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THE FOOTBALL PLAYER'S FEET – AND TONGUE: COULD IT BE THAT THEY BOTH COUNT?[1]

And yet the language counts: Whoever believes that only feet speak on the football pitch, is wrong. In the past decade, sociolinguistic research has discovered multilingualism in football teams as a topic. Especially productive research has emerged from the Innsbruck Football Research Group, which present their latest results in this contribution. Based on the empirical work of our project seminars but also on a collection of press articles on linguistic issues in football, we throw light on those aspects that have been added since the last publications.

1. Introduction

«Feet Speak Louder Than the Tongue» multilingualism – this is the title of the first scientific article ever published on the theme of multilingualism in football (Kellermann / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006). This title takes up a much repeated adage, when fans get enthusiastic about "football as a universal language" – a slogan suggesting that the core of football talent does not reside in the tongue, but in a part situated at the other end of the body.

1 A former and partially different version of this text was published in German in a special issue of the journal *Aptum* (Lavric 2018).

And yet, one is entitled to raise doubts about this pseudo-truth, and to reflect upon the importance of linguistic competences in a sport where success depends largely on good cooperation within the team. In this contribution we shall address the question whether, besides the feet – whose importance nobody will deny – the success of a player and a team might also depend on their tongues, i.e. on their language skills. We thus intend to elaborate a sociolinguistic description and analysis of the role of linguistic competences for the success of a player as well as of the everyday practice of multilingualism inside football teams.

In the (internet) press, opinions are divided as to the question of language needs in football. One can find articles such as the one by Pilger s.a.: *Football talent will always overcome the language barrier*, which gives examples of foreign players (and coaches) who worked wonders in the Premier League without however having mastered the English language.[2] Does this mean that language is not so important? Not really, because the same author also reports about English players who went abroad: for them, it turned out that those who managed to learn the language of their club did much better than those who did not.[3]

Another article (Williams 2017) says about foreign players in Spanish football clubs: «La Liga's foreign players are easy targets until they master the Spanish language». More than in other countries, in Spain stars like Gareth Bale, Toni Kroos and David Beckham are being criticised for not speaking the country's language and/or not making a sufficient effort in order to learn it. Which does not stop them from beating all kinds of records in terms of scored goals and other types of success. Is the Spanish press simply too picky about the level of competences, or is it really possible to operate successfully in one of today's major football clubs without learning the local language?

A third press article – *Barça speaks a lot of languages* (Nogueras 2009) – contributes some interesting elements on this issue: at the time of the news story, the Barcelona team included players from 11 different nationalities, who spoke 17 languages in total (mother tongues and foreign languages included): Spanish, Catalan, Icelandic, Portuguese, French, Russian, English, Italian, German, Dutch, Danish, Serbian, Croatian, Greek, Creole, Bambara and Diola. In this variety everybody seemed to find their heart's desire, in the form of a teammate with whom they could practice even the most exotic languages.

Williams (2017) coins a phrase that summarizes very well the day to day experience in multilingual teams, and that is opposed to our introductory slogan: in modern football, «[t]here is a necessity to find both your feet and tongue». We will show in

2 Robert Pires, Carlos Tevez, Mauricio Pochettino.

3 Positive examples: David Platt, Ray Wilkins; negative examples: Ian Rush, Michael Owen.

this contribution how this double imperative materializes in football reality.

Let us point out the fact that multilingualism in football is a subject that has entered sociolinguistic research only very recently. It is a rather interesting variant of the «multilingualism at the workplace» branch which has rarely been studied (Franceschini 2010). It is particular because language competence levels are often very low – close to what has been called "threshold level"[4] or "survival level" – since speakers are usually recruited not for their language skills (their "tongues"), but for skills they show in other parts of the body. Football professionals nevertheless do not confine themselves to this minimum, and in the course of an international career a player or coach generally acquires a repertoire of varied and high-level linguistic competences.

Football is therefore, undoubtedly, an interesting context for sociolinguistic research; the pioneer in this field being the "Innsbruck Football Research Group",[5] founded in 2005 at the faculty of philology, who present their latest results in this contribution. Based on the empirical work (interviews and observations) of our project seminars but also on a collection of press articles on linguistic issues in football, we throw light on those aspects that have been added since the last publications.[6]

Before presenting the research of the Innsbruck Group, we shall resume the studies conducted to date outside this centre, which are rather scarce, but have grown in number and variety over the last few years. The only publication on the subject of multilingualism in football prior to the work of the Innsbruck group was the article quoted in the introduction, *Feet Speak Louder Than the Tongue*, by Kellerman / Koonen / van der Haagen 2006, that gives an introductory analysis of linguistic arrangements for foreign professional footballers in the Netherlands. Then, there is a study by Chovanec / Podhorna-Polická 2009 (in cooperation with Innsbruck), a monograph by Baur 2012 *English for Foreign Premier League Football Players: Linguistic Needs, Tutoring Options and Support Mechanisms – A Framework of an ESP Course*, one special case study by Ringbom 2012 and finally a very interesting article by Siebetcheu 2016, who approaches the issue with statistical methods.

