

## **A Hundred Years of Football English: A Dictionary Study on the Relationship of a Special Language to General Language\***

Gunnar Bergh & Sölve Ohlander  
University of Gothenburg

gunnar.bergh@sprak.gu.se; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2509-3568>  
solve.ohlander@ped.gu.se; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6066-486X>

### ABSTRACT

General-purpose dictionaries may be assumed to reflect the core vocabulary of current language use. This implies that subsequent editions of a desk dictionary should mirror lexical changes in the general language. These include cases where special-language words have become so familiar to the general public that they may also be regarded as part of general language. This is the perspective of the present study on English football vocabulary, where a set of well-known football words – *dribble*, *offside*, etc. – are investigated as to their representation in five editions of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1911–2011), and in four of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1948–1995). Two other dictionaries are also consulted: the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2010) and – for first occurrences of the words studied – the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is shown that, over the past hundred years, football vocabulary has gradually, at an accelerating pace, become more mainstream, as demonstrated by the growth of such vocabulary (e.g. *striker*, *yellow card*) in subsequent dictionary editions. Yet, some football terms make an esoteric impression, e.g. *nutmeg* ‘play the ball through the opponent’s legs’. Interestingly, such words also tend to be included in present-day dictionaries. Thus, football language is in a state of constant flux, responding to developments in and around the game. This is reflected in the dictionaries studied. In conclusion, due to the status and media coverage of the “people’s game” today, English general-purpose dictionaries have increasingly come to recognize much of its vocabulary as part of general language.



**Keywords:** football language, diachronic perspective, general-purpose dictionaries, learners' dictionaries, lexical change

## 1. Introduction

Football, as a popular pastime in some form or other, has been around for ages (Goldblatt, 2007: Ch. 1). One indication of this, on British soil, is that, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (*OED*), the first occurrence of the word football dates back to the Middle Ages (1409). Football is also referred to by Shakespeare, in *The Comedy of Errors* and *King Lear*, in a way implying that, in those early days, football's reputation was at a constant low, owing to its extremely rough and violent nature, occasionally resulting in fatal casualties.<sup>1</sup> Football at that time could certainly be called "the people's game", although in a different sense from now, when the world's most popular sport is also commonly referred to as "the beautiful game". Thus the historical trajectory of football can, in several respects, be considered a true from-rags-to-riches tale (cf. also Harvey, 2005).

In contrast to the long and winding road of football, football language cannot boast a very long history, the modern game being invented, i.e. regulated, in Britain in the early 1860s. Thus, football language – loosely defined as the elements making up football-related communication (spoken and written) at various levels, on and off the pitch – was, to begin with, synonymous with English football language, later to be converted to other varieties along with the international spread of the game, where English loans played a substantial role (Bergh & Ohlander, 2012b, 2017). Further, due to the fast-rising popularity of the game from the late 19th century onwards, football language as a special language, with a vocabulary of its own, gradually came to infiltrate general language, continuously blurring and modifying the boundary between them.<sup>2</sup> For example, as an indication of this state of affairs, some familiarity with football language, even among those not directly involved in the game as players or spectators, was becoming increasingly common in the first few decades of the 20th century, not least in Britain (Bergh & Ohlander, 2018: 256–257).

In this paper, the relationship between English football language and general language over time, with special regard to vocabulary, is our main focus. Such a diachronic perspective also involves change *within* football vocabulary, mainly an incremental process – for example, the word *striker* was introduced in the 1960s – although leaving in its wake a fair number of more or less obsolete expressions; for instance, the term *centre half* (along with *left-half* and *right-half*) started to disappear in the latter half of the 20th century following the emergence of new tactical formations (cf. Wilson, 2008: 82).

In the present context, the relatively condensed history of English football language may be seen 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 comparatively straightforward 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, financial or sociocultural nature. For instance, from an international perspective, 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 (for discussion, see Görlach, 2002; cf. also Bergh & Ohlander, 2012a: 293–298).

Such wider sociolinguistic issues, however, are not relevant to the present context. Our study of English football vocabulary will stick to the home turf of football language, being a diachronic, lexicological and lexicographic investigation of a sample of English football words and their spread into general language. In many cases, it may be expected, there should be a fairly transparent causal and temporal relationship between the first occurrence of a new term in the language, and its subsequent acceptance by language users, and the underlying cause or “event” – e.g. a rule change or 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 expressions like *one-two*, *through ball*, *offside trap* and *keep a clean sheet* first turn up? Or *ball watching* and *holding midfielder*? In general, for dating of first occurrences, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* is an indispensable tool, even though some very special football expressions may elude even this outstanding reference work, at least for a while.

