more general way, however, the figure indicates what is reasonably a valid generalization, i.e. that football-specific items are far thinner on the ground than both sports-language and general-language items. Thus, the bulk of any communication about football, spoken or written, is likely to be made up of lexical items that are not specific or exclusive to football.

Apart from the different levels of specificity briefly discussed above, football language can also be seen from a more sociolinguistic perspective, where the

various participants in football communication will come to the fore. For instance, not only do footballers and officials produce football language in a variety of match situations, but the media – traditional and social – do so even more through their near-exhaustive coverage of the game, from live reporting and commentary, interviews and post-match discussions to news articles, written follow-ups and blog forums.

At least four different strata, or domains, can be distinguished, reflecting different angles or positions in relation to the game as well as different degrees of linguistic formality, largely correlating with the oral–written dimension of the communicative context. From a formal point of view, the innermost core of football – its defining features – consists of the *Laws of the Game*, i.e. football’s rule system, as decided on by its governing body, FIFA. Somewhat more broadly, the various documents issued by FIFA, UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations) and similar bodies, as well as national football associations, can be said to make up football’s official domain, basically characterized by written language with a fairly high degree of formality. Various club-level documents, etc., also belong here. The style of this kind of football language may be illustrated by the following example, taken from the *Laws of the Game* (2008/2009; “The Field of Play: Field Surface”): “Matches may be played on natural or artificial surfaces, according to the rules of the competition.” In stark contrast to this formal language, there is the domain of what may be called the performers of football on or off the pitch, basically the players and referees, but also, e.g., managers and coaches. The oral communication among these participants – before, during or after training sessions or games, e.g. in pre- or post-match interviews – is naturally of an informal, or very informal, nature. A typical example of “pitchspeak” is the warning call *Man on!* (Sw. *Akta rygg!*); cf. Seddon (2004:140).

The two opposing strata of official, “abstract”, written language versus “concrete”, situation-bound participant talk represent the two most fundamental or central domains of football language. Both rules and participants are criterial to football, i.e. football as an abstract rule system determining the boundaries of football as concrete performance in specific games.<sup>7</sup> Apart from these two core domains, there are other, more “peripheral” contexts where football language is produced, by people not actively involved in the game. Here the language of football commentators and that of supporters and spectators come readily to mind. There can be little doubt that, in terms of sheer quantity, these two domains jointly give rise to vastly more football language than the two core domains. Football commentary is a well-known feature – or genre – in all kinds of media, produced by various, more or less professional experts (often referred to as “pundits”). It may be spoken or written, displaying wide stylistic variation. The following example, taken from Seddon (2004:221), illustrates the way a “co-commentator”

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the similarity to Saussure’s langue–parole and also, from a different perspective, Chomsky’s competence–performance distinction.



might describe or explain to radio listeners what just happened on the pitch: “Owen drove into the box, beat the defender, gave him a little nudge which the ref didn’t see, and stroked it home.” This kind of spoken language contrasts with that produced by ordinary fans and spectators, whether on the terraces or in front of the television or computer screen. It is almost exclusively spoken – except when appearing in, e.g., fanzines or supporter blogs – being stylistically more restricted than commentary (cf. e.g. Krøvel & Roksvold 2012). A distinctive form of such language is that of chanting, i.e. repeated rhythmic phrases typically shouted or sung in unison by a crowd, as in the famous *You’re not singing any more!*<sup>8</sup>

Needless to say, the picture just outlined is an oversimplification; obviously, there is considerable overlap between the four basic domains involved in football language, e.g. with regard to the vocabulary used, not least in the media. Yet, it makes sense to distinguish between them, for various reasons. Stylistic considerations have already been mentioned. Each domain may in fact be said to represent a specific text type, or genre, with its own characteristics. Different sociolinguistic settings produce different types of football language, also in terms of subject matter. For example, neither the *Laws of the Game* nor footballers’ talk during or after a game are likely to refer to things like hooliganism or sponsorship deals, as opposed to the language produced by football commentators or fans. Further, from the point of view of linguistic research, the four domains differ considerably in terms of accessibility, written source material naturally being more readily available than spoken.

## 2.2 Football in linguistic research

In view of its status as the world’s number one sport as well as a mass cultural phenomenon, it should come as no surprise that football has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, increasingly so in recent years. Thaler (2008:392) notes that football as a “global cultural phenomenon” is nowadays “widely discussed in academic discourse”, mentioning such diverse fields as linguistics, religion, art, psychology, pedagogy, aesthetics, economics and philosophy; history and sociology could also be mentioned (cf. the bibliography in Goldblatt 2007).

However, despite the fact that Thaler (2008) mentions linguistics in connection with football, it would appear that comparatively little scholarly attention has been paid to football language as a special language, especially in comparison with more traditional ESP fields like Business English or Academic English (cf. Dudley-Evans & St John 1998). Football language, as already argued, makes up the most widespread special language of all in terms of the number of people using it, as regards speaking and writing as well as listening and reading. It should, therefore, be of obvious linguistic interest, as should sports language in general (cf. section 2.1). Nonetheless, at least to the best of our knowledge, no

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<sup>8</sup> Another well-known example of chanting is *Carefree*, sung by Chelsea fans: “Carefree, wherever we may be/ We are the famous CFC/ And we don’t care/ Whoever you may be/ ‘Cause we are the famous CFC.”

large-scale, systematic inventory of English football vocabulary has so far been undertaken; there is no comprehensive, let alone scholarly, dictionary of English (nor of any other) football language.<sup>9</sup> This lack of lexicological and lexicographic coverage may be contrasted to the existence of special-language dictionaries like, to name but a few, the *Oxford Dictionary of Business English* (1993) or the *Cambridge Air and Space Dictionary* (1990) – not to mention the field of Academic English, to which especially large amounts of scholarly as well as pedagogical interest have been devoted in recent years (cf. e.g. Biber et al. 1999, Schleppegrell 2004, Carter & McCarthy 2006:267–294, *Longman Exams Dictionary* 2006).

In actual fact, Lavric et al.’s *The Linguistics of Football* (2008), dealing with a plethora of languages, may be seen as a pioneering work, as indicated by its publication date. In her “Introduction” to the volume (p. 5), Eva Lavric stresses the potential of football as a field of linguistic inquiry:

This volume is meant to illustrate the richness of linguistic analysis in connection with football. Combining these two fields – 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.

In other words, interest in football language is a fairly recent scholarly concern, except, it may be argued, with regard to English loanwords in other languages, to which considerable attention has been paid, especially concerning sports language at large (cf. e.g. Schönfelder 1954, Fisiak 1964, Tingbjörn 2003). Despite this, however, the total volume of research specifically devoted to football language may be described as relatively limited.<sup>10</sup>

To be sure, Lavric et al. (2008) do account for a great deal of interesting work on football language, English and other, mostly relating to reporting and commentary in different media (e.g. Chovanec 2008, Vierkant 2008; cf. also Ferguson 1983, Anderson 1994). Fields dealt with include, among others, vocabulary and phraseology (e.g. Levin 2008, Schmidt 2008) as well as grammar (Müller 2008, Walker 2008, Wiredu & Anderson 2008); two articles (Nordin 2008, Vierkant 2008) specifically treat the use of metaphor in football

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<sup>9</sup> The existence of practically oriented word-lists of football terms, e.g. *BBC Learning English – Vocabulary, Football* (2010) and *England Football Online. Glossary of Football Terms and Phrases* (2005), does not affect the general picture. This also applies to a work like Leigh & Woodhouse (2006), which, however, despite its popular and somewhat idiosyncratic nature, provides a wealth of linguistically relevant information about football language, as do Leith (1998) and Seddon (2004). Although not a strictly scholarly work, Burkhardt’s (2006) *Wörterbuch der Fußballsprache*, a monolingual dictionary accounting for and exemplifying 2200 “Fußballbegriffe”, also deserves mention in this connection. A more linguistically sophisticated project, although of limited scope, is the “Kicktionary”, aiming at an electronic multilingual football-language resource (Schmidt 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Cf., however, the bibliography on “football and language” compiled by The Innsbruck Football Research Group (2008). The reason for linguists’ relative lack of interest in football language can only be a matter for speculation.

commentary, although not with regard to English.<sup>11</sup> There are also articles on English loanwords in various languages (e.g. Pintarić 2008, on Croatian; Sepçk 2008, on Polish). Dosev (2008:63), discussing Bulgarian, points out that “in most European languages” such loans “are the most characteristic way of providing football-specific lexis”; cf. Bergh & Ohlander (2012). It should be noted that the majority of the contributions in Lavric et al. (2008) are focused on other languages than English.