And here at last is the overview over the research conducted by the "Innsbruck

4 The *threshold level* (fr. *niveau seuil*) was developed in the 1970ies by the Council of Europe; the term refers to a very basic competence in a foreign language, see http://archive.ecml.at/help/detail.asp?i=124 (ultimo accesso: 09/05/2017).

5 Eva Lavric, Jasmin Steiner, Erika Giorgianni, Irene Giera, Gerhard Pisek, Andrew Skinner and Wolfgang Stadler, who can count on the support of their students (e.g. Vincenzo Folino) in the framework of specialized seminars as well as MA and PhD theses. The website of the Group is available under https://www.uibk.ac.at/romanistik/personal/lavric/sprache_fussball/.

6 For a list of publications of the Innsbruck Football Research Group, see the special heading *Scientific publications by members of the Innsbruck Football Research Group* in the "References" section below.

Football Research Group" about multilingualism in football teams. These were the main phases:

- It all started with the conference that gave rise to the "The Linguistics of Football" proceedings (Lavric *et al*. 2008), where our article Giera *et al*. 2008 first presents the multilingualism project;
- the "Football and Language Bibliography Online", compiled by Erika Giorgianni, first published in 2012, and continuously updated;[7]
- the first intensive phase of our research, with at its heart a project seminar conducted by Eva Lavric in the summer term of 2009, with 20 students, working with qualitative interviews, observation and video recordings. The results of this phase were summarized and published as an MA thesis (Steiner 2009/2011) and as a list of "11 Theses about Multilingualism in Football" (Lavric / Steiner 2011a and b, Lavric 2012 and 2017);
- Jasmin Steiner's PhD thesis (Steiner 2014),[8] a case study of some hispanophone players and their integration into an Austrian club (FC Wacker Innsbruck), which represented an advance in terms of methodology, as it was based on participant observation and on video/audio recordings transcribed with conversation analytic methods. She also painted a portrait of the "linguistic landscape" of her Tyrolean club, with all its characteristic language choices in different types of constellations and situations, and identified the reasons for language barriers (see also Lavric / Steiner 2017);
- the workshop "Multilingual and multifaceted football" held in Innsbruck on July 10th 2016, the proceedings of which are to be published soon;
- and, finally, the second intensive phase of our studies, which started in 2016 and included a further project seminar directed by Eva Lavric, this time with 43 students who again worked with qualitative interviews and video recordings, and who also collected a series of episodes from the internet football press about language issues in football.[9] The results of this new project phase are presently being published (Lavric / Steiner 2018) and they provide the content for this paper;[10]

7 It now contains more than a hundred pages of references: https://www.uibk.ac.at/romanistik/personal/lavric/sprache_fussball/bibliography/

8 A pilot study for this is presented in Steiner / Lavric 2013.

9 See the "Press articles from the internet" part of the "References" section.

10 The references to the sources of the present contribution will be coded as follows: phase 2 and the 2016 project seminar are coded S16, together with an acronym indicating the working group which generated the result:
G-NonV is the group named "Charlie Chaplin" who studied non-verbal communication;
G-BayL is the group that analysed the language policy of Bayer Leverkusen;
G-YAcad is the group that studied youth academies in Italy and Spain;
G-Vorarl is the group dedicated to professional and amateur clubs in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg;

- This second phase is continuing with the (recently completed) MA thesis by Vincenzo Folino 2019 (directed by Eva Lavric), about multilingualism in Italian football, which draws not only on interviews and observation, but also on the author's personal experiences in a series of Italian clubs.

In the present contribution, we shall very briefly present the "11 Theses" that were the result of the first intensive project phase, but we shall mainly develop a new 11-fold grid of "11 Further Research Questions". These questions are the result of the empirical research and press reviewing done in the second intensive project phase; they are based on the 11 Theses, but they develop them through the new evidence and a series of new examples.

2. Previous research and results: Our "11 Theses" about multilingualism in football

The list of "11 Theses" we are presenting in this chapter summarizes the results of the first project phase (the 2009 project seminar). The research methods consisted of qualitative interviews, conducted with a series of different professionals (players, coaches, referees), completed with observation (e.g. of training sessions) and with audio and video recordings.

It is clear that the testimonials in such qualitative interviews are subject to the well-known "self-report bias" (e.g. Donaldson / Grant-Vallone 2002), which means that the answers one gets are influenced by the concept that the interviewee has of the interviewers' and society's expectations with respect to the topic at hand. Hence the necessity to complement the interviews with observation or recordings in order to increase the reliability of the results.

The theses are the results of our research, i.e. they sum up strongly convergent answers and observations. But they are still a long way from being established findings or proven correlations. Rather, they are highly probable observations and tendencies, which should be useful for formulating hypotheses and designing further research, which could then confirm or reverse, and perhaps refine, our results.

