

Two global languages: football and English language teaching

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TWO GLOBAL LANGUAGES: FOOTBALL AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

"Football and English are the only truly global languages", stated Sir Bobby Charlton. So why not combine the two in our classrooms? This paper attempts to outline a framework in which football can be integrated into TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). As a modern mass phenomenon, football has met with severe criticism from various angles (1). That is why convincing arguments for including football in TEFL have to be put forward (2). In the next step, some astonishing parallels between TEFL and football will be revealed (3). Even if English teachers may be convinced of the relevance of football, they still need to know more about the what and how, i.e. the football topics to choose from (4) and the methods and techniques that can be used in the classroom (5).

1. Criticism

It is easy to criticize football. If Jean-Paul Sartre claims that in football everything is complicated by the presence of the opposing team, then the version of our modern media-driven society reads: in football everything is complicated by the presence of the players – who have more contact with journalists than with the ball. "Fußballstars in ihrer multifunktionellen Omnipräsenz als ballversierte Sports männer, aktienbesitzende Millionäre, rhetorikseminargeschulte Interviewpartner, managergestützte Werbepartner und affärengestahlte Familienväter sind Heroen der Neuzeit, die schnell von ihrem brüchigen Sockel gestoßen werden können." (Thaler 2006b: 2)

There is indeed no lack of arguments against football:

- mass phenomenon and low-culture image
- ignorance and arrogance among presidents, managers and commentators
- materialism and commercialization
- glorification in the media
- bribery and corruption
- hooliganism and chauvinism
- exploitation for political goals
- players as intellectual and rhetorical anti-heroes (cf. malapropisms in table 1).

Logical and linguistic problems

- 'A game is not won until it is lost.' (David Pleat)
- 'Samassi Abou don't speak the English too good.' (Harry Redknapp)
- 'My parents have been there for me, ever since I was about 7.' (David Beckham)
- 'Alex Ferguson is the best manager I've ever had at this level. Well, he's the only manager I've actually had at this level. But he's the best manager I've ever had.' (David Beckham)
- 'We're definitely going to get Brooklyn christened, but we don't know into which religion!' (David Beckham)
- 'I think this could be our best victory over Germany since the war.' (John Motson)
- 'I would not say David Ginola is the best left winger in the Premiership, but there are none better.' (Ron Atkinson)
- 'The Bulgarian players are tried and trusted. Well, I'm not sure they can be trusted.' (Ron Atkinson)
- 'Well, Clive, it's all about the two M's. Movement and positioning.' (Ron Atkinson)
- 'It's been two ends of the same coin.' (Dave Bassett)
- 'I've had 14 bookings this season – 8 of which were my fault, but 7 of which were disputable.' (Paul Gascoigne)
- 'I never make predictions, and I never will.' (Paul Gascoigne)
- 'If you can't stand the heat in the dressing-room, get out of the kitchen.' (Terry Venables)
- 'It was never part of our plans not to play well, it just happened that way.' (Terry Venables)

Table 1: Footballers' quotes

2. Rationale

In spite of all those arguments against football, it is a topic of universal interest. The latest football results form the lowest common denominator in conversations among male intellectuals. Moreover, football has advanced to a global cultural phenomenon, widely discussed in academic discourse. In numerous research fields the small round object has become a subject well investigated, e.g. in linguistics (Hutz 2006), religion (Klein / Schmidt-Lux 2006), art (Klant 2006), sport psychology (Höner 2006), sport pedagogy (Sobiech 2006), aesthetics (Bredenkamp 1982, Gumbrecht 2002), economic sciences (Herzog 2002), philosophy (Thaler 2006d), individual psychology (Buytendiyk 1953).

As far as teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is concerned, the following eleven arguments in favour of integrating football into the classroom may be put forward (Thaler 2006b).

