

INTRODUCTION

*Around half the planet watched the 2006 World Cup Final
Three billion people have never done anything simultaneously before.*

(Goldblatt 2007: x)

The above quotation is indicative of the status that association football (from now on referred to as football or soccer¹) has attained in recent decades. Its history goes back to the Middle Ages when a wide range of ball games were played in France, England and Italy (Lipoński 2003: 42). England is generally regarded as the cradle of football because it rightly claims a few firsts. It was in England that the first football club, Sheffield Football Club, was set up in 1857. It was also here that the first football competition, the F.A. Cup, was inaugurated. Last but not least, it was in England that the rules of modern football were codified in 1863, when the so-called Laws of the Game were approved at a meeting of the newly-established Football Association. Football then began to develop in various corners of the globe². Nowadays, at the turn of the millennium, this game enjoys worldwide acclaim. Not only has soccer become the world's most popular sport but it has evolved into a socio-economic phenomenon. In other words, "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" (Bergh and Ohlander 2012a: 12). Anchimbe (2008: 133), in turn, highlights the agenda-setting function of football as he argues that "the sport has become so dynamic and diverse that it is used – both consciously

¹ For stylistic reasons these two terms will be used interchangeably in the present work. *Soccer*, derived from *association*, is a term commonly used in the United States, Australia or Canada in order to avoid confusion with other kinds of football, such as American Football, Australian Football or rugby.

² The scope of this book prevents a more detailed account of the history of football. For more insights see Lipoński (2003, 2012), Seddon (2004) and Goldblatt (2007).

and unconsciously – to represent reality, political and social issues, tastes in fashion, as well as racial and political awareness.

Coupled with the present status of football is the development of its language. Recent years have seen a growing interest in the language of soccer, which is winning increasing recognition as a valid area of linguistic inquiry. To illustrate the scope of this interest, let us supply a few examples, beginning with lexicographical works. The wide range of football dictionaries include monolingual (Murray 2002; Leigh and Woodhouse 2006; Burkhardt 2006a; Rosłoń 2011), bilingual (Sirges 1980; Taborek 2006) and multilingual (Yıldırım 2006; Simmen 2008) contributions³. In recent years, two volumes of papers devoted solely to the relationship between language and football have been published. The first one, Lavrić et al. (2008), includes 34 articles divided into the following six thematic sections: football terminology, football language, football discourses, football and media, media and discourse: emotions, and football multilingualism. The other one, Taborek et al. (2012), is a collection of papers, predominantly in German, covering various aspects of football language. One of the thematic sessions at the 19th Sociolinguistics Symposium in Berlin in 2012 was the Sociolinguistics of Football panel (chaired by C. Gerhardt), which featured several talks on a wide range of football language topics. Finally, there are a host of papers exploiting different facets of soccer language. They have been published in various linguistic journals and books, but their reference details can easily be accessed thanks to the Football and Language Bibliography Online⁴. This project, launched in the summer of 2012 by E. Giorgianni and E. Lavrić, lists several hundred publications which are grouped into twelve subsections for easier reference (some of them include contributions on the language of sport). As can be seen, the scope of football language research is impressive. Yet among the plethora of sources there is no contribution that provides a synthetic and comprehensive overview of soccer language with insights into its varieties⁵. This book has been written to fill this gap.

Central to the subject matter of this work is the concept of variation, which will not solely be invoked in the context of cross-language differences, as the title might suggest. The book aims to demonstrate that football language is a construct which occurs in many contexts of use (or communicative situations) and hence it displays intra-language variation. More specifically, it will be

³ Also worth mentioning is the *Kicktionary*, which is a multilingual online resource available at www.kicktionary.de. Cf. Taborek (2012b) for fuller discussion of football lexicography.

⁴ Available at: http://www.uibk.ac.at/msp/projekte/sprache_fussball/bibliography/bibliography20120807.pdf (retrieved on 17 November 2012).