The first three theses follow the progress of the language skills and the communication strategies alongside: from level "zero" and the culture shock of the newcomer (Thesis 1), to a level of competence where everything is permitted and communication already takes place, usually through a mix of different languages (Thesis 2), and finally to a phase of ambitious striving for a good and fluent competence in the new language (Thesis 3), accompanied by the wish to integrate

G-RefR is the group that concerned itself with referees;
G-Coach is the group that studied coaches;
G-SansP is the group that observed refugees clubs like the FC Sans Papiers.
Apart from this there were a video group, a group that organized the international workshop, and a group that was in charge of the administration of the whole seminar and event.

into the new culture:

Thesis 1: Without language, nothing works. But with a little bit of language, many things are possible.

Thesis 2: The important thing is to convey the message – no matter how.

Thesis 3: Better language skills are important for well-being and integration, and many players make it a personal goal.

The following theses four to six touch upon the expedients and tools as well as the assistance and support that a foreign player may use in order to accelerate his integration or to compensate his lack of competences: From interpreters and personal assistants (Thesis 4), to friendly teammates that act as cultural bridge builders and as "community interpreters" (Thesis 5), and finally to the inevitable, but not always very popular, language classes (Thesis 6):

Thesis 4: Good clubs will provide newly arrived players with interpreters or, more often, with personal assistants helping them in the beginning.

Thesis 5: The most frequent integration method is the translation by a teammate who speaks the same mother tongue.

Thesis 6: Language courses are not very popular, but some clubs promote them a lot.[11]

Theses seven to nine ask who in football really needs language and communication skills, from the players in their different playing positions (Thesis 7), to the coach (Thesis 8), and last but not least the referees (Thesis 9):

Thesis 7: The amount of language a player needs will depend on his playing position on the pitch.

Thesis 8: It is clearly the coach that has the strongest language needs – and there are different ways of providing for them.

Thesis 9: Referees have to communicate smoothly with their colleagues. They need English, but maybe even more.

The last two theses are meant above all to complete the number: Thesis 10 which is not to be taken completely seriously and Thesis 11 which attempts a kind of a synthesis and places language and culture into the context of team spirit and solidarity.

Thesis 10: If you really feel the need to insult the referee, you better choose a language he does not understand.

Thesis 11: Eleven players – one goal: it is the team spirit and the cooperation that are crucial for success.

11 In relationship with this thesis, let us mention the – as far as we know – only two existing language courses designed especially for football players: the first one was "Deutsch für Ballkünsler" by Uwe Wiemann (Wiemann 2003 a and b, 2008; Wiemann *et al.* 2008; Replinger 2005); 2012 saw the publication of *English for Football* by Redmond / Warren.

2. New research and results: Our "11 Further Questions" on the same topic

This chapter will finally present the "11 Further Research Questions", which are the result of the second project phase (seminar 2016) and will be at the centre of the present contribution. It is worth mentioning that the participants carried out their interviews and observations in football teams of very different levels, from the prestigious FC Barcelona and the German First league club Bayer Leverkusen, which is known as the champion in dealing with language issues, down to teams made up of refugees and asylum seekers who are playing in Austria's lower leagues.

It is clear that these "Further Questions", intended to delve deeper into the topic and to complete the "11 Theses", do not give an overview of the vast subject of multilingualism on the pitch. Rather, they expand and further develop specific issues, demonstrating the richness of this very complex and promising research area.

2.1 Which role do languages play in transfers and when signing a contract?

This question on the role of languages concerns the recruitment of new players or coaches and the conclusion of their contract; as well as the role of language necessities in the professional choices made by the actors involved.

When it comes to recruiting new players, not only their sportive performance, but their origin and their language competences will also play a certain role. For instance, a foreign player who has already spent some time in the country and knows the local language and culture will be preferred over a complete newcomer and will also be more expensive to buy. This is confirmed by a quote from Frank Ditgens, long-term "coordinator for foreign players" at Bayer Leverkusen:

> If a player speaks [German], he will be a better player. This increases his value. It worked for Jorginho, Emerson, Paulo Sergio, Zé Roberto and lately Lucio. When Bayer 04 Leverkusen transferred these players, either abroad or to Bayern München, we made money. (quoted in Repplinger 2005; again in Lavric / Steiner 2011a: 110; translation E.L.)

All things being equal, there will be a reluctance to hire a player from a completely new culture and language, and a tendency to prefer newcomers from regions and languages of which there is already at least one player in the team. The language criterion also applies to coaches, even much more than for players, see above, Thesis 8.

And looked at from the other side, when a player or coach gets a job offer from abroad, language problems or a lack of competences might be the cause of a hesitation or a negative answer. One example (S16 G-Vorarl) would be a young Austrian player getting two offers, one from a very good Austrian club and the other one from an even better Dutch club, and choosing the home offer for language reasons. And in a humorous press comment, sports journalist Oskar Beck (2015) talks about an

incredible offer of 24 million euros made to the German coach Ottmar Hitzfeld by a Chinese club. Against all expectations, Hitzfeld refused, alleging family reasons (his first grandchild). In fact, it was the language barrier, suggests Beck, that frightened the manager, who had once criticized Pep Guardiola for coaching less well in German than in Spanish.