It might be thought, in view of its obvious social dimensions, that football should have left, more or less, an “open goal” for a wide variety of sociolinguistic research. This, however, hardly seems to have been the case, as noted by Gerhardt (2011):

Considering the wealth of sociological literature on football ... and the range of topics involved (e.g. politics, economics, media, nationalism, racism, globalization, fan cultures, social identity), it seems surprising that this domain has not been investigated in any depth in sociolinguistics.<sup>12</sup>

To summarize, the general impression is that, from a linguistic point of view, football may be regarded as an under-researched but potentially rewarding field of inquiry, largely uncharted territory in need of further exploration. This applies to football language in general, in a global perspective, but also to English football language. In a way, this can be seen as a paradoxical state of affairs, given the history of the game and the role of English as a source of inspiration and supplier of loanwords to football languages around the world.

### **3. Exploring English football language: a research project**

The picture emerging from the preceding section clearly indicates a need for further research into football language in general, and English football language in particular. The ongoing project described in the following pages, initiated a few years ago, should be seen as an attempt to address the relative scarcity, so far, of in-depth linguistic accounts of various aspects of English football language. The title of the project is: “English football language: exploring the ‘special language’ of a global sport.”<sup>13</sup>

#### **3.1 Aims and overall structure**

The primary purpose of the project is lexicological, aiming at a thorough account of the vocabulary used in communication about football, along a variety of contextual settings (cf. section 2.1). In part, this will be done from an English–Swedish contrastive perspective. A concrete result of the inventory of the lexical

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<sup>11</sup> For English football metaphors, see e.g. Beard (1998:53ff.), Chapanga (2004), Bergh (2011).

<sup>12</sup> In this connection, football in relation to gender should provide a particularly interesting angle.

<sup>13</sup> Apart from the authors, the project team includes Christian Sjögreen, University of Gothenburg, in charge of various computer-related aspects of the lexicographic part of the project.

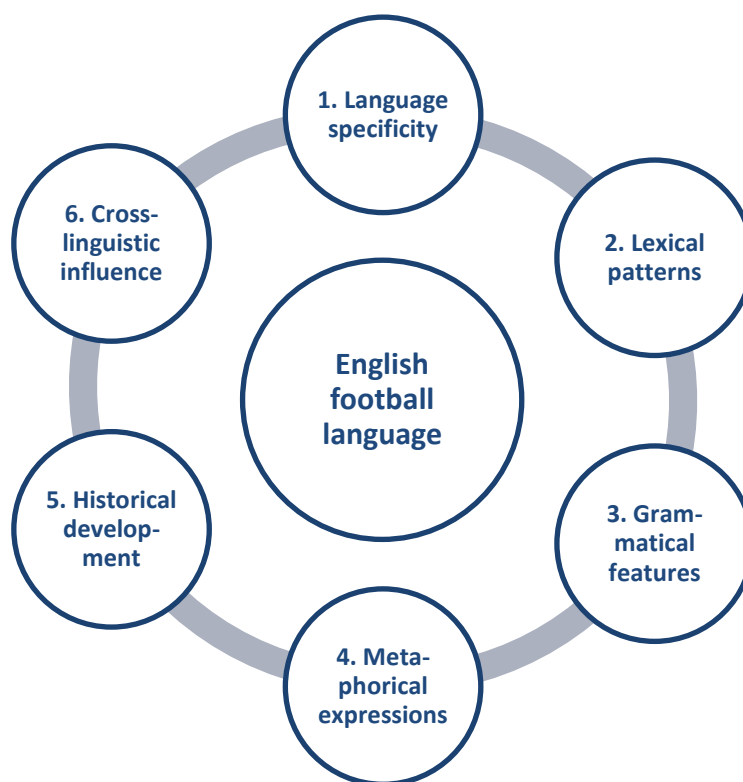
items – words and phrases – will be a scholarly bilingual football dictionary (English–Swedish, Swedish–English). The lexicological/lexicographic description makes up the core of the project. This is a logical reflection of the fact that “the lexicon of special languages is their most obvious distinguishing characteristic” (Sager et al. 1980:230; cf. Svensén 2009:72).

The lexicological core of the project is also intended to provide a platform for a number of studies on more specific aspects of English football language. In particular, this “periphery”, accounted for in more detail in section 3.4, aims to elucidate the following set of topics:

- *language specificity*: how sharply delimited is English football language from general language and sports language, especially with regard to vocabulary? (cf. section 2.1);
- *lexical patterns*: phraseological and semantic properties of English football vocabulary, focused mainly on collocation and polysemy;
- *grammatical features*: particularly football-specific syntactic characteristics of certain verb constructions as regards the number and types of complements (valency) that certain verbs may take;
- *metaphorical expressions*: the use of different types of metaphor relating to English football language;
- *historical development*: diachronic aspects of English football vocabulary, as related to the continuous development of the game, its organization, settings, etc., since the 19th century;
- *cross-linguistic influence*: the extent to which English football vocabulary has affected other European languages, especially with regard to direct borrowing and loan translation.

The overall architecture of the project – its “core” and ”periphery” – can be visualized as follows:

Figure 3. Structural outline of the present project



### 3.2 Material and some methodological aspects

The aims and scope of the project build on the collection and analysis, from various perspectives, of large amounts of authentic material, spoken as well as written. Since there is no shortage of readily accessible football-related material, the problem is, if anything, one of *embarras de richesse*.

The written material includes, apart from the *Laws of the Game* and similar official publications, news articles and commentary from (electronically published) British newspapers, e.g. *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*; correspondingly, in a Swedish context, Swedish newspapers like *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Göteborgs-Posten* are used. Follow-up reporting and further commentary in magazines like *World Soccer*, *FIFA Magazine* and *When Saturday Comes (WSC)* provide equally valuable sources, as do, for Swedish, *Offside* and *FourFourTwo*. Other written material includes books on football history, e.g. Goldblatt (2007), Lyons & Ronay (2006) and Wilson (2008). Fiction like Nick Hornby’s *Fever Pitch* (1992), mentioned earlier, as well as, e.g., David Beckham’s autobiography *My Side* (2003), along with their Swedish translations, also contains large amounts of football language, including dialogue; so does, for Swedish, Zlatan Ibrahimović’s bestselling autobiography, *Jag är Zlatan Ibrahimović* (2011).

A kind of written-spoken hybrid language is to be found in the minute-by-minute match reporting and commentary written on the Internet while a game is being played (cf. Chovanec 2008, Bergh 2011:85f.). When it comes to spoken football language, the main sources are provided by TV and radio, match reporting and commentary, post-match interviews, etc. These resources, in turn, are complemented by selected language corpora and other textual collections, containing mainly written texts but also some spoken material. For English reference, *The British National Corpus* (BNC) is a valuable source, containing some 100 million words of sampled text, of which 10 per cent consist of transcribed speech, as well as the huge TenTen web corpus provided by Sketch Engine (cf. Kilgarriff et al. 2004), amounting at present to some 2.7 billion words; for Swedish reference, the various collections at *Språkbanken* are useful, primarily those featuring blog material (“Bloggmix” – 267 million words) and other web-related texts (“SweWaC” – 115 million words; see further <http://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/>).