Concepts	Aspects
1. Topicality	EURO 2008 in Austria/Switzerland
2. Popularity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. 1 sport - TV viewing figures - large number of active players
3. Proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training of four basic skills, viewing, mediating - relevance for lexis, grammar, pragmatics

4. Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rising number of female fans - about 30 million active female players worldwide - the female perspective on playing males
5. Intercultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trans-, cross-, intra- and intercultural learning - real or fictitious encounters
6. Intermediality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visual, auditory, audiovisual and interactive media on football - comparing different media formats
7. Primary classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - football boom in pre-teen ages - integration of children's interests - using playful elements, movement, songs
8. Literary studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - books (e.g. Nick Hornby: <i>Fever Pitch</i>) - football poems (www.footballpoets.org)
9. Bilingual teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - England as birthplace of modern soccer - teaching module <i>Football in P.E.</i> in English - CLIL in geography (e.g. presenting participating countries)
10. Interdisciplinary approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - multiple perspectives on soccer - <i>fachübergreifender/fächerverbindender Unterricht</i> (interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches)
11. Sport pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - raising interest for active participation - positive consequences of movement for body, psyche, character

Table 2: Arguments for football in TEFL

3. Affinity

At first sight, football on the one hand and TEFL methodology on the other do not seem to have a very close relationship. Looking more closely, one may, however, discover various features which the two phenomena share.

To begin with, three major language acquisition theories can also be applied to football. According to behaviourism, all learning takes place through the process of habit formation, supported by (positive and negative) reinforcement and pattern drill. Likewise, progress in playing football can be achieved by behaviourist habit formation, i.e. practice, imitation and drill. Noam Chomsky and the innatists claim that children are born with a special ability to discover for themselves the underlying rules and structures of a language system – via a black box or language acquisition device (LAD), or Universal Grammar (UG). Football theorists may adhere to a 'selective innatism' based on the FAD (football acquisition device): either you can play or you can't (*Man kann's oder man kann's nicht*). A third theoretical approach, the interactionist position, focuses on the role of the linguistic environment in interaction with the child's innate capacities and holds "that language develops as a result of the complex interplay between the uniquely human characteristics of the child and the environment in which the child develops" (Lightbown / Spada 1993: 14). In football, many experts favour a sort of 'competitive interactionism', convinced that the more you play with and against others, the better you will eventually become (*spielen, spielen, spielen!*).

Apart from the field of language/football acquisition, a certain affinity between the two domains may be disclosed when considering the following 11 key concepts, which dominate present TEFL discourse.

TEFL Methodology	Football
1. Active learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Handlungsorientierter Unterricht</i> (action-based learning) - learning by doing, acting, talking - products and processes of acting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - action as leitmotif - ball as driving force - player as goal-oriented agent
2. Holistic view	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - combining left and right hemispheres - learning with head, heart and hands - appealing to various senses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physical and mental fitness - flexibility of players' positions - search for complete player
3. Method pluralism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - method awareness - reflected selection from various approaches - choice dependent on goal, content, group, teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - variety of styles - Italian <i>catenaccio</i>, English 'kick-and-rush', Spanish one-touch-circle - choice of tactics dependent on opponent and one's own resources (players)
4. Communicative approach	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fluency, accuracy, appropriateness - message before form - success and misunderstandings in communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coordination within team - verbal and non-verbal means of communication between players, opponents, coaches, audience and media - successful and failed communicative acts (<i>Schiri: Ich verwarne Ihnen! – Lippens: Ich danke Sie! – Konsequenz: Rote Karte</i>)
5. Task-based approach	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - real-life tasks - negotiation of meaning - Willis' TBL framework: pre-task – task cycle – language focus (1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'football is life' - fighting for victory - training – match – analysis
6. Cooperative learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cooperation via interaction - promoting social skills - problems when doing group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - team spirit - 'the team is the star' - rivalry within a team
7. Product and process orientation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - producing and presenting a final product - process learning - „Der Schüler muss Methode haben“ (Gaudig) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - result orientation ("Modern ist, wer gewinnt" – coach's perspective) - run-of-the-match orientation (way of playing, individual performances, chances – aesthete's perspective)
8. Differentiation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - heterogeneous classes - different learner types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - different player types - working on one's individual strengths and weaknesses
9. Teacher personality	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher as most important variable for learners' success and motivation - various roles: model, coach, tutor, facilitator, organiser, expert, classroom manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - importance of coach for success - various role models: father figure (Herberger), slave-driver (Merkel), football idol (Völler), personal qualities (Hitzfeld), master of motivation (Daum), charismatic aura (Beckenbauer)
10. Openness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - criticism of teacher-fronted lessons - open learning - use of innovative methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open outcome - outsiders beating favourites - new rules and technological advances