After the recruitment and the corresponding job choice, there is one more aspect before the player can run onto the pitch: the club and its new acquisition have to negotiate and to sign a contract. This contract is generally written in the home language of the club, or English as a lingua franca, but the main thing is that an interpreter is provided to the player in order to explain him all the clauses in his mother tongue. This is the only point where all clubs systematically resort to interpreters, and it is done in order to avoid conflicts that might arise later (S16 G-RefR).

2.2 Which measures are taken to prevent young foreign players from being isolated in a new country?

Football clubs are not always aware of the importance of language competences for the integration of foreign players in their new environment – see the emblematic quote by coach Heinz Peischl (former assistant coach of the Austrian national team), which really gets to the heart of it:

> Alas, I have to say that most clubs do not care about the integration of their foreign players. They see the player as a commodity which has to function from the beginning, and are not aware of the fact that performance is related to well-being […].
> It is logical that a person coming into a new country from abroad needs help and support. They need someone to help them with the administrative procedures and to find a suitable social environment where they are fully accepted […].
> Foreign players certainly need a few months in order to feel comfortable in the new country, and the more support they get, the quicker they can settle in and can deliver their sportive performance. This is something clubs still have to learn. (Interview Peischl 2009, conducted by Jasmin Steiner, quoted in Lavric / Steiner 2011a: 107; translation E.L.)

Good clubs generally implement the procedures we have described in our Theses 4, 5 and 6 (a personal assistant, translation by a teammate, language classes, etc.). In our new research phase, however, we found out about some special procedures applied to young players, which are maybe those who suffer most from homesickness: the young talent is placed in a host family, which will provide a positive environment for integration and for learning the new language. Integration of young players through host families is a common practice, as confirmed by Heinz Peischl (S16 G-Coach), who remembers his time as a young player in Argentina, where his gate to the new language and culture was exclusively the guest family with whom he lived.

2.3 Are multilingualism problems confined to professional clubs?

We just mentioned the "good clubs" and it might be necessary to clarify what we

understand by that term. A "good club" plays in a higher league, has a generous budget (this is the objective aspect of "good"), and it has a sufficient awareness of linguistic problems (this is the subjective aspect, related to our subject) – the last two criteria, by the way, do not always coincide. Indeed, not all professional clubs take the language issue really seriously. Many of them – though their number is decreasing – still resort to improvisation (see the Peischl quote in the previous section) and to "bricolage" (Lavric 2012).

But our third "Further Question" focuses on the opposite case: amateur clubs with nearly no budget, and which one would expect to have no foreign players because they simply cannot afford them. Is it true that they are immune to language problems? They are not, and this was revealed in the 2016 project seminar, where two groups (S16 G-Vorarl and G-SansP) investigated amateur clubs of lower football leagues in order to study the language issues that arise there and the coping strategies that they develop.

Actually, the most extreme examples of completely multilingual teams are not found among the big Champions League clubs – which no doubt fulfil the criterion too – but in a couple of refugee clubs playing in the lower Austrian leagues (S16 G-Vorarl and G-SansP) which we had the opportunity to interview and observe. Here are two examples of such clubs: the FC Sans Papiers, from Innsbruck (Austria), consists of 23 players coming mostly from African and Asian countries.[12] There are subgroups of players speaking Arabic, English, French, and – the biggest group – Farsi. Although the official language is German (which is spoken in the club both in the standard and in a dialectal variety), Farsi acts as some kind of unofficial "lingua franca", which shows up also in their battle cry *ya'-allah* ('God help us!' in Farsi). In another, no less multilingual, refugee team, the FC Flüchtlinge Dornbirn from the Austrian region of Vorarlberg, the manager depicts the communicative routine as a medley of standard German or dialect expressions, English fragments, language mixing, combined with all kinds of nonverbal means such as glances, facial expressions and gestures. Code switching and the combination of verbal and nonverbal codes thus seems to be the «unmarked code choice »[13] in such variegated teams.

At the lowest end of the scale, refugee clubs cannot afford interpreters or personal assistants, although their players have more or less the same needs as their more prominent colleagues. In this case, it is the coach and the members of the managing board that have to assume the function of interpreters, bridge builders, and helping hands in all daily life troubles (S16 G-SansP); some of them have also come to an arrangement with an adult education center or a similar institution where the newcomers will be able to attend language classes.

12 Afghanistan, Gambia, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Pakistan, and Somalia.

13 This concept was introduced by Myers-Scotton 1983 and *passim*.

2.4 Is the formation of groups according to mother tongues in a team dangerous or not? (and in which sense, and for whom?)