A special resource, in the form of a corpus of some 87,000 words, may also be mentioned here. It is made up of downloaded minute-by-minute reporting and commentary on all the 31 games played in Euro 2008, deriving from the web edition of *The Guardian*. Even though this corpus will need to be considerably expanded to provide reliable data on all aspects of authentic football language, the potential of such a corpus can be illustrated by the following brief extract of the “*Guardian* corpus”, showing the frequencies, absolute as well as relative, of the word *goal* and a number of words having *goal* as its first element:

Table 1. Extract from the “*Guardian* corpus”

341	0.3927%	goal	2	0.0023%	goalless
2	0.0023%	goal-bound	6	0.0069%	goalline
1	0.0012%	goalie	2	0.0023%	goalmouth
1	0.0012%	goal-ish	41	0.0472%	goals
13	0.0150%	goalkeeper	3	0.0035%	goalscorer
2	0.0023%	goalkeepers	2	0.0023%	goalscoring
6	0.0069%	goalkeeping	1	0.0012%	goalside
4	0.0046%	goal-kick	9	0.0104%	goalwards

As to Swedish football language, we have at our disposal a unique material in electronic form, namely all the articles published in the Swedish football magazine *Offside* over a period of ten years. This material has been organized into a corpus of close to 1.8 million words, with some shallow tagging added in terms of authorship, year and issue. As such, it is much larger than the above-mentioned “*Guardian* corpus”, enabling various types of relevant searches on Swedish football vocabulary. Like the English example from the small “*Guardian* corpus”, the example below from the “*Offside* corpus” involving the word *mål* ‘goal’ and a set of words having *mål* as its initial component, gives an idea of the relevance

and usefulness of this kind of material, for example in decisions concerning which words to include as headwords in a bilingual dictionary of the kind planned within the project.

Table 2. Extract from the “Offside corpus”

2247	0.1270%	mål	2	0.0001%	målfattigt
11	0.0006%	måla	2	0.0001%	målfest
1	0.0001%	målaptit	1	0.0001%	målgest
1	0.0001%	målburen	11	0.0006%	målgivande
31	0.0018%	målchans	1	0.0001%	målglada
1	0.0001%	måldiffen	24	0.0014%	målgörare
2	0.0001%	målfacit	1	0.0001%	målis
3	0.0002%	målfarlig	1	0.0001%	måljängel

Naturally, the Internet is also a great supplier of football language from a variety of sources, such as the home pages of FIFA and UEFA, lengthy football entries in *Wikipedia*, electronic fan blogs and fanzines as well as other kinds of informal commentary, often approaching the informality of spontaneous speech. Furthermore, Google searches provide a virtually unlimited source of more specific information on authentic football language, especially with regard to the frequency of individual words and phrases, as well as collocational patterns. From a lexicographic point of view, the Internet is an invaluable asset, serving as a complement to the time-consuming manual excerption of lexical items qualifying for inclusion in the dictionary; it is also an inexhaustible source of authentic examples.

Finally, a number of dictionaries – English as well as Swedish – have been found indispensable for various purposes, such as determining the degree of football specificity of certain lexical items, like *offside* and *striker*, or establishing the approximate date of first occurrence for a certain football term, like *crossbar* and *yellow card* (see further section 3.4). Both general-purpose dictionaries and learners’ dictionaries, from *OED* and *ODE* to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)* and *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (MED)*, are of great help in such endeavours.

### 3.3 The lexicological core

According to Lavric (2008:5), “[t]he language of football is first and foremost terminology.” Thus, it is only to be expected that the core of a research project on football language should be of a lexicological nature. As already implied, the lexis of the football domain may be more many-splendoured than that of most special languages, due to the wide variety of settings – from narrowly technical to extremely public – in which football finds itself at centre stage. Despite this, Schmidt (2008:20) finds it reasonable to characterize football language as having “a large but manageably-sized vocabulary”.

Our main lexicological concern is English – more specifically British English – football vocabulary, its forms (words and phrases) and meanings, especially in relation to the vocabulary of general language. Its aim is to provide as complete an inventory as possible of the lexical items of this special language, including all its subdomains, on or off the pitch. The theoretical interest of such an undertaking should be obvious, providing a rich material for linguistic research along formal, semantic and sociolinguistic dimensions. A more practical, lexicographic, result will be a scholarly bilingual English–Swedish dictionary. As far as we know, it will be the first of its kind, i.e. a “special dictionary” in the sense of Malkiel (1967:23): such dictionaries of “highly specialized vocabularies of trades, crafts, arts, and sciences” – and sports, it might be added – deal with vocabularies that are “unrepresentative of the common core of the lexicon”.<sup>14</sup> The basic lexicological and lexicographic challenge, then, is to establish the line of demarcation between the specialized vocabulary and the “common core” of the lexicon. With regard to football language, as already noted, this demarcation line may be more difficult to determine than for most other special languages.

Compiling a bilingual football dictionary means that the project’s main focus on English football vocabulary has to be supplemented by a contrastive perspective, involving Swedish. Such a perspective will be consistently applied in our work on the dictionary. However, although the dictionary is planned to be bilingual, providing Swedish equivalents (translations) for English headwords as well as the other way around, thus consisting of two parts (i.e. English headwords – Swedish equivalents, Swedish headwords – English equivalents), it is intended mainly for Swedish users. As noted early on by Harrell (1967:51), in his discussion of bilingual lexicography, “[i]t is clearly impossible to pay equal attention to both X-speakers and Y-speakers in one and the same work.” In technical terms, the football dictionary under way will thus be a bilingual dictionary of the “monodirectional” rather than “bidirectional” kind.<sup>15</sup> This will, in certain respects, affect the types of linguistic information supplied. For instance, information concerning the gender and plural formation of Swedish nouns – e.g. *mål* ‘goal’ or *frispark* ‘free kick’ – will not normally be given, such knowledge being presumed for speakers of Swedish. Further the metalanguage, i.e. the dictionary’s description language, will be Swedish, such as labels indicating the degree of formality for a specific lexical item, like *spot kick* (referring to the penalty spot) as an informal alternative to *penalty (kick)*, both corresponding to Sw. *straff(spark)*; or the marking of a certain word as historical or obsolete, e.g. *centre half*, nowadays roughly corresponding to terms like *centre back* or *central defender* (cf. also *stopper*, *sweeper*, *libero*; see Leith 1998:42).

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<sup>14</sup> For a typology of “specialized dictionaries”, see Svensén (2009:30ff.). Malkiel’s term “special dictionaries” (1967:22f.) corresponds roughly to Svensén’s term “technical dictionaries”; cf. Atkins & Rundell (2008:24). See also Bergenholtz & Tarp (1995).

<sup>15</sup> For a thorough discussion of bilingual dictionaries, focusing on the monodirectional–bidirectional distinction, see Svensén 2009:16ff., 28f.); cf. also Atkins & Rundell (2008:39ff.), Haas (1967) and Al-Kasimi (1983:18ff.).



Now, as regards the bilingual dictionary under construction, it goes without saying that the lexicological inventory forming its basis is likely to yield a good deal of interesting information on the relations between the vocabularies involved in the domain of football. Inherent in any bilingual dictionary is a detailed account, involving thousands of lexical items, of explicit and implicit similarities and differences between the lexicons of two specific languages. Here only a few indications of some large-scale dimensions in the overall relationship between English and Swedish football vocabulary can be given.