As will already have appeared, however, first occurrences are not the only, perhaps not even the most intriguing, historical aspect of football language; nor is it the main concern of this study, aimed at illuminating the special–general language interface of English football vocabulary. It should thus be of interest to determine, as far as possible, when a certain term may be said to have become part of general language – and, possibly, how long it took after its first recorded occurrence. For example, when may football terms like *free kick* and *penalty*, or *striker* and *yellow card*, be said to have “entered” general language? And why did some terms take longer than others?

Needless to say, answers to such seemingly simple questions can never be an exact science. For one thing, general language is not a well-defined entity; nor, indeed is special language (cf. Sager et al., 1980: 68). In particular, the underlying problem concerns how to devise and design a method to make the somewhat woolly notion of general language accessible to empirical investigation in more concrete, operational terms. What does it mean to say that a football word like *free kick* or *striker* is, or has become, part of general language? On what grounds, except purely intuitive or

impressionistic, can such a claim plausibly be made? More specifically, what manageable criterion may be applied for a football word, whether of old or more recent provenance, of an exclusively football-specific or a more general sporting nature, to be considered part of general language? This basic question, among others, will be further discussed below.

## **2. Aim, material and method**

This section will give a more precise account of the outline of the study sketched in the introductory section – its overall aim and basic research questions, the lexical material investigated and the methodological framework and design of the study.

### **2.1. Aim**

As will already have appeared, the overall aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between football vocabulary, the core of the special language associated with football in a wide sense, and general language. More specifically, this kind of investigation relates to the time span between a football word's first documented (written) occurrence in a footballing context, i.e. with a recognizable football sense, and its first appearance as a football term in an ordinary, non-specialist dictionary, i.e. a dictionary aimed at the general reader rather than a dictionary specifically intended for those with a special interest in football.

In more narrow terms, then, our overall aim will be primarily realized by investigating to what extent a selection of English football terms are represented, if at all, in different editions of a general-purpose dictionary, and also, for comparative purposes, in different editions of a learner's dictionary for foreign students of English.

The chronological perspective in our study means that questions such as the following are brought to the fore: When did a certain football word make its first appearance in English, as recorded in the *OED*? When was the word first included in a general-purpose dictionary, such as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD)*, and in a learner's dictionary, such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)*? How fast are changes in football vocabulary – in particular, the introduction of new terms, for whatever reason – reflected in general language, i.e. included in the dictionaries investigated? Is there any difference between early football words and more recent ones with regard to the time elapsing before a certain word is included in a general-purpose or learner's dictionary? Is there evidence of a closer relationship between football vocabulary and general language nowadays than, say, a hundred years ago and, if so, what may be the reasons for this? Other questions include: What differences, if any, may be noted between dictionaries as regards coverage of football words? How specific – or exclusive – to football are the football words accounted for? These and related questions will be discussed at some length in section 3.

## 2.2. Material investigated

English football language comprises thousands of words and expressions relating to various aspects of the game, referring to players and activities on the pitch, equipment and rules, tactical and technical dimensions, spectators and media, etc. The approach taken here is to use as our basis what we consider a representative selection of football vocabulary, older as well as more recently added items, reflecting both the core of the game itself and somewhat more peripheral perspectives.

The football terminology providing a basis for the present study includes 40 English football terms. All of them may be considered relatively basic to the game in its various contexts. The main part consists of the 25 football words used in the studies by Bergh & Ohlander (2012a, 2017), in turn taken from the compilation of Anglicisms presented in Görlach (2001). However, Görlach's collection is limited to words adopted as direct loans in at least one of the 16 European languages included in his material. This means, among other things, that football words like *forward* and *offside*, appearing as direct loans in a number of languages, are included in his material, whereas words like *free kick* and *midfield* are not, usually rendered as loan translations in the same languages. Due to these limitations in Görlach's study, it was deemed necessary to add a further 15 words to our selection, a piece of discretionary sampling with a view to extending and complementing the lexical basis of our investigation, making it more representative of football language at large. All in all, the words making up our sample may be regarded as belonging to mainstream football language, although, to be sure, some of them are undoubtedly of a more narrowly specialist – opaque – nature than others, e.g. *nutmeg* and *sweeper*.

Among the 40 terms, the majority are simple words or derivatives (e.g. *dribble*, *supporter*), while a dozen are compounds (e.g. *crossbar*, *kick-off*);<sup>3</sup> one is an adjective-plus-noun phrase (*yellow card*). Most of the words are nouns (e.g. *corner*, *hooligan*, *penalty*), reflecting the fact that nouns are, generally speaking, more common than verbs and adjectives, football language being no exception. A number of words display dual wordclass membership, functioning as, for instance, both nouns and verbs (e.g. *draw*, *dribble*, *score*, *tackle*). In our study, however, wordclass membership is largely irrelevant: for example, if a word like *dribble* is first documented as a verb or a noun does not matter as long as its meaning is clearly related to what may be seen as a football context. The word *head*, primarily used as a noun in general language, is normally used as a verb in football language.