This question is related to the "fellow players as interpreters" aspect of multilingualism in football (see Thesis 5). The easiest (and cheapest) integration help for a newcomer is indeed the presence of a co-player with the same mother tongue or with the corresponding language skills. It is only natural that this teammate should translate for the newcomer, even if he is only a few months ahead and his mastery of the local language is still approximative. But he will always be there and will know the habits of the club and the peculiarities of the local culture. This is a clear advantage which may have been decisive for the appointment of the new player (see "First Question" above). In translation studies, this practice is known as "community interpreting",[14] i.e. interpreting by non-professionals, often in immigration or social work settings, where the interpreter does not only translate but also takes the newcomer under his wings in some way.

This practice of mutual translation, if reflected in a recruitment policy, will lead to the creation of small groups of certain nationalities/languages inside the football team. Siebetcheu (2016) gives (among others) a demographic analysis of the Italian A and B Series leagues, and one of the factors he calculates is the *dominance* of certain nationalities[15] in each specific team: the "champions" by this criterion in 2015-2016 were Udine in Serie A League with 6 players from Brazil (= 26% of foreign players and 20% of all the players of the team), and La Spezia in Serie B League with 9 players from Croatia (= 45% of foreign players and 31% of all the players of the team). One curious example he gives is about French players of Paris Saint-Germain, in the season 2012-2013 when Carlo Ancelotti was the manager, who complained anonymously that they were being discriminated against in comparison with their 5 Italian and 4 italophone teammates (Siebetcheu 2016: 153-155).

Frank Ditgens gets to the heart of it when he explains that Bayer Leverkusen traditionally employs many Latin American players, and especially a number of Brazilians. Spanish and Portuguese are thus largely spoken in the club, and the two groups use a special language, so called *Portuñol*, to communicate with each other. But this "family feeling" can also be a hindrance for integration, as in some cases (e.g., for the Brazilian players França and Alberto), the club offered them such a perfect environment in their mother tongue that they did not even perceive the need to learn German (S16 G-BayL).

When, in multilingual teams, the foreign players naturally start to form small

14 For this concept see among others Roberts 1994.

15 Beside *presence* (number of foreign players), *incidence* (density of foreign players), *origin* (the foreign players' nationalities), and *geographic heterogeneity/homogeneity*, see Siebetcheu 2016: 148-149.

groups according to languages, the manager in general is concerned about the weakening of the team spirit. Which leads to frequent and urgent appeals for monolingualism, i.e. the learning and the obligatory use of the club's home language. At least, a recent press article (APA/dpa 2017) quotes Bayern München president Uli Hoeneß who insists that German must be the official and everyday language at the German top club. He thus implies that this is not naturally the case at the moment. Hoeneß even threatens players who infringe this rule with a penalty fee. This concern seems to be shared by the majority of coaches of multilingual clubs, regardless of their division, e.g. by manager Lassaad Chabbi of the Austrian 2nd league club SC Austria Lustenau (S16 G-Vorarl) as well as by FC Sans Papiers coach Michael Kunzer (S16 G-SansP). Yet, the video recordings of the latter team show that in spite of the extreme linguistic diversity all players cooperate and are busy helping each other also linguistically during the match, in various languages.

In view of the long-lasting success of Bayern München in spite of the multilingualism that seems to prevail in the club, one might legitimately wonder how valid the monolingual concerns of the manager are. Be it as it may, other approaches are possible and are being lived: the Austrian former national coach Dietmar ("Didi") Constantini told us in an interview[16] (Giera *et al*. 2008: 385-386) that in Austria he once managed a team where there were three hispanophone players. Which motivated him not to order them to attend German courses, but rather to take some Spanish classes himself!

2.5 Can dialect become a language barrier?

One of the main findings of Steiner's 2014 PhD thesis about the integration of a group of hispanophone players in the Tyrolean club FC Wacker Innsbruck[17] was the fact that the language classes only focused on standard German, while the real working language of the team, its "unmarked language choice", was Tyrolean dialect.[18] This led to misunderstandings and communication problems even at a time when the newcomers already mastered German pretty well (see also Lavric / Steiner 2017).

Knowing about these findings, two groups of the 2016 seminar (S16 G-Vorarl and G-SansP) systematically asked about the dialect issue. This was a good initiative because the clubs they visited were domiciled above all in the Vorarlberg region of Austria, whose dialect is known to be extremely different from standard German.

16 This was in one of the very first interviews realized by the Innsbruck Group, as far back as 2006.

17 Which then used to play in the first Austrian league

18 Hence the title of the study: *Iñaki, du musch ummi laufen! – Empirische Analyse von Mehrsprachigkeit und Kommunikationsstrategien in einer Fußballmannschaft*, an instruction ("you have to run to the other side") uttered in broad Tyrolean dialect, while the name of the addressee (Iñaki), shows that he comes from a completely different language and culture, in this case the Basque region and linguistic community in Spain.