First of all, with regard to similarities, it must be noted that Swedish, along with many other languages, European and other (cf. section 3.4), has internalized numerous English football terms in the form of direct loans, integrated to varying degrees into Swedish, phonologically and/or morphologically.<sup>16</sup> Examples (in Swedish) may be taken from various subdomains: *match*, *derby*, *back*, *forward*, *playmaker*, *dribbla*, *tackla*, *hat-trick*, *foul*, *offside*, *supporter*, *huligan*. Even more frequent than direct loans are semantic loans, where an already existing, single Swedish word has taken on a new, football-related sense, e.g. Sw. *hörna* < *corner*, and the closely related category of loan translations (calques), usually involving compounds, e.g. Sw. *frispark* < *free kick*. Other examples include *skjuta* < *shoot*, *mål* < *goal*, *försvare* < *defender* as well as *fotboll* < *football*, *gult (rött) kort* < *yellow (red) card*, *avspark* < *kick-off*, *inkast* < *throw-in*, *mittfältare* < *midfielder*. For some Swedish expressions, however, it may be difficult to determine whether it is a true loan translation or an independent creation that happens to coincide, semantically and morphologically, with its English equivalent. For example, a compound like Sw. *måltorka* looks like a deliberate, literal translation of *goal drought* – but need not be; nor should it be a problem from a purely lexicographic point of view.

In many cases, the relationship between the two languages is of a less straightforward kind. This occurs when an English expression corresponds to a more independent, native Swedish equivalent, with the same meaning but not related to the corresponding English word. For example, the English noun *draw* ‘a game ending with scores even’, as in *The match ended in a goalless draw*, corresponds to Sw. *oavgjort (resultat)* ‘undecided (result)’. Similarly, what in English is referred to as a *set piece* – mainly involving free kicks, penalty kicks and corner kicks – is in Swedish called *fast situation* ‘fixed situation’. The English noun *dive* (as in the phrase *take a dive*) corresponds to Sw. *filmning* ‘playacting, putting on a show (to influence the referee)’, a different kind of metaphor from the English expression; its exact Swedish equivalent, i.e. the literal translation of the English metaphor, would be *dykning* – which, incidentally, is not unheard of in Swedish football reporting as a synonym of *filmning*, thus a semantic loan (cf. above) indicating English influence.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For different types of English loans in Swedish, see Ljung (1988:60ff.) and Stålhammar (2010:22ff.). Cf. also Edlund & Hene (1992:32ff.), Andersson (2001) as well as Haugen (1950).

<sup>17</sup> In the expression *diving header*, corresponding to Sw. *språngskalle*, *diving* is used in another, more literal sense.

Occasionally, the relationship between English and Swedish football language may be characterized as one of false friendship. False friends, of course, make up a familiar and troublesome phenomenon for language students at large (cf. well-known English–Swedish cases like *actual* – *aktuell* ‘current’ and *eventual* – *eventuell* ‘possibly occurring’).<sup>18</sup> For example, *goal kick* has nothing to do with scoring a goal, as the literal Sw. equivalent *målspark* might suggest; the correct Swedish translation is *inspark* (literally: ‘in-kick’). Another example is the Swedish noun *tunnel* (cf. also the transitive verb *tunnla*), which means ‘playing the ball through the legs of an opponent’; Engl. *tunnel*, however, refers to the passage (Sw. *spelargång*) through which players enter the pitch (for somewhat obscure reasons, the English equivalent of Sw. *tunnel/tunnla* is *nutmeg*, less frequently used by British commentators than *tunnel* by their Swedish counterparts).

A few words should also be said about the frequent absence of a one-to-one correspondence between football vocabulary in English and Swedish. To be sure, many lexical items in the two languages display a one-to-one relation, where a specific word or phrase in one language corresponds to one – and only one – word or phrase in the other, as testified by examples like *pass* – *passa*, *referee* – *domare*, *goalpost* – *målstolpe*, and *throw-in* – *inkast*. However, there are also numerous instances of the opposite situation, where either English or Swedish has two (or more) lexical items corresponding to only one in the other language. This means that, in many cases, one of the two languages has more synonyms (or near-synonyms) than the other. Our impression so far, however, is that English appears to have more synonyms than Swedish with regard to central football vocabulary.

In fact, English examples of such synonymy seem to be in relative abundance. A typical case involves the two words *team* and its synonym *side*, both corresponding to Sw. *lag* – which, incidentally is why David Beckham’s punningly titled autobiography, *My Side* (2003), could not find an equally ambiguous title in Swedish translation (*Mina ord*). Other examples are provided by the two English words equivalent to Sw. (*lag*)*kaptten*, i.e. *captain* and *skipper*, as well as by *offside rule* and *offside law* corresponding to Sw. *offsideregeln*; similarly both *tackle* and *challenge* translate into Sw. *tackling* (or *tackla*). Further, the Swedish term *straffområdet* is equivalent to *the penalty area*, *the penalty box* or *the 18-yard box*, often shortened to simply *the area* or *the box*.<sup>19</sup>

In many cases, both English and Swedish may boast more than just one expression for (more or less) the same basic concept, e.g. Engl. *added time*, *injury time*, *stoppage time* – Sw. *tilläggstid*, *stoptid*. Generally speaking, however, English appears to have more alternatives than Swedish in such cases, too. For instance, when talking about imparting spin to the ball, e.g. in performing a free kick or a cross (cf. below), English has a wide range of verbs to choose from: *bend* (cf. the film title *Bend It Like Beckham*), *curl*, *curve* and *swerve*; *spin*, by

<sup>18</sup> For some discussion of false friendship, see Ohlander (1997).

<sup>19</sup> In Swedish football reporting, the direct loan *boxen* (‘the box’) as an alternative to *straffområdet* has become increasingly common in the last few years or so.

contrast, is mostly used in games like tennis and cricket, according to *ODE*. Swedish normally uses the verb *skruva* or, informally, *knorra*; Engl. *screw*, on the other hand, would qualify as an extremely false friend in a footballing context, but not in games like billiards and snooker in the sense of ‘backspin’ (*ODE*). At the same time, it should be noted that both languages have a variety of expressions for basic notions like the way a kick is executed: *belt, boot, cannon, chip, clip, crash, dink, flick, lash, power, side-foot, ram, slam, tap, wellie, whip*, etc. (cf. Seddon 2004:125ff.); or how an opponent can be defeated: *beat, bring down, crush, defeat, dump out, hammer, outclass, see off, thrash, upset*, etc. In Swedish, there is a similar range of expressions, e.g. *dundra, klippa till, panga, smeka, slå, smälla, stöta, trycka*, as well as *besegra, mosa, krossa, köra över, slå, utklassa*.

Clear examples where Swedish has more synonymous expressions than English are harder to find. A possible example involves the notion of ‘hitting the ball with one’s head’, where English normally uses the verb *head*, and occasionally *nod*, while Swedish has the verbs *nicka, skalla* and – informally – *knoppa*. Another example might be Engl. *cross*, corresponding to either *inlägg* or *cross*(*passning*) in Swedish. Strictly speaking, however, this is hardly a genuine example of Swedish synonymy since the two Swedish terms, though semantically related, mean different things. The English football term *cross* should rather be seen as a case of polysemy, where each subsense has its own Swedish equivalent.<sup>20</sup> Still, of course, two Swedish words correspond to one polysemous – and thus ambiguous – word in English. A similar lack of exact “fit” between the two languages is to be found in the Swedish distinction between *kortlinje* and *mällinje*, both of which may be rendered by *goalline* in English (cf. e.g. *Norstedts Comprehensive English–Swedish Dictionary*); on its own, then, a sentence like *The ball passed the goal line* is embarrassingly ambiguous, corresponding to two Swedish translations. On the other hand, there is also the word *byline* (or *byeline*), not given in *Norstedts Comprehensive Swedish–English Dictionary* but defined in the *ODE* as ‘the part of the goal line to either side of the goal’. Again, this is – in either language – hardly a case of synonymy as the meanings of the various words are not identical, or even near-identical.<sup>21</sup>

A different kind of example illustrating poor “fit” between Swedish and English football vocabulary involves Sw. *utspark*, similar but not identical in meaning to *inspark* (*goal kick*; cf. above). English apparently lacks a single equivalent for this Swedish term – which means, roughly, that the goalkeeper, e.g. after a save where the ball has not passed the byline, kicks the ball upfield for his or her team to pick up for a new attack.<sup>22</sup> Words like *drop kick*, mainly restricted to rugby football,

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ODE* (*cross*): ‘a pass of the ball across the field towards the centre close to one’s opponent’s goal’; this definition, it appears, fails to fully cover the distinction between the two subsenses of *cross*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the *Laws of the Game* (2008/2009; “The Field of Play: Field Markings”): “The two longer boundary lines are called touch lines. The two shorter lines are called goal lines.”