From a semantic point of view, the 40 lexical items chosen represent different layers, or domains, of football terminology. Some belong to the very core of the game, closely linked to players and events on the pitch, e.g. *back*, *dribble*, *midfield*, *striker*, *shoot*; some refer to the pitch itself, e.g. *crossbar*, *goal*, *goal line*. The rules (“laws”) of the game are reflected by words like *free kick*, *handball*, *offside*, *penalty*, and *yellow card*. Others belong to what may be called its periphery, e.g. *coach*, *hooligan*, *supporter*. As mentioned earlier, a few terms are semantically very specific, e.g. *offside*, defined in the following elaborate – yet incomplete – way in the 12th edition (2011) of the *COD*: ‘(in games such as football) occupying a position on the field where playing

the ball ... is not allowed, generally through being between the ball and the opponent's goal'; a hundred years earlier, the 1st edition of the *COD* defined *offside* more briefly: 'in football, between goal and opponents [sic] goal'. Other football terms, such as *score* and *team*, have wider reference, well beyond football. This is related to the fact that most expressions that are part of football language are words with wider contextual reach, i.e. they tend to be used in a variety of sports, as well as in other settings, e.g. *derby*, *goal*, *match*, *substitute*, *team*. They should, nonetheless, be seen as representing the base of football language, which is thus, to a large extent, made up of words and phrases that are part of sports language in general, alongside their potential for football-oriented reference. In other words, football vocabulary does not only include words that are exclusive to football (cf. Bergh & Ohlander, 2012b: 16–17). At the same time, some terms, although in a clear minority, are indeed more or less exclusive to football, e.g. *head*, *kick-off*, *nutmeg* and *side-foot*.

The following table provides a list of the 40 words selected (cf. also Appendix 1):

back	free kick	kick-off	shoot
coach	goal	libero	side-foot
corner	goal line	linesman	soccer
cross	goalpost	match	striker
crossbar	handball	midfield	substitute
derby	hands	nutmeg	supporter
draw	hat-trick	offside	sweeper
dribble	head	pass	tackle
football	hooligan	penalty	team
forward	keeper	score	yellow card

Table 1. The 40 football words used in the present study

### 2.3. Method

One of the main methodological problems of this study relates to the somewhat nebulous notion of general language. In our view, as suggested earlier, a practicable way of approaching this issue, and the overall aim of the present study, involves a comparison between the first documented occurrence of the football words specified in Table 1 and their inclusion in, on the one hand, a general-purpose desk dictionary and,

on the other, a learner's dictionary. More specifically, we use five editions (1911–2011), of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD)* – its 12th edition (2011) retitled the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED)* – and, for comparative purposes, four editions (1948–1995) of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)*, the first two editions (1948, 1963) titled *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Apart from these two dictionaries, we have also checked the *Oxford Dictionary of English (ODE, 2010)*, with greater overall coverage than the *COED*, for inclusion of football terms. Last but not least, to determine the first recorded occurrence of each individual football word, with a football sense, in our material, the *OED* was consulted.

Thus, having established their first occurrences by means of the *OED*, the 40 football words were then looked up in the *COD/COED* and the *OALD* to establish in which edition of the two dictionaries each word was first included, as a basis for calculating the time lag between the first *OED* occurrence of the word and its appearance in the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*. This, in essence, is the basic method employed here to study the relationship between football language as a special language and its role in general language, from a mainly diachronic perspective. This kind of method, however, is by no means self-evident, and so merits some further discussion.

Our underlying assumption is that inclusion of a word with a football meaning in a general-purpose dictionary such as the *COD/COED*, as well as in the *OALD*, may be seen as an operational criterion for being part of the general language current when the various editions were published. This line of reasoning, of course, is closely related to the stated aims and scope of the dictionaries in question, as opposed to more specialist dictionaries, intended for more narrowly circumscribed fields, e.g. law or medicine. Accordingly, words like *dribble* and *offside*, by virtue of being included in the first edition of the *COD* (1911), may be considered part of the general language at the time of – or, rather, well before – its publication, whereas *corner* and *midfield* are not. Further, using consecutive editions of the same dictionary should be an advantage in this kind of undertaking, even though inclusion policy may not have been consistent throughout its history; different editors may have adopted different approaches. As a complement to the *COD/COED*, our main source, different editions of the *OALD*, will also be referred to, for the latter half of the 20th century. It should be borne in mind, however, that learners' dictionaries, being intended for foreign students of English, are generally more restrictive as to which words they include. Nonetheless, both *dribble* and *offside* are present in the first edition of the *OALD* (1948), in contrast to *corner* and *midfield*. Here, then, the first editions of the two dictionaries, though decades apart, provide joint support for the general-language status – or lack thereof – of these particular football words. However, as will be seen in due course, such consensus between the *COD* and the *OALD* is not always the case.