Linguistically speaking, it belongs to the Alemannic dialect group, which includes also "Schwyzerdütsch", Swiss German, which is known for diverging a lot from the neighboring dialects of the Bavarian group, e.g. Bavarian, Tyrolean, Viennese and many more. As we had seen in the case of Wacker Innsbruck that even the "easier" Tyrolean dialect posed a serious problem, we were expecting similar barriers in the Vorarlberg clubs.[19]

But the interviewees of both research groups did not perceive dialect as a particular problem; they could not report about miscommunication due to the dialect barrier. In the professional clubs, there were players from all over Austria (plus a few foreign countries), thus the autochthonous players had to adapt their language to a more "standard" variety. In the refugee clubs, coaches and managers alleged that the foreigners coming to Vorarlberg were having their first contact with the German language precisely through the local dialect, so they were learning standard German and Vorarlberg dialect at the same time. This seems plausible, but further research through participant observation or video recording will be necessary to confirm or reverse the thesis. Actually, during Steiner's research, it was only the transcription phase that revealed the dialect problem; thus in Vorarlberg, too, recordings might reveal that participants are simply not aware enough of the dialect issue, as it was the case in the Tyrolean club before Steiner's research.

2.6 Does more or less linguistic communication influence the playing style?

In the second phase of our research (S16 G-SansP), we found evidence that pointed to the fact that the amount of verbal communication in a team might have an impact on its playing style and technical skills. This became obvious through the observation and recording of several league matches of the refugee club FC Sans Papiers. This team – probably due to its extreme multilingualism – tended to communicate less verbally when playing on the pitch, compared with their opponents. The scarcity of communication led to a higher ratio of long passes and thus to a series of unnecessary turnovers, while the opponent team played shorter passes and could thus better keep the ball. This confirms the well-known observation that short passes are helpful to avoid turnover, but it also shows that a good communication, especially on the verbal level, is necessary to implement this playing style.

2.7 What goes on between a coach and his translator/interpreter?

Following our Thesis 8, the language issue also applies to the coach, who will often work in countries where a foreign language is spoken and who in any case has to deal with players of very different linguistic and cultural origins in his team. This is confirmed by former Austrian national coach Dietmar Constantini, who worked as

19 Vorarlberg football teams are even said to use their difficult dialects with a cryptic function during matches with other germanophone clubs, see below, Further Question 8.

a coach in a whole series of countries, and who told us (Giera *et al*. 2008: 385-386):

> If you want to motivate the players, but you do not speak their language, you certainly have a problem. You tell the interpreter what you want to say, and he reformulates it in his own words. If you are lucky, at least the content is correct, but the intonation and pitch get lost (translation E.L.).

Constantini emphasises furthermore that the interpreter should not know too little about football, but not too much either. If they know too little, they will provide a very poor translation, but if they know too much, they will try to interfere and convey their own contents.

Dominik Glawogger, an Austrian coach who worked for a club in Tanzania for half a year, confirmed this impression. Due to financial reasons he had to work with a non-professional translator, and he was never sure what his instructions were turned into (S16 G-Coach). This was a motivation for him to start learning the local language.[20]

On the other hand, the interpreter, too, is faced with the nearly impossible task of translating not only the content of the coach's instructions, but also their enthusiasm, their anger, their impatience, in short, all the psychological and motivational elements of a coach's speech, all of this in real time.[21]

When speaking about the manager and his interpreter, one could invent a new thesis such as e.g.: *The coach and his interpreter have to form the perfect symbiosis linguistically and emotionally.* This is illustrated by an example given in the press (ad. 2010), where it is described how football interpreter Ruben Reggiani imitates volume, pitch and gesture of Queens Park Rangers' coach Luigi de Canio in order to transmit to the English team not only the words, but the whole temperament of the Italian manager. And it is time now to mention the perfect couple formed by the German coach Otto Rehhagel and his Greek interpreter Ioannis Topalidis, who together led the Greek national team to win the European Championship 2004.

To finish, let us mention the interpreters who ended up becoming coaches themselves, i.e. the coaches that had begun their career as interpreters – the most famous of whom is undoubtedly José Mourinho (Carlin 2003). One could conclude now that the boundaries between the functions of coach and of interpreter might become fuzzy and that there might be connected vessels. But if we remember Constantini's disparaging remark about the brash interpreter who interferes in the

20 Learning the language also has the advantage of gaining the coach a lot of sympathy, says Dietmar Constantini: "And this is the greatest possible compliment: When someone comes to a new country and immediately tries to learn the language – this will be greatly appreciated by all the people living there" (translation E.L.). When Constantini worked in Saudi-Arabia, he indeed immediately started to learn Arabic.

21 Constantini underlines that instructions during the match have to be understood immediately, and that the rapid pace leaves hardly any space for translation.

coaching, one probably has to admit that such an intrusion can only work if it is accepted or even encouraged by the official manager.