<sup>22</sup> For the distinction between *inspark* and *utspark*, see *Svensk ordbok*. Interestingly, *Norstedts Comprehensive Swedish–English Dictionary* states that Sw. *utspark* corresponds to *goalkick*; this

and *punt* do not cover the specific meaning of *utspark*; a term like *kick-out*, so far absent from English football language, would be sorely needed to fill the gap ...

Similarly, the precise equivalent of the Swedish noun *djupled*, increasingly frequent in football reporting over the past twenty years or so, not least in phrases like *löpa/passa i djupled* or compounds like *djupledslöpning/-passning*, has caused a good deal of bafflement among a number of otherwise well-informed native speakers of football English. The meaning of the Swedish expression is not in itself the problem, implying movement along the length of the pitch, especially by attacking players in their opponent’s half. Different people have come up with different suggestions, like *running from deep* or *make a (vertical) run for löpa i djupled*. None of them, however, seems to capture the essence and wide applicability of the Swedish term. Our conclusion so far is that there seems to be no readily available, standard equivalent in English for the ubiquitous Swedish expression – a literal translation like *in depth* obviously will not do.

Naturally, there are also cases where an English expression lacks a concise one-word Swedish equivalent. For example, the normal Swedish expression corresponding to the pivotal English football verb *score*, as in *She scored twice*, is the verb phrase *göra* (or *lägga*) *mål* (literally: ‘make/lay a goal’).<sup>23</sup> An even clearer example is provided by the English verb *wrongfoot*, as in *Messi’s free kick took a deflection, wrongfooting the poor goalkeeper*. The meaning of *wrongfoot* is transparent enough and can hardly be missed. In Swedish, however, there is no corresponding verb, simple or compound; several words are needed to convey the meaning of *wrongfoot* (cf. *ODE*: ‘play so as to catch (an opponent) off balance’).

In this connection, the English word *WAG* may also be mentioned. A fairly recent invention, the word is an acronym, derived from *Wives And Girlfriends*, specifically of football players. Again, Swedish lacks a concise expression of a similar kind, being stuck with a clumsy phrase like *spelarfruar och flickvänner*.

Our discussion in the preceding paragraphs has been intended to show the occasional lack, at different levels, of a one-to-one correspondence between English and Swedish football vocabulary, resulting in a poor “fit” – or translatability – between the two languages. Such discrepancies, of course, are legion in general language as well. Before we leave this aspect of lexicological comparison, having obvious implications for the compilation of a bilingual football dictionary, a few words should be said about the classical lexicographic problem of how to handle homonymy versus polysemy in the dictionary – with regard to wordclass distinctions (e.g. *attack* as noun or verb) as well as semantic differences (e.g. *leg* as ‘limb’ or as ‘match, round’). This is not the place to embark on a full discussion of this issue; the main arguments are well known (see, e.g., Lyons 1977:550ff.; Cruse 1986:80; Atkins & Rundell 2008: 191ff., 280ff.;

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is hardly correct, however, as indirectly implied by *Norstedts Comprehensive English–Swedish Dictionary*, where the headword *goalkick* gives *inspark* as its only Swedish equivalent.

<sup>23</sup> In early 20th-century Swedish football language, *scora* (like *goal* or *gå*) was in common use as a direct loan in Swedish (see Tingbjörn 2003:488). Swedish football commentators occasionally use verbs like *näta* (cf. Engl. *to net*) and *måla*, but neither of them is very frequent.

Svensén 2009:94ff.). Suffice it to say here that, mainly for reasons of user-friendliness and transparency, we have decided to (1) use separate headwords for different wordclasses of “the same” lexical form, e.g. one headword for *draw* as a noun and one for *draw* as a verb (as in *ODE*); (2) use semantic subsections, whether of a polysemous or homonymous kind, within the same headword (such as the different meanings of *draw* as a noun, or of *draw* as a verb (as in *LDOCE*). This approach is illustrated below:

<sup>1</sup>**draw** *noun*

1 oavgjord match *The match ended in a goalless draw*

2 lottning *The draw for the World Cup placed Sweden in the group of death*

<sup>2</sup>**draw** *verb*

1 spela oavgjort *Bolton drew 2-2 with Leeds*

2 lottas i *Italy and Brazil were both drawn in Group A*

3 locka, dra *Racing Club drew the third-biggest crowds in the country*

4 finta bort, dra *He advanced down the left, drew two men, and played the ball inside to Torres*

The same basic principles apply to Swedish headwords. However, Swedish lexical items may, in a few rare cases, appear as distinct headwords because of formal differences below wordclass level, such as gender. One such example is Sw. *straff* ‘penalty’, where the gender difference also indicates a difference in meaning, manifesting itself with regard to articles, definite form and plural formation: *ett straff*, *straffet*, *straff* (zero plural) ‘penalty (general sense)’ versus *en straff*, *straffen*, *straffar* ‘penalty (kick)’. The differences are exemplified below:

<sup>1</sup>**straff** *noun* [non-neuter] penalty (kick) *Rooney converted a penalty on 60 minutes*

<sup>2</sup>**straff** *noun* [neuter] penalty *Rooney’s penalty was a two-match ban*

### 3.4 The periphery: some specific studies

The lexicological core outlined and illustrated in the preceding section, from a predominantly contrastive English–Swedish perspective, provides a point of departure not only for a bilingual dictionary but also for a number of specific studies of football language (cf. section 3.1). Here, too, our main focus will be on *English* football language, even though a cross-linguistic dimension will be present to some extent, especially concerning Swedish but also some other languages.

The set of studies – some of which are in progress – can be said to belong within the following broad areas of English football language: its delimitation in relation to general language and sports language; language structure, involving, in particular, specific features of some English “football verbs”; historical

development, i.e. the emergence of English football vocabulary and its gradual influence on general language; its relation to other European languages, i.e. the impact of football English on other football languages. The former two areas concern distinctive features of football language from an “internal”, purely synchronic perspective, while the latter two relate to wider, more “external” dimensions in time and place, focusing on diachronic and cross-linguistic aspects. Below a brief outline of the studies in question will be given, along with some exemplification.

As already pointed out, a basic question concerns *language specificity*, to which one of the special studies is devoted. It is related to the fact that, like other special languages, football language is partly made up of lexical items and other features that are shared with general language – or, in the case of football language, with sports language (cf. section 2.1). The study thus aims to identify, on the basis of a selection of frequently used lexical items and mainly in quantitative terms, the relationship between football language, sports language and general language, vocabulary being its main focus. The key issue is to what extent the lexical items in English football language, with regard to form and/or meaning, are more or less exclusively football-oriented (e.g. *free kick*), or whether they are also part of either sports language (e.g. *semi-final*) or general language (e.g. *win*). In other words, how *specific* is football vocabulary, as measured by the proportion of specifically football-related words and phrases, i.e. how sharply delimited is it from general language and sports language?