⁵ Seddon's (2004) *Football Talk* is an interesting book which explores some aspects of English football language. However, being a popular science publication, it is not grounded in any linguistic theory.

argued that the language of football is a special language composed of a wide range of registers (some of them can also be marked by internal variation). It is hoped that this methodological solution can be applied in future studies of special languages other than soccer language.

This work takes as its object of inquiry the description of English and Polish football languages⁶. As the linguistic material submitted for analysis comprises samples of spoken and written British English texts, all generalizations will apply to the English language as spoken in the United Kingdom (it is assumed that some of them may not hold true for other contemporary geographical varieties of English)⁷. The contrastive perspective applied here entails the existence of differences and similarities between the two languages at all levels of linguistic investigation. I further seek to explore the patterns of similarity and dissimilarity, account for them, and finally prove or disprove the hypothesis that barring the structural differences between English and Polish, their football languages share a number of features.

Concerning its methodological approach, this book is strongly, though not solely, grounded in the theory of register and draws on the views of Halliday (1978), Beaugrande (1993), Biber and Conrad (2009) and others. Rooted in the neo-Firthian tradition, the register approach emphasizes the impact of extralinguistic factors on language choices. In other words, the linguistic features of registers are pragmatically determined by situational characteristics. Football vocabulary in Chapter 6 is primarily approached from a cognitive linguistics perspective. Some of the micro-studies whose results are included in the present work are based on other frameworks (e.g. speech acts theory or frame semantics).

The present work does not cover all aspects of football language. Nor does it explore in detail all of its subdomains. The choice of subject areas for investigation was based on the conviction that in order to make valid generalizations about the features of discourse, grammar and vocabulary, it is necessary to turn to large samples of text. Hence, the main area of inquiry is the language of soccer reporting in the three most popular kinds of media: the press, television and the Internet.

As regards the content of the book, Chapter 1 lays the theoretical foundations for empirical studies. It introduces the concept of special language by providing an overview of its definitions and distinctive features. The latter

⁶ To make the content of the book more accessible to non-Polish readers, all Polish language data, including examples of usage, have been translated into English.

⁷ Another disclaimer should be made with regard to the gender issue. Despite the increasing popularity of women's football worldwide, this work will explore 'men's language of soccer' (thus, generic masculine pronouns will be used). The choice of approach does not result from any sexist bias. Conversely, it is hypothesized that 'women's language of soccer' can prove a valid topic for in-depth research.

part of the chapter focuses on register, which is viewed as a useful construct accounting for social language variation and is contrasted with other related concepts, notably genre and style. This section is followed by an overview of register typologies and frameworks for register analysis. For the sake of further investigations, I discuss in detail Biber and Conrad's (2009) analytical framework, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been applied in Polish linguistic research.

Chapter 2 studies the relationship between general language, sports language and football language. It is argued that the language of soccer exhibits the characteristics of a special language and displays internal variation. I propose a taxonomy of football language subdomains within which I identify several registers. One of them is dealt with in greater detail: I discuss the results of my research on the language of on-field communication (i.e. how players communicate with each other and their coach during a soccer game).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present the findings of three corpus-based studies of the most popular media registers: football match reports, live TV football commentary and online live football commentary. The three chapters have a similar format. I first discuss the situational characteristics of each register. Then I provide an overview of the most distinctive discourse features and conventions, focusing on the pragmatic aspects of language use. Finally, I analyze selected linguistic features of each register quantitatively and qualitatively. In line with Biber and Conrad's approach, I also try provide a functional interpretation of the linguistic phenomena in every register under investigation by correlating its lexico-grammatical features with the situational characteristics. All studies include numerous examples of genuine usage from the Polish and British print, broadcast and online media.

Finally, Chapter 6 deals with football lexis. Its first part focuses on selected aspects of basic soccer terminology while the latter section provides a corpus-based overview of the most pervasive football metaphors, which are investigated from a cognitive perspective.

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