Our choice of the *COD/COED* as a representative general-purpose dictionary can hardly be seen as controversial. For one thing, its original close connection to the *OED*, still a work in progress at the time of the first edition of the *COD*, made it uniquely authoritative (cf. Fowler & Fowler 1911: iii; cf. also Knowles 2011: ix–xi). Further, it is probably still the best-known English desk dictionary in use by the general

public, thus being a prime candidate for reflecting generally current language. Indeed, the full title of the *COD* (“the *Concise*”), in all its editions throughout the 20th century, is: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. From the start, the *Concise* could be seen as, in many ways, a pioneering kind of dictionary, as noted by Crystal (2011: xi): “What is initially surprising, then, is to encounter in the *Concise* a dictionary that is so modern, descriptive, and inclusive in character”. Further, Fowler & Fowler (1911: v) particularly emphasize, as a matter of editorial policy, the notion of “currency” and their commitment to “the main stream of the language”, including “a fuller treatment than is usual in dictionaries of its size to the undoubtedly current words forming the staple of the language”, while being explicitly restrictive with regard to “scientific and technical terms”. This, it would appear, represents as good an intention as any to capture what we are after in the present study, i.e. the general, or mainstream, language, rather than an abundance of special vocabulary. Such ambitions also pervade the subsequent editions of the *COD/COED*, despite an inevitable succession of editors and other changes, use of computerized corpora, etc. (cf. Knowles, 2011). Stevenson (2011: viii) states that the *COED* “aims to cover all those words, phrases, and meanings that form the central vocabulary of English in the modern world”, i.e. words that are part of “the mainstream language”, echoing the words of the Fowler brothers a hundred years earlier. This, it may be assumed, will include a number of words belonging to the language of football.

Out of the twelve editions of the *COD/COED* (1911–2011), we have used five (see Table 2), at intervals ranging from 40 years, in the first half of the 20th century, to 16 years (at the end of the period covered), intended to mirror the increasing pace of changes in football vocabulary, as well as the increasing frequency of new editions in the course of the 20th century. As a complement to the *COD*, as pointed out earlier, we have also used, for the latter half of the 20th century, a learner’s dictionary, intended for another kind of readership, viz. the *OALD*, pioneered by A.S. Hornby in the 1940s and perhaps still the best-known of all English learners’ dictionaries (see Cowie, 1999). Like the *COD*, its title includes the phrase *Current English*. However, its purpose and scope differ substantially from those of the *COD*, as can be gathered from its original title: *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary*. According to its “Introduction”, its aims can be described as much more “productive” than those of a general-purpose dictionary like the *COD*: “to give [foreign students] as much information as possible concerning idioms and syntax” (p. iv; cf. Cowie, 1999: 13). Its focus on foreign learners also means that its coverage of vocabulary is considerably more restrictive than that of the *COD*. At the same time, it naturally aims to cover general rather than special vocabulary, even more so than the *COD*, since it necessarily includes far fewer words. For that reason alone, it may be of interest to use it in the same way as the *COD* in our investigation of English football vocabulary, on the assumption that if a word is found in the *OALD*, this is even stronger proof of it being established as part of the general, mainstream language. Four different editions of the *OALD* have been used in our study, published between 1948 and 1995.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, a comparison of results from the *COD/COED* with those from the *OALD* with regard to the 40 football words studied may be highly relevant, especially



for football terms making their appearance towards the middle and in the latter half of the 20th century, a period of expansion and change for football at large (Goldblatt, 2011: Ch. 11). The editions of the two dictionaries mainly used in our investigation are shown in Table 2:

<i>Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD)</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> ed., 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> ed., 1951	6 <sup>th</sup> ed., 1976	9 <sup>th</sup> ed., 1995	<i>COED</i> , 12 <sup>th</sup> ed., 2011
<i>Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> ed., 1948	2 <sup>nd</sup> ed., 1963	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed., 1974	5 <sup>th</sup> ed., 1995	

Table 2. Editions of *COD/COED* and *OALD* used in the present study

In addition to the various editions of the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*, we have also, as mentioned earlier, consulted another one-volume, general-purpose dictionary, the *Oxford Dictionary of English (ODE)* (3rd ed., 2010).<sup>5</sup> Considerably more comprehensive in word coverage than the *COED* (2011) – 350,000 words, phrases and meanings versus the *COED*'s 240,000 – it may provide additional evidence that a certain football term may be regarded as being part of the mainstream language. Like the *COED* (2011), it is based on evidence drawn from the enormous Oxford English Corpus of more than two billion words – a far cry indeed from the lexicographic methods used for the first editions of the *COD* and the *OALD* (let alone Dr. Johnson's dictionary of 1755).<sup>6</sup>