To investigate this, well-established general-purpose dictionaries such as the *ODE* and the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED)* will be used as benchmarks. Thus, if a football term is not included in such dictionaries, it will be classified as outside general language, i.e. as being either specific to football language or as being part of sports language. This applies, for instance, to the verb *bend* in its special football sense (cf. above) and also to the adverb *home* in connection with goal scoring, as in *Gerrard headed home* (‘Gerrard headed the ball into goal’). The following table provides an illustration of how general-purpose dictionaries like the *ODE* and the *COED* can be of use in determining specificity:

Table 3. Inclusion of some football terms in general-purpose dictionaries

	<i>ODE</i> (2010)	<i>COED</i> (2011)
full back	+	+
wide man	–	–
own goal	+	+
away goal	–	–
free kick	+	+
bicycle kick	–	–
libero	+	+
catenaccio	+	–

Further, domain labels given in dictionaries – e.g. “sport”, “football” or “soccer” – are obviously useful in determining the relative specificity of expressions used in football language. The following (simplified) examples from the *ODE* will illustrate the point at issue:

**goal** *noun* **1** (in football, rugby, hockey, and some other games) ...

**corner** *noun* **5** (also **corner kick**) *soccer* ...

**nutmeg** *verb soccer, informal* ...<sup>24</sup>

Since all the three words are included in a general-purpose dictionary like *ODE*, they can all be regarded as being part of general language, as opposed to, e.g., football words like *bend* and *home* in the senses commented on above. On the other hand, they are all marked as sports terms, *goal* being used in a variety of sports, whereas – at least according to *ODE* – *corner (kick)* and *nutmeg* are exclusive to football (soccer). Of the latter two, *corner (kick)* is, intuitively speaking, much less specific and more frequent than *nutmeg*, as also indicated by its absence from learners’ dictionaries like *LDOCE* or *MED*.

As the above discussion will have shown, determining the specificity of football vocabulary is not an altogether straightforward matter. The borderlines between the three lexical levels of general language, sports language and “exclusive” football language are not always, in individual cases, easy to establish, not even with the help of different general-purpose and learners’ dictionaries.

The special character of football language manifests itself in other ways, too, beyond individual words and their meanings. This applies not least to phraseological and semantic features in multi-word combinations, especially with regard to collocation and polysemy. Such properties of football language provide the field of inquiry for a specific study of *lexical patterns*.

Listening to live football commentary, one is often struck by the number of frequently recurring phrases, or collocations, that make up a large proportion of the flow of words (cf. Levin 2008). Unmistakable instances include noun phrases such as *a goalless draw*, *a glorious goal*, *a reckless challenge* – the latter often more or less synonymous to *a late tackle*. A somewhat more surprising example is *an educated left foot* (cf. Leigh & Woodhouse 2006:63), to be compared with Sw. *en känslig vänsterfot* (‘a sensitive left foot’). Equally surprising – but only from the point of view of the general-language sense of the verb *award* and the noun *penalty* – is the collocation *to award a penalty*, as in *Arsenal were awarded a last-minute penalty*; the verb *award* normally collocates with “positive” nouns as its object, like *prize* or *scholarship*. In football language, however, the phrase is

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Seddon (2004:9), complaining that “our national game is shoddily treated by that large body of literature known as ‘word books’”, using the purported absence of *nutmeg* in the *OED* to prove his case; in the current online *OED*, however, *nutmeg* as a football term is actually included (first occurrence as a noun: 1968; as a verb: 1975).

never perceived as a paradox or contradiction, unlike in normal life (cf. e.g. the absurdity of a sentence like *\*The murderer was awarded the death penalty / a life sentence*). On the contrary, it is perfectly normal football usage: in football, a penalty implies an advantage for the attacking team, a very clear opportunity to score a goal. The specific sense of *penalty* thus paves the way for an otherwise unexpected collocation, so common that it may be regarded as a fixed phrase. In fact, football language – especially, perhaps, in connection with events on the pitch – seems to provide a rich field for investigating those “chunks” or “prefabs” that make up a large proportion of ordinary language use, often referred to as the “idiom principle” (Sinclair 1991). In assessing the specificity of football-language collocations in relation to general language, collocations dictionaries like the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary* (2002) and the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary* (2010) will be drawn on (cf. Ohlander 2004).

A slightly different kind of lexical patterning, although related to collocation, involves the use – unconventional, from a general-language perspective – of a few common verbs of position in specific football contexts. This is shown by the following examples illustrating the use of *stand*, *sit* and *lie*: *The referee let the goal stand* (i.e. allowed the goal despite some previous controversy), *The midfielders were sitting (lying) deep* (i.e. playing in markedly defensive positions). In the last example, the synonymous phrases *lie deep* and *sit deep* (cf. also *drop deep*), not usually included in dictionaries (cf. e.g. *ODE* and *LDOCE*), can be said to have a special, idiomatic football meaning, basically depending on the adverb *deep* in the special sense of ‘defensively, in a defensive position’, again not to be found in most general dictionaries.<sup>25</sup> The examples all demonstrate the kind of idiosyncratic – rather than “regular” or “systematic” – polysemy that may arise from frequent everyday words used in a figurative, not completely predictable sense in a certain context, such as football (cf. Malmgren 1988, Atkins & Rundell 2008:286f., Svensén 2009:209).

Phrases and idioms of the types just discussed are as typical of football language as single words with specific meanings. This also applies to certain *grammatical features* of football language. For instance, the unconventional use of the present perfect in English football reporting and commentary has been noted (see Walker 2008). Similarly, the widespread use of the present – a variety of the historic present, it would appear – rather than the past tense by players and coaches in, especially, post-match interviews, is a characteristic feature of Swedish football language.

Our study of some grammatical features of English football language will focus on certain aspects of verb syntax, particularly questions concerning valency. In this field – related to the idiomatic nature of phrases like *sit (lie) deep*, mentioned above – the grammatical behaviour of some verbs with regard to their complement structure may be seen as unexpected, at least from a conventional

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<sup>25</sup> Nor, as a rule, are phrases like *sit deep* and *lie deep* to be found in special idiom dictionaries; cf. e.g. Cowie & Mackin (1985).



grammatical perspective. Consider the following sentence: *Rooney was awarded a penalty but failed to convert*. To speakers of English football language, the meaning is perfectly clear: Rooney did not score but missed the penalty kick, i.e. he failed to convert the penalty into goal (cf. Sw. *omsätta straffen i mål*). This use of the verb *convert*, without any sort of complement, deviates from normal usage and seems to have gone unnoticed in most dictionaries; for example, there is no mention of it in learners’ dictionaries like *LDOCE* or *MED*.<sup>26</sup> Another case of missing object involves the specific use of the verb *concede* without an object or other complement, as exemplified in *Chelsea conceded again a minute from time* (i.e. Chelsea let in a goal just before the final whistle). A related – but not identical – case is illustrated by the following example: *Ronaldo tested the keeper once more but was denied a second time* (i.e. Ronaldo failed to score).

Other examples of more or less deviant verb usage include cases like the following: *The manager decided to rest two of his key players*, *Sir Alex played none of his favourite midfielders in the derby*, *Many top clubs in Europe systematically sign African players*. In all these examples, a verb (*rest*, *play*, *sign*) is used with a type of object, denoting human beings, that is unconventional from a general-language point of view. Normally, you can rest your case, play a game or sign a contract – but hardly people.<sup>27</sup> In all three sentences, the verbs are used in a kind of pseudo-causative way, somewhat reminiscent of generative semantics of the 1970s; cf. clumsy semantic paraphrases involving the verb *cause*: *rest* ≈ ‘cause to rest’, *play* ≈ ‘cause to play’, *sign* ≈ ‘cause to sign (a contract)’.

As the above, necessarily brief outline and exemplification will have suggested, verb syntax may prove a worthwhile field of inquiry with regard to certain football-specific properties of common verbs, especially concerning their valency. It seems clear that football language, as well as sports language at large, displays characteristic properties that are, to a greater or lesser extent, at odds with more conventional patterns of English grammar. Verb syntax is unlikely to be the only such field. For instance, the use of articles and prepositional expressions in football language may also be worth looking into; cf. expressions like *in midfield*, *(a shot) at/on goal*, *in goal*, *from time*, *on the half-hour*.

The three studies outlined above all concern, from different perspectives, characteristic features of football as a special language, features that contribute to its specialness. At the same time, the boundary between football language and general language is a pervious one, promoting transition between them (cf. section 2.1). Nowhere, perhaps, is this more apparent than with regard to *metaphorical*

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<sup>26</sup> To be sure, *ODE* gives the specific meaning involved – ‘score from (a penalty kick, pass, or other opportunity) in a sport or game’ – but uses the notation [with obj.] to indicate, wrongly, that it should be used transitively, as can also be gathered from the definition provided; that it *may* be used with an object is another matter.