2.8 Can language also be used in order for the other not to understand?

Football clubs' language choices may include some rather unexpected aspects: an unusual form of language choice seems to be practiced regularly by the Spanish club Atlético Bilbao (where all players are Basque), whose then-coach Joaquín Caparrós reports:

> On the pitch, we use the Basque language especially when attacking, in order to surprise our adversaries. Not with encrypted words or secret signs, but with simple commentaries: whether the free kick will go towards the far post, or whether the corner will be short… Or simply to signal to a teammate that he is free, not under pressure (Larrea 2009, translation E.L.).

This is a good example of what can be called the "cryptic function of language" – i.e. to speak in a certain language in order not to be understood. Or to put it in another way, not to be understood by the opposing team, while the teammates or at least some of them can perfectly follow what is said. This means that the players speak Basque to manifest their complicity through insider comments in order to destabilize the opponent. The same tactics is reported of a series of teams in different language areas, in as much as they have command of a rare and exotic linguistic code. In Austria, it is reported that clubs from the Vorarlberg region, where a rather unusual Alemannic dialect is spoken, use this code in a similar way (see footnote 20). Destabilizing the opponents through the use of a language they do not understand is also common in the Innsbruck refugee club FC Sans Papiers (S16 G-SansP), where a variant of Farsi is the off record "lingua franca" of many players. The students interviewed the adversary, who indeed complained that the FC Sans Papiers achieved a competitive advantage through this language choice.[22]

2.9 Do celebrity foreign players have an impact on the club's communication policy?

Foreign players' languages actually play a role not only in internal communication, but also in the external communication of the club. This holds at least for the stars among the foreigners, who in their home country can count on a whole community of fans and followers. In order to benefit from this popularity, the club will e.g. add to its website some pages in the mother tongue of their superstar.

The link between foreign players and international fans is one more of our new

22 It is well known that this cryptic function is also fulfilled by idiosyncratic code words and gestures, for which each club develops its own very special and very secret repertoire. This private code of the club is very helpful for communicating smoothly on the pitch without being understood (Interview Heinz Peischl, S16 G-NonV). The secret code concerns mainly technical procedures and it is carefully memorized during the training sessions.

findings about foreign football players. The issue was raised by Frank Ditgens from Bayer Leverkusen. He states that hiring a player from a certain nation or a certain language area provides the club with an opportunity to enlarge its fandom on an international level. He quotes the examples of the Mexican player Chicharito, who is seen as a national hero in his home country and has aroused a lot of interest in Bayer Leverkusen in Central America. The club is selling a lot of jerseys in Mexico, and its press department is now present on social media not only in German and English, but also in Spanish.

This means that foreign players are an asset not only on the pitch, but also on the level of international renown and marketing (S16 G-BayL) – and they can contribute to make the external communication of their club more international, more polyglot, more pluralistic.

2.10 Do multilingual teams play better than monolingual ones?

As an outlook to further research, I would like to mention the MA-thesis project of Football Group member Erika Giorgianni, whose goal is to examine, if not to prove – through examples, statistics and expert interviews – that multilingual football teams play better than monolingual ones (Giorgianni 2014 and forthcoming). She carried out interviews with clubs (Bayer 04 Leverkusen, BSC YB Bern, U.C. Sampdoria, Udinese Calcio, etc.) and organizations (EBU, Lega Serie B, ÖFB, UEFA), to which she added a number of case studies, e.g. on Milan and Udinese Calcio.

Giorgianni has actually found some evidence for her hypothesis of the superiority of multilinguals, as the experts she has interviewed so far have confirmed that this is very likely the case. But they insisted on the crucial role of the coach, who has to build the multilingual and multicultural team into a community, where each player's diverse background is respected and contributes to the common goal. So it seems that the advantage of multilingualism is an added value that has to be deserved through a wise management of linguistic and cultural diversity. Giorgianni (2014) sums up her conclusions under the motto of "Cultural Winning":

- Multilingualism: asset – with team spirit.
- Language not isolated, but part of a larger whole (experience, education, values, personality, etc.).
- Each player has his own cultural richness, which he brings along in the various transfers to new clubs.
- Cultural gain for the whole team if the coach understands and emphasizes this richness.

Interesting as Giorgianni's project is, it seems difficult to conduct a rigorous statistical analysis that would make it clear once and for all that multilingual teams play better than monolingual ones. Giorgianni intends to study a series of Italian clubs famous for their high or low number of foreign players in some phases of their existence. She hopes to establish a correlation with the success or failure of the clubs during the respective time span. This project could take advantage of the statistical

methods developed by Siebetcheu 2016 (see Question 4). In spite of methodological difficulties, Giorgianni's idea is innovative and useful, for the world of football as well as for the world of sociolinguistics.

2.11 How does Ibrahimović manage to get away with insulting the referee unpunished?

The careful reader or attentive listener may have already taken notice of the hint hidden in our above Thesis 10: *If you really feel the need to insult the referee, you better choose a language he does not understand.* The use of an "exotic" language to insult the referee is but one aspect of the cryptic function of languages on the football pitch, already mentioned above (Question 8).