The procedure proposed here – determining the first *OED* occurrences of the football words in our material and comparing them with their first occurrences in the relevant dictionary editions – may seem straightforward enough. However, the general requirement of an identifiable football sense in order for a word – e.g. *corner* and *penalty* – to be assigned a proper first occurrence, whether in the *OED* or in the other dictionaries examined, occasionally gives rise to some borderline cases, calling for special attention. As emphasized above, what we refer to as football vocabulary does not only include the minority of words that are more or less exclusive to football, but also words that may occur in a variety of sporting contexts apart from football, e.g. *coach*, *match*, *pass*, and *score*. Such words are just as much part of football language as more football-specific words like *nutmeg* and *side-foot*.

Thus, from our perspective, for a word to be considered a football word in our various dictionary searches, a dictionary entry must include some sort of indication or reference – including examples of usage – either to football/soccer or to some more general sporting context which may reasonably be seen as including football. A few examples will clarify matters. The noun *back* is defined as 'football player stationed behind' in the *COD* 1/1911, whereas *match* is defined in more general terms: 'contest of skill &c. in which persons are matched against each other, as *cricket m.*'. Both these

words, despite the difference in football specificity in their definitions, have been counted as football words in the *COD* 1/1911, *back* with a distinct football-specific sense, *match* with a more general sporting sense, as shown by the reference to cricket. Similarly, the noun *penalty* is included, in a general sporting sense in *COD* 1/1911, introduced by the general domain marker '(Sport.)', reappearing with a specific football sense in *COD* 4/1951, now introduced by the marker 'Football'. This example also illustrates differences between different editions of the same dictionary in their treatment of football terms. By contrast, the entry for the verb *shoot* in the *COD* 1/1911 does not include any reference to football, whether specifically or in some other relevant sporting terms; it does, however, turn up with a specific football sense in *COD* 4/1951, introduced by the domain markers 'Assoc. Footb., Hockey, etc.' and defined as 'take a shot at goal'.

An especially interesting case, illustrating the kind of footwork required in deciding whether a particular term should be considered a football word or not in a dictionary edition, is provided by the noun *striker*. *COED* 12/2010 offers the following definition, in explicitly football-specific terms: '(chiefly in soccer) a forward or attacker'. Now, how old is this specific football usage? The word is recorded as a tennis term in the *OED* as early as 1699. However, since this usage differs radically from the meaning associated with that of a football striker, first recorded as late as 1963, *striker* has been classified as a 20th-century word here. Another intriguing example is the word *crossbar*. While the *OED* gives 1857 as its first recorded instance, the crossbar as such was not introduced in football until 1875 (when a change in *The Laws of the Game* was implemented). Still, as the notion of crossbar, with a function similar to that in football, seems to have been prevalent in related sports, especially rugby, before the 1870s, the earlier date has been used here; the difference between *striker* and *crossbar* as regards first occurrence as football words seems relatively clear.

As will be obvious from the above discussion, intended to show the occasionally intricate decision-making process involved in how a certain football word should be regarded and classified in a specific dictionary, the handling of problematic cases will ultimately depend on qualitative arguments about relative closeness to football and the like, thus on a partly subjective basis. This means, inevitably, that some uncertainty will remain, in a limited number of cases. However, they are unlikely to affect the overall picture resulting from our investigation, to which we now turn.

### 3. Results and discussion

The overall results, the raw data, of all the dictionary searches concerning the 40 football words are to be found in Appendix 1. It presents a master table accounting for the first occurrences of the words according to the *OED*, as well as their presence in the various editions of both the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*, along with their coverage in the *ODE*. This table provides the basis for the different sortings of our findings that form the bulk of this section, after a brief numerical account of our main results.

## 3.1. General overview

A condensed survey of the results of our dictionary searches is given in Table 3. It provides absolute numbers and corresponding percentages for the football words investigated, deriving from the distribution of the following markers in the master table: “–” (non-inclusion), “+” inclusion, “fb” (football-specific definition); the “double” marker “+fb” thus refers to inclusion of a word with football-specific definition (e.g. *kick-off*), as opposed to inclusion with a more general sporting definition (e.g. *match*).