<sup>27</sup> Incidentally, Swedish has adopted the same kind of usage, most likely as construction loans from English; in the case of *sign*, however, informal Swedish often uses a direct loan (*sajna*) as a direct equivalent to the English usage, as in *Ingen klubb vill sajna en skadad målvakt* (‘No club wants to sign an injured keeper’).

*expressions*, an aspect of football language meriting special attention.

First of all, there is the all-pervasive “master metaphor”: “Football is war”. From this metaphorical foundation, a large number of more specific metaphors derive, as noted by Chapanga (2004) and Bergh (2011), e.g. terms like *attack* and *defence*, *victory* and *defeat*, as well as *shoot* and *shot*. Examples like *Real Madrid fired their heavy artillery* are stock-in-trade in football commentary. In such cases, then, general-language vocabulary provides the basis for much of the lexical backbone of football language, in the form of metaphorical expressions capturing the competitive framework of the game, expressions that are so indispensable to football – everywhere and in all languages – that we have almost stopped looking on them as metaphors. They are indeed, to paraphrase the title of the ground-breaking work by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), metaphors football lives by.

On the other hand, it is by no means uncommon for football expressions to be adopted as expressive metaphors in general language (cf. section 2.1). A common example is *(missing) an open goal*, as illustrated in “Miliband misses an open goal”, a *New Statesman* blog headline (8 June 2011). Interestingly, this metaphorical phrase is absent from both *ODE* and *LDOCE*, which shows that even well-known football metaphors may escape notice in standard general-language dictionaries. Similar self-explanatory, *goal*-related phrases include *scoring an own goal* and *moving the goalposts*, no longer restricted to football language but turning up in a variety of other contexts as well. Another much-used phrase is *back to square one*, with a curious background in prewar live radio coverage of football (cf. Davies 2007:122).

When it comes to single words used metaphorically in general language, there are also a number of well-known examples. The verb *sideline* is one of them, as can be seen in a sentence like *The new MP was sidelined by her own party*, a usage included as a matter-of-course in general-purpose dictionaries. Much the same goes for the informal use of *kick-off* in the sense of ‘the start of an event or activity’ (*ODE*) or *offside* in a figurative sense, as in *His radicalism caught him offside with the law* (from *ODE*). Likewise, expressions such as *red card* and *yellow card*, also used in other sports, have infiltrated domains well beyond football, e.g. politics, as noted by *Wikipedia* (*penalty card*) – but not so far by dictionaries like *ODE* or *LDOCE*. Incidentally, the English examples just given of metaphorical extension from football language to general language have exact equivalents in Swedish; to what extent this is also true of other languages is an interesting question.

As the examples given in the last few paragraphs will have suggested, football metaphors in general language are unevenly covered in ordinary dictionaries; some are included, many are not. This may be seen as a clear indication that metaphorical expressions in relation to football language make up yet another field deserving more extensive scrutiny. Such study should have a dual perspective, including both the transition of general-language words and phrases to football language and the “export” of football-language items to general

language. Further, different contexts and text types should be taken into account here, spoken as well as written (cf. Nordin 2008, Vierkant 2008). Our descriptive framework will be based primarily on the distinction between conceptual and orientational metaphors, as proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). Among the latter type may be mentioned the adverbs occurring in, for example, verb phrases like *head home* (‘score by heading the ball’), *shoot wide* (i.e. beside the goal) and *sit deep* (cf. above); cf. also phrases like *high up the pitch* and *up the wing* – but *down the flank*.

The studies outlined so far all concern various aspects of football language from a synchronic perspective, especially oriented towards features that set it off as a special language. However, English football language, being the first of its kind, may also be seen from a diachronic perspective, where the *historical development* of, in particular, its lexicon should be of considerable interest.

The gradual emergence of “football talk” as a special language is sketched in the following way by Seddon (2004:25):

Football’s core language was influenced by two key bodies of men: the Football Association and the press. The lexicon they created was rapidly taken on board by a public who just as quickly spread it at home and abroad. Most of it is still with us now, so it follows that today’s football talk is a legacy of linguistic fashions from the game’s formative years.

Thus, English – or any other – football language cannot boast a very long history, the modern game being invented, i.e. regulated, in the 1860s (cf. section 1.1). This circumstance alone should facilitate the study of the development of its present-day vocabulary, mainly an incremental process, although leaving in its wake a fair number of more or less obsolete expressions. For instance, the term *centre-half* (as well as *left-half* and *right-half*) started to disappear in the latter half of the 20th century as a result of the introduction of new defence formations, like a *flat back four*, as in the 4–4–2 formation (cf. Davies 2007:118-119, Wilson 2008:82).

The condensed history of football language may thus be thought of as an advantage, in that there should be comparatively few completely dark linguistic corners. Further, given the brief time span of the modern game, the influence of historical and social change on its vocabulary over the past hundred years or so should be relatively unproblematic to trace. In many ways, today’s football language can be viewed as a mirror not only of technical, tactical and organizational changes in or around the game, but also – in some layers of its vocabulary – of changes in society at large, whether of a political, economic or sociocultural nature. For instance, the language policies of dictatorial regimes – and not only those – in 20th-century Europe often implied purist attitudes towards foreign loanwords, not least football terms, giving rise to the replacement of early English direct loans by loan translations or more independent indigenous creations (see Görlach 2001, Bergh & Ohlander 2012).

However, our own diachronic study will focus mainly on football-internal

changes as reflected in the continuous development of the game’s core vocabulary over the past 150 years. In many cases, it may be expected, there should be a fairly straightforward causal and temporal relationship between the introduction of a new term and the “event” – e.g., a rule change or a tactical innovation – that prompted it. Obviously, there was no need for terms like *crossbar*, *penalty line* and *centre circle* before the crossbar, penalty line and centre circle were introduced in the 1880s; similarly, the term *goal net* would have to wait until 1892 to make its first appearance (Goldblatt 2007:34). Other words or phrases may be more difficult to pinpoint as to their first occurrence, especially such terms as have resulted from more gradual changes of, say, a technical or tactical nature. When, for example, did terms like *one-two*, *through ball*, *offside trap*, *libero* and *total football* first turn up? Or, to widen the perspective, *Bosman ruling* or *WAG*? For such dating of first occurrences, the *OED* is of course an indispensable tool (cf. note 24).

First occurrences, however, are not the only, perhaps not even the most intriguing, historical aspect of football language. It should also be of interest to determine, as far as this can be done, when a certain term could be said to have become part of general language – and how long it took after its first occurrence. Needless to say, determining this can never be an exact science. One way of approaching the problem that we propose to employ involves the use of the twelve editions so far published (1911–2011) of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD)*, its twelfth edition (2011) retitled the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED)*. The underlying assumption here – by no means unproblematic – is that inclusion in this dictionary is criterial for being part of “current” general language.<sup>28</sup> For example, the words *dribble* and *goalkeeper* are included in the first edition of *COD* (1911), and may thus be considered part of general language at the time of – or, rather, well before – its publication, whereas *crossbar*, *goal net* and *offside* are not. Using consecutive editions of the same dictionary should be an advantage in this kind of enterprise, even though inclusion policy may not have been consistent throughout its history; different editors may have adopted different approaches in such matters. As a complement to the *COD*, learners’ dictionaries could also be used for the same purposes, but only for the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>29</sup> It should be borne in mind, however, that such dictionaries, being intended for foreign learners, are considerably more restrictive as to what they include.

Due to the pioneering role of English football language in setting the lexical

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. the full title of the first edition of *COD* (1911) where the phrase “current English” is included, just as in the following editions up to the twelfth; the notion of currency is also emphasized and discussed in the Preface. The retitled twelfth edition carries on its predecessors’ insistence on “current English”: “[It] aims to cover all those words, phrases and meanings that form the central vocabulary of English in the modern world”, including, like the first edition, many technical terms “now established as part of the mainstream language” (Preface to the twelfth edition, p. viii); cf. Knowles (2011:x–xi).