It is well known that a player who, losing his temper in the heat of the moment, insults the referee, inevitably sees the red card. Except… except when the player has chosen to utter his insult in a language that the referee does not understand! In this case, the latter will not be able to show the red card. This is because he has to note down in the match report what the player actually said to him, which, of course, he cannot do if he did not understand the words but only inferred the insult from tone and expression.

At the time of developing the above thesis (Lavric / Steiner 2011a), we actually did not really mean it, it was rather meant as a sort of a final gag. But as we deepened our research, it turned out to be perfectly realistic. A series of referees confirmed that a polyglot player could indeed escape a red card through the language trick. Others confided to us that they were regularly cramming foreign language insult lists before important games (Lavric / Steiner 2018). A coach of a German lower league club catering predominantly to Turkish migrants (see interview Yüksel 2016[23]) even told us that he regularly warns his players not to recur to insults in Turkish, because the German referees have most certainly studied them beforehand. And in the 2016 project seminar the referee of a FC Sans Papiers game (S16 G-RefR and G-SansP) admitted to be powerless if an insult was uttered e.g. in Farsi.

Our evidence was further confirmed through the press, as we found an article (Quintin 2015) where an opponent coach accuses a certain player of taking advantage of his foreign language skills in order to regularly insult referees without getting punished. Have you already guessed who this polyglot bad boy might have been? It was (who else?) Zlatan Ibrahimović.

23 Ziya Yüksel, coach of "Türkgücü Germersheim", was interviewed by Eva Lavric in 2016.

3. Conclusion

Studies about multilingualism in football enrich the research about multilingualism at the workplace, adding a new and unexpected context. The second phase of the Innsbruck project (2016) has brought about a series of interesting results which open up promising prospects for research in this rich and innovative area.

It turns out that the tongue or "tongues" of football professionals can sometimes count nearly as much as their feet, and that players and coaches are often true plurilingualism champions.

Today's footballers' linguistic repertoires and daily multilingualism might well be an anticipation of the linguistic future of our societies and is therefore worthwhile studying. They prefigure future working and living environments where the original mother tongue is only one language among others, in the frame of a varied and constantly evolving linguistic repertoire.

We shall close this contribution with an homage to successful plurilingualism, i.e. a ranking of the most polyglot football coaches and players (the list starts with the respective mother tongue):[24]

We shall begin with the coaches, who, by the way, have (nearly) all started their career as players:

- Pep Guardiola – 5 languages – Catalan, Spanish, English, Italian, German
- Zinédine Zidane – 6 languages – French, English, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Berber ([Europe] s.a.; LFM 2015)
- José Mourinho – 6 languages – Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, English, Catalan (Hurrey 2016)
- Arsène Wenger – 6 languages – German, French, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese ([Wenger] 2011)

And here are the players:

- The German defender Shkodran Mustafi – 5 languages – Albanian, English,

24 As for the sources of this ranking, there are some that treat the subject of languages in football mentioning a whole range of players/coaches: these are the article [fhs] 2011 and above all the video clip Khalid 2017; the sources mentioning only one or two football professionals are quoted under the respective name.

A short remark about the quality of this information: The theme of language skills is mentioned from time to time in the internet sports press, but the sources often diverge about the number of languages of celebrities. Either they forget about less international languages (like Berber for Zidane or Creole for Henry), or they only count those languages in which the player/coach has reached a fairly good level. This is one core problem of plurilingualism, as one is often confronted with very uneven levels of competence – which nevertheless have to be counted and adequately appreciated. On the other hand, in the course of the player's/coach's career their linguistic repertoire diversifies, which might also explain the diverging information. Moreover, if we believe internet sources, the question whether Zidane really speaks Arabic seems to be more of a political than of a sociolinguistic nature…

German, Italian, Spanish (sid 2016)

- The Austrio-Croatian midfielder Mateo Kovačić – 5 languages – Croatian, German, English, Italian, Spanish (Williams 2017)
- The French ex-national player Thierry Henry – 6 languages – French, English, Italian, Spanish, Creole, Catalan (Nogueras 2009; [Henry] 2012)
- The famous Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimović – 6 languages – Swedish, Bosnian, English, Italian, Spanish, French
- The Austrian national player Marko Arnautović – 7 languages – Serbian, German, Turkish, English, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch ([Arnautović] 2014)
- Philippe Senderos, the Swiss national player with Hispano-Serbian roots – 8 languages – Spanish, Serbian, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian
- Eiður Guðjohnsen, the Icelandic who played (among others) at Barça – 8 languages – Icelandic, Spanish, English, Dutch, German, Catalan, French, Danish (Nogueras 2009)
- Gilbert Prilasnig, Austria's ex-national player – 11 languages – German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Slovenian, Croatian, Polish, Greek, Dutch[25] (Jandl 2013)

So, it comes as no surprise to find in the internet press the following slogan, coined by a sports journalist (Calum 2014): as far as plurilingualism is concerned, "[football] players should be our role models!".

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