Dictionary editions		COD					OALD				ODE
		1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> e d. 1951	6 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1976	9 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	12 <sup>th</sup> ed. 2011	1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1948	2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 1963	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 1974	5 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010
Absolute numbers	–	23	16	9	4	1	19	17	11	5	1
	+	17	24	31	36	39	1	23	29	35	39
	+ fb	8	14	19	19	24	16	17	22	30	27
Percentages (of 40 words)	–	58	40	23	10	2	48	42	28	12	27
	+	42	60	77	90	98	52	58	72	88	98
	+ fb	20	35	48	48	60	40	42	55	75	68
Per cent + fb of +		47	58	61	53	62	76	74	76	86	69

Table 3. Numerical summary (absolute numbers and percentages) of master table, involving 40 football words and three dictionaries (cf. Appendix 1)

A few general comments are due on the numbers and percentages given in Table 3. First of all, as already emphasized, the “+fb” marker constitutes a subset of the “+” marker, distinguishing football-specific definitions from more generally defined football words within the inclusion category, both of them contrasting with the “–” marker, i.e. the non-inclusion category. Yet, it should be noted that “fb” does not necessarily mean that a word is exclusive to football, only that it is defined in football-specific rather than general sporting terms.

Altogether, apart from the *OED* datings, the master table contains 365 markers, relating to the 40 words in the ten dictionary editions investigated. Their distribution is as follows: “–” 106, “+” 147, “+fb” 112. This means, on the one hand, that a clear majority (147 versus 106) of the football words are actually included in the dictionary editions searched; on the other hand, it also means that, among the inclusions, an equally clear majority (112 out of 147) display football-specific rather than more general sporting definitions. Let us now take a closer look at these figures.

Overall, the absolute numbers of football words included are slightly larger in the *COD* than in the *OALD*, as can be seen from a comparison of temporally

corresponding editions of the two dictionaries, e.g. *COD* 6/1976 (31) versus *OALD* 3/1974 (29) and *COD* 9/1995 (39) versus *OALD* 5/1995 (35). This difference, though small, is hardly surprising in view of the difference in coverage between a general-purpose dictionary like the *COD/COED* and a dictionary for foreign learners, such as the *OALD*; if anything, the difference might have been expected to have been bigger. Further, both dictionaries display steadily increasing coverage of football words over time, in the *COD/COED* from 17 to 39 words in the hundred years elapsing between its 1st and 12th editions, in the *OALD* from 21 to 35 words from its 1st to its 5th edition, spanning roughly half the time covered by the *COD/COED*. And, of course, it is only natural that later editions, of both dictionaries, should include a larger proportion of the 40 football words than earlier ones; after all, some of the words in our material were not in general football use until the 1960s.

It may also be noted that the absolute number, as well as the proportion, of football-specific definitions in the two dictionaries increases along with the growing number of football words – however defined, i.e. also in more general (sporting) terms – included in them. Here, the *OALD* is consistently in the lead, peaking at 30 football-specific definitions (75% of the 40 football words) in its 5th edition (1995), to be compared with only 19 (48%) in the corresponding *COD* 9/1995. Thus, the share of football-specific definitions in relation to the words investigated is substantially larger in the *OALD*. This is also reflected, even more clearly, in the percentage figures for the two dictionaries with regard to football-specific definitions in relation to all the football words included in the two dictionaries (bottom line of Table 3), where the *OALD*, around 75% in its first three editions, attains 86% in its 5th edition (1995): out of the 35 football words included, 30 have football-specific definitions. Neither the *COD/COED* nor the *ODE* can match the percentage figures of the *OALD* in this respect. This finding merits further attention and will be discussed in due course, like several others briefly commented on above.

### 3.2. Chronological aspects

On the basis of the master table (Appendix 1) and Table 3, we now proceed to some more specific angles of the main data, accounting in more detail and depth for the parameters and dimensions most relevant to the overall aim of the study.

A fitting point of departure is our findings concerning the first occurrences of the 40 football words as documented in the *OED*, presented in Table 4:

Pre-19 <sup>th</sup> century	The period 1800–1862	The period 1863–1899	The 20 <sup>th</sup> century
football 1409	draw 1825	dribble 1863	hat-trick 1901

Pre-19 <sup>th</sup> century		The period 1800–1862		The period 1863–1899		The 20 <sup>th</sup> century	
match	1531	substitute	1826	offside	1863	derby	1914
goal	1577	team	1834	head	1871	side-foot	1945
		goalpost	1842	Hands	1874	keeper	1957
		supporter	1843	forward	1879	cross	1961
		score	1844	handball	1879	striker	1963
		crossbar	1857	Back	1880	sweeper	1964
		kick-off	1857	corner	1882	libero	1967
		goal line	1862	shoot	1882	nutmeg	1968
				tackle	1884	yellow card	1970
				coach	1885		
				soccer	1885		
				midfield	1890		
				free kick	1894		
				linesman	1894		
				penalty	1897		
				hooligan	1898		
				pass	1899		

Table 4. The 40 football words in chronological order according to first recorded instances in *OED*