<sup>29</sup> The first edition of *The Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* was published in 1948, continuously updated and reigning supreme until the advent of *LDOCE* in 1978; see Cowie (1999); cf. also Ohlander (1996, 2003).

framework of the game, there is an inevitable and close connection between its development and the history of other football languages around the world. This means that the *cross-linguistic influence* of English football language on other languages is in evidence virtually everywhere. This “extrovert” aspect provides another field of study worthy of special attention (cf. Bernard 2008, Dosev 2008, El Sayed 2008, Gamal 2008, Pintarić 2008, Šepek 2008).

The cross-linguistic influence of English football language is, of course, especially obvious with regard to vocabulary, in the form of direct loans as well as loan translations (calques) and semantic loans (sense loans). Numerous Swedish examples of all three types of loans have already been given (cf. section 3.3); similar examples from other languages are equally abundant. However, due to political, cultural and sociolinguistic circumstances in different countries, including purist trends in different periods, languages differ considerably with regard to their attitude towards, in particular, direct English loans, with repercussions for the other two loan types.

Bergh & Ohlander (2012) account for the impact of English, in terms of direct loans, on the football vocabulary of 16 European languages (Swedish not being part of them). The study was based on a set of 25 well-known English football terms – *corner*, *dribble*, *goal*, *hooligan*, *offside*, *score*, *supporter*, etc. – taken from *A Dictionary of European Anglicisms* (Görlach 2001), also providing relevant data for the “fate” of each word in all of the 16 languages. It was found, among other things, that while direct borrowing is certainly common, there is nonetheless a great deal of variation among the languages studied, Norwegian and Dutch displaying the largest number of direct English loans (23 and 20, respectively), Finnish and Icelandic the lowest (6 and 10, respectively). Another finding was that, among the 25 words included in the study, *team*, *hooligan* and *offside* came out on top as the most “popular” English direct loans (15–16 languages each), *head*, *sweeper* and *draw* making up the bottom three (1–2 languages each). A follow-up study of loan translations (Bergh & Ohlander, forthcoming), based on the same material, shows Icelandic at the top (15 cases) and Albanian at the bottom of the league, exhibiting no clear case.

The two studies just mentioned point to the interplay – or, often, tug-of-war – between direct loans and different types of native-language renditions (basically, loan translations, semantic loans and other indigenous creations; cf Görlach 2001, 2002). In some cases, as is well known, two competing terms may remain in (more or less) peaceful coexistence in the same language, like Norwegian *corner* versus *hjørnespark*, or *score* versus *lage mål* (Graedler & Johansson 1997: *corner*, *score*; for Swedish, cf. section 3.3, note 23). In other cases and other languages, an original direct loan may have been replaced by a native word; for example, *offside* was ousted by *hors jeu* in French and by *fuera de juego* in Spanish (Görlach 2001: *offside*).<sup>30</sup> In fact, the word *football* itself was replaced by

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. also German *abseits*, “von Konrad Koch schon 1874 vorgenommene Lehnübersetzung zu engl. *offside*” (Burkhardt 2006: *abseits*).

*calcio* in Italian, whereas in Spanish the native word *balompié*, basically a calque, was less of a success story as a substitute for *fútbol* (Görlach 2001: *football*). Generally speaking, it is not easy to predict the long-term fate of an English direct loan entering another language, beyond the tendency that its chances of survival as direct loans are clearly diminished by national language policies that promote, or demand, restrictiveness.

Thus, a diachronic perspective on football language appears to offer yet another worthwhile field of study. This applies to football language as such, its continuous creation of new vocabulary in response to developments on and off the pitch, and, not least, to its interplay with general language along the time axis. Moreover, it could be argued that, given the short history of the modern game, a diachronic perspective on its language may provide a convenient peephole into more general processes involved in vocabulary change.

#### 4. Summing up

It has been the aim of the preceding sections to demonstrate that just as football is in many ways a remarkable public phenomenon in its own right, now in its third century, so indeed is the language of the game. As argued here, football language may be characterized as a special language with a public face. The specialness of football language is apparent in literally thousands of facts and features, lexical and grammatical, that set it apart from general language. Consequently, a sentence like *The striker was awarded a last-minute penalty but failed to convert* (cf. section 3.4) is virtually incomprehensible from a strictly general-language point of view, i.e. to speakers of English with no, or insufficient, knowledge of football and its language. Not only does it contain special terms like *striker*, *penalty* and *convert*; it also deviates from normal collocational and grammatical patterns, with regard to the verb *award* in relation to *penalty* as well as the use of the verb *convert* without an object or other complement. The same general point is illustrated by sentences like *A heavy first touch let the goalkeeper gather* and *Van Persie curled narrowly wide*.

At the same time, however, due to football’s public nature, the interface between special language and general language is quite possibly more extensive as regards football language than other special languages. For this reason, as insisted throughout this paper, football language as a field of linguistic inquiry should warrant considerably more scholarly attention than it has so far received. The research project outlined in the preceding sections represents an attempt to make at least partial amends for this collective “sin of omission”. Its lexicological core is aimed at elucidating the specificity of English football vocabulary, its words and phrases, especially from a contrastive English–Swedish perspective.

Work on the concrete, lexicographic outcome of the lexicological investigation, a bilingual English–Swedish dictionary, is under way. All in all, the dictionary will include some 8000 headwords, English as well as Swedish, thus accounting for the specifics – words, phrases, common collocations – of both English and Swedish football vocabulary, together with ample exemplification. The following

extract, involving a sample of English entries under the letter *E*, will give some idea of the contents of the English-Swedish part of the dictionary:

**early doors** informellt i början, tidigt i matchen *Both sides tried to keep it tight early doors*

**effort** subst.

**1** målchans *They didn't manage a single effort on goal in the first half*

**2** mål *Notts County pulled one back after another effort by McSwegan*

**eighteen-yard box** el. **18-yard box** subst. informellt straffområde, box; jfr **penalty area**

**end-to-end stuff** informellt; ung. böljande,

pulserande spel *The second half was end-to-end stuff with both sides creating many spectacular chances*

**engine** subst. informellt (mittfälts)motor *The team is lacking an engine in midfield to create opportunities for the strikers*

**engine room** informellt centralt mittfält, centrala mittfältare *Steven was a key part of the Ajax engine room*

The “periphery” of the project is intended to provide a fuller picture of some specific aspects of English football language. It is, for the most part, closely tied up with the lexicological core area, especially as regards the specificity of football language in relation to general language, with in-depth studies of certain lexical and grammatical features. The research horizon is further extended to include diachronic and cross-linguistic dimensions. In view of the key role of English in the brief history of modern football as well as its present-day status as a global lingua franca, investigating such dimensions should prove interesting also from a wider linguistic perspective.

It should be added that the project presented here is by no means exhaustive with regard to scope and range. For instance, a perspective not specifically focused on is the sociolinguistic one. It is, naturally, implicit in much of the lexicological work, like assigning markers of different degrees of formality to lexical items; cf. e.g. the rather formal *altercation* and its more informal near-synonym, *afters*. However, as pointed out earlier, a more explicitly sociolinguistic approach to football language would seem to be long overdue. Its large variety of contexts and settings, as well as the vast number of people involved in football, should prove fertile ground for sociolinguistically oriented studies of the complex and dynamic relationship between football and society; the language on the terraces is likely to differ from that in the stands.

In conclusion, most work on football language, English and other, remains to be done – a somewhat surprising state of affairs considering the present-day role of football as *the* global game as well as the world’s most widespread cultural phenomenon. In the meantime, football keeps developing at a rapid pace, along with its language, as new notions, e.g. of a technical, tactical or organizational nature, are continuously introduced, while old ones are gradually phased out. As an object of linguistic study, “the people’s game” is very much alive – and forever kicking.

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