11. Assessment	
- standards, tests, exams	- continuous assessment (weekly matches)
- self, peer, and external evaluation	- final exam (Euro/World Cup)
	- clash between players' and media evaluations

Table 3: Parallels TEFL methodology – football

4. Topics

Teachers may not be very impressed by this (partly ironically intended) affinity. They are interested in practical classroom suggestions rather than academic theories. Once they have been convinced that football is a suitable subject, they can choose from various fields. Such a choice depends on the teacher's own interests, the learning background and level of the students, the intended goals and the availability of materials. Younger learners may be attracted by rather down-to-earth aspects like rules and their history, players' biographies and the make-up of famous teams. With more advanced students, teachers should also critically reflect on controversial issues such as political, economic and cultural implications of the game.

No	Topic	Examples
1	rules	- historical background - meaning - critical evaluation
2	history	- beginnings in China/Japan - development in 19th century England
3	tactics	- national styles - mirror of national cultures?
4	players	- professionals' salaries - quasi-religious status - role models
5	teams	- reasons for success - women's teams
6	VIPs	- roles of sponsors and owners (Abramovich, et al.) - motives of presidents (Berlusconi, et al.) - influence of players' agents
7	audience	- mass behaviour - hooliganism - the female perspective
8	media	- players as pop stars - match coverage in tabloid/quality papers
9	business	- globalisation - marketing
10	politics	- nation-building power - chauvinism - profile-raising instrument
11	championships	- status of Champions League, Euro, World Cup - impact on economy and society

Table 4: Football topics in TEFL

5. Approaches

After the topic has been chosen, the question arises as to which methods and techniques can be employed in the classroom. The following table combines a modern media approach (Stempleski / Tomalin 2001, Sherman 2003, Hobrecht 2004, Thaler 2005) with TBLL – Task-based Language Learning (Skehan 1998, Ellis 2003, Müller-Hartmann / Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004, Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006). For each medium or material one task example – including various task descriptors – will be given (cf. also Thaler 2003, 2006a-e, Mendez 2006, Massler 2006, Vogt 2006).

No	Medium	Task examples
1	Football feature films: <i>Bend it like Beckham</i>	Compare the final scene of the film <i>Bend it like Beckham</i> with the ending of the novel. Which parallels and differences can you detect?
2	TV series: <i>Goal</i>	Let's view an episode from this series, do the activities on the worksheets and try to understand the protagonist's behaviour
3	Music videos: <i>Football's coming home</i> by Lightning Seeds, etc.	Compare two music videos and explain the parallels and differences between them by referring to the cultural background
4	Sketches: Monty Python's <i>The philosophers' football match</i>	View this Python sketch and do a dual task: Analyse the pythonesque form of British humour, and reflect on the relationship between football and philosophy.
5	Audio podcasts: <i>Zidane heads out of football</i>	Listen to the file and make up your mind as to whether Zidane's headbutt was justified.
6	Web search: <i>football history</i>	Find out whether the following five statements are true or false by researching the web: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. King Henry VIII hated football. 2. Many football idioms are of military origin. 3. Football has always been a working class sport. 4. The word <i>soccer</i> derives from the thick socks worn while playing. 5. Traffic lights were the inspiration for the red and yellow cards.
7	Commercials: <i>Football clips</i>	Identify both the surface and the subliminal message of this football commercial.
8	Wiki: Football's A – Z	Let's develop a football wiki, i.e. explanations of important football terms from A – Z, and put it on our school homepage.
9	Literature: <i>Here are the football results</i> by Michael Rosen	Read the poem as fast as possible, analyse the humour, and write a further line by resorting to British place names (e.g. Liverpool: liver + pool).
10	Jokes: <i>Football humour</i>	Identify the rhetorical devices these jokes are based on.
11	Cartoons: <i>National football tactics</i> (www.networks.ecse.rpi.edu/~bsikdar/tactics.pdf)	Reflect on what these football tactics reveal about national traits and discuss whether they are prejudices.

Table 5: Media and tasks

Apart from resorting to media like these, a teacher may simply use the first warming-up minutes of a lesson to discuss the match of the evening before. A deeper and more subtle examination of the power of football can also become a classroom topic. Yet one

should never forget that basically there is only one aim and goal in football: *Das Runde muss in das Eckige* – or to put it in TEFL terms: Football (the round thing) must be part of the language classroom (the square thing).

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