First of all, a caveat is in order: in view of the popularity of football, not only as a competitive game but as a pastime, a large number of football words may be assumed to have existed in spoken colloquial English long before their first occurrences in print. Be that as it may, Table 4 shows that the great majority of the football words included in our study seem to have made their first documented appearances in the 19th century, here divided into an earlier and a later period, based on the all-important regulation of English football in 1863, together with the establishment of the Football Association (FA) (Goldblatt, 2007: 30–31) – incidentally, the year of the first documented instances of the central football-specific words *dribble* and *offside*. Not surprisingly, in view of

the long prehistory of the modern game in Britain, the word *football* itself emerges as the undisputed, medieval Nestor among the 40 words, followed in the 16th century by two other words at the very centre of the game: *match* and *goal*, albeit in a general sporting – rather than football-specific – sense. The 19th century, during the breakthrough of the modern game, saw the first written appearances of a large number of familiar football words of a much more specific nature, from *draw* (1825) to *pass* (1899), as well as a host of other words still alive and kicking on and off today's pitches – the backbone, as it were, of English football vocabulary. At the same time, the game experiences a constant influx of new words and expressions, as indicated by such well-known mid-20th-century additions as *libero* (1967) and *yellow card* (1970), reflecting developments in the tactics and rules of football. Also, among the relative late-comers, somewhat surprisingly, is the word *cross*, not appearing as a football word until 1961, according to the *OED*.

Having determined the first *OED* instances of the football words, we now turn to the number of words included in the different editions of the dictionaries used. The relevant figures are shown in Table 5 (cf. also Table 3):

<i>COD/COED</i>	football words	<i>OALD</i>	football words	<i>ODE</i>	football words
1 <sup>st</sup> edition 1911	17	1 <sup>st</sup> edition 1948	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> edition 2010	39
4 <sup>th</sup> edition 1951	24	2 <sup>nd</sup> edition 1963	23		
6 <sup>th</sup> edition 1976	31	3 <sup>rd</sup> edition 1974	29		
9 <sup>th</sup> edition 1995	36	5 <sup>th</sup> edition 1995	35		
12 <sup>th</sup> edition 2011	39				

Table 5. Number of football words included in selected editions of *COD*, *OALD* and *ODE*

It should be noted that the numbers shown include occurrences of football words found in earlier editions of the same dictionary, with the exception of the *ODE*, where only one edition (the 3rd) has been used. This means, for example, that *OALD* 3/1974 includes the football words accounted for in the two previous editions of the dictionary.

The figures for the 40 football words investigated provide a neat picture, showing a steady increase over time. For the *COD/COED*, the number more than doubles, going from 17 to 39 words in a hundred years, an increase of 22 words, i.e.

from 42% to 98% of the words in our material. For the *OALD*, a similar trend is in evidence, with a substantial 14-word increase from 21 to 35 in the 47 years covered, i.e. from 52% to 88% of the 40 football words. *ODE* 3/2010, finally, displays the same number of football words (39) as *COED* 12/2011, hardly surprising in view of the close link between them, noted above.

Despite the differences in aim, scope and intended readership between the *COD/COED*, a general-purpose dictionary, and the *OALD*, a dictionary for foreign students, the similarities between them are obvious with regard to the number of football words included in comparable editions. For instance, *COD* 6/1976 includes 31 football words, *OALD* 3/1974, 29; similarly, *COD* 9/1995 contains 36 football words, *OALD* 5/1995, 35. This relative consensus between the two dictionaries lends some support to the general assumption underlying this study, namely that inclusion of words in certain types of dictionaries may be used as an indication of what may be seen as general language. It is also of interest to note that all but one in our selection of football words turn up in our dictionary searches. The odd man out is *hands*, an outmoded word referring to “illegally” handling the ball, its first *OED* occurrence from 1874. This word, it appears, was gradually outcompeted by the synonymously used *handball* (not to be confused with the sport), included in both *COD* 9/1995 and *COED* 12/2011, as well as *ODE* 3/2010. By contrast, *handball* qua football word is missing from the *OALD*, regardless of edition; this also goes for *libero*, *nutmeg* and *side-foot* (see further below).

As can be seen from the master table (Appendix 1), a fair number (16) of the 40 football words turn up in all the dictionary editions searched, belonging to what may be considered the staple of football vocabulary, dating back to the 19th century. These are: *back*, *draw*, *dribble*, *goal*, *hooligan*, *kick-off*, *linesman*, *match*, *offside*, *penalty*, *score*, *tackle*, *team*, *side*, *soccer* – and, of course, the word *football* itself. The words *goal line* and *goalpost* are included in all the editions of the *COD/COED*, but missing from the earlier editions of the *OALD*.

This means that already by the early 20th century almost half of the 40 football words may be seen as part of general language, appearing in *COD* 1/1911. They are well-established ingredients in the subsequent editions, as well as in more recent editions of the *OALD*. Somewhat surprisingly, among the words initially missing from the *COD* but included in later editions, and in the *OALD*, are some fairly basic football terms, such as *corner*, *forward*, *head* (verb), *pass*, and *shoot*. The latter half of the 20th century also saw the addition, in both the *COD* and the *OALD*, of some more recent terms, often the result of various tactical changes and formations, such as *midfield*, *sweeper* and *striker*, all to be found in editions from the 1970s. By contrast, the word *libero* – like *striker* and *sweeper* a child of the 1960s, according to the *OED* – makes its first appearance only in *COD* 9/1995, not being included in any edition of the *OALD*. Likewise, *yellow card*, with the latest first occurrence (1970) of all the 40 words, is introduced in the 1995 editions of both the *COD* and the *OALD*. Incidentally, this also applies to the word *cross* (first *OED* occurrence 1961), whereas *nutmeg* (first *OED*

occurrence 1968), included in *COED* 12/2011 as well as *ODE* 3/2010, is missing from all the *OALD* editions searched.

### 3.3. Football-specific and general sporting words: some tendencies

Apart from the overall chronological picture outlined in section 3.2, some more specific tendencies may be noted in our material, as will become clear from a closer look at the master table (Appendix 1). Thus, besides the dimension of inclusion versus non-inclusion in the various editions, exemplified above, there are other lines of development between different editions of the same dictionary. Here, the notion of “football specificity” (“fb” in Table 3) in the dictionary definitions plays a pivotal role, especially in contrast to more general sporting definitions.

To be sure, as already pointed out, some of the 40 words are indeed exclusive to football – *free kick*, *head*, *kick-off*, and *side-foot*, apart from *football* and *soccer*, of course – and are, consequently, given football-specific definitions throughout the dictionary editions investigated. This also goes for *tackle* in the *COD/COED*, but not consistently so in the *OALD*, while the opposite holds for *dribble*, defined in football-specific terms throughout the *OALD*, but not so in the *COD/COED*; in the *ODE* 3/2010, however, they are both defined as football-specific. By contrast, *forward* and *head* are missing from *COD* 1/1911 but given football-specific definitions in subsequent editions of the dictionary, as well as in the *OALD* and *ODE* 3/2010. Similarly, the word *corner*, missing from *COD* 1/1911 and *OALD* 1/1948, is given football-specific definitions in the remaining editions of both dictionaries, and in *ODE* 3/2010. On the other hand, words like *draw* and *hooligan* are defined in more general sporting terms in the great majority of the dictionary editions investigated. The word *goal*, finally, with football-specific definitions throughout the *OALD*, is less clear-cut in the *COD*, with general sporting definitions in the first three editions studied, displaying football-specific ones in *COD* 9/1995 and *COED* 12/2011, like *ODE* 3/2010.

However, despite the considerable amount of variation and lack of consistency just exemplified, between and within the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*, certain – admittedly weak – tendencies, in different directions, are noticeable among our dictionary findings. On the one hand, there are football words indicating, in their definitions across editions, a movement from a general sporting sense to a more football-specific definition. One example of this is *goal line*, missing from the first two editions of the *OALD*. Both *COD* 1/1911 and *COD* 4/1951 define the word in general sporting terms, *COD* 6/1976 and later editions, like *ODE* 3/2010, in football-specific terms. The *OALD* presents a different picture: when the word is first included, in *OALD* 3/1974, its definition is football-specific, to be replaced by a more general sporting definition in *OALD* 5/1995. Another situation obtains for the word *hooligan* (cf. above), which is defined in fairly general terms throughout the different editions of the *COD/COED*, in contrast to *ODE* 3/2010. In the *OALD*, the word is also given a general definition until the 5th edition (1995), when – possibly inspired by the particularly outrageous behaviour of English football hooligans at the time – its lexical entry



specifically refers to football hooligans. The lack of agreement between the *COD/COED* and the *OALD* in these and many similar cases will be further looked into in due course.

The opposite direction is also in evidence in the material studied, i.e. definitions changing from football-specific reference to a more general (sporting) sense. The word *back* is a case in point. The 1st (1911), 4th (1951) and 6th (1976) editions of the *COD* define the word in football-specific terms, the 9th (1995) and the 12th (2011) in general sporting terms, like *ODE* 3/2010. The *OALD*, by contrast, adheres to football-specific definitions throughout the editions investigated. Another example is *pass*. While (somewhat surprisingly) missing from *COD* 1/1911, *COD* 4/1951 and *COD* 6/1976 give football-specific definitions, supplanted by more general definitions in the last two editions investigated, unlike *ODE* 3/2010. Again, the *OALD* uses football-specific definitions across the board. In the *COD*, *linesman* is defined in football-specific terms in the first three editions searched, while the 9th (1995) and the 12th (2011) use more general sporting definitions, like *ODE* 3/2010. The *OALD* presents a somewhat more wobbly picture: its 1st edition (1948) gives a football-specific definition, the following two a general sporting one, the 5th (1995) reverting to football