

Multilingualism in Football Teams

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Abstract

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

The study approaches the language issue from the perspective of a foreign player newly joining an existing team, which works in a language unknown to him and already includes a few other foreign players with different mother tongues. How does the club provide for the linguistic and cultural integration of the newcomer? Do they hire an interpreter for him? Do they systematically provide him with language courses? Will the language skills or non-skills have an impact on his integration within the team, and on his actual well-being? Will the fellow players help the newcomer to assimilate the language? Will they translate for him? What will be the most urgent language needs and the most noticeable shortcomings of a player with linguistic difficulties? Where and how will language barriers manifest? Methodologically the study draws on participant observation and on an extensive audio and video corpus, as well as on qualitative interviews. It brings about some unexpected findings about the “unmarked language choice” in the club and the language to be taught to the newcomer.

In the context of research conducted about multilingual professional environments, the football study focuses on an area where language does not seem to be at the centre of interest: players are in general not chosen with regard to their language skills. Apart from the integration issue, the corpus will allow us to describe the multifaceted nature of multilingualism as it shows in in this scarcely investigated type of domain. We will illustrate the code choice habits, the language shifts and mixes, and the complex yet meaningful patterns of their functioning, describing thus the plurality of language choices that are likely to occur in a multilingual team, as an example of language needs, policies and practices different from those that have been studied, e.g. in diglossia or business contexts.

Short Bio

Eva Lavric is a full professor of Romance Linguistics at the University of Innsbruck and director of the Centre for French Studies at Innsbruck University; she formerly worked at the Vienna Business University. She graduated *sub auspiciis* (with highest honours), was awarded the Elise Richter prize of the German Association of Romance Studies for the best habilitation (= state doctorate) and was honoured with the French “*palme académique*” and “*ordre du mérite*”. The Romance languages she speaks are French (second L1), Spanish and Italian; her research areas include (contrastive) semantics, text linguistics, pragmatics, languages for

special purposes, language acquisition and multilingualism – the latter in a whole variety of contexts, ranging from business to language teaching and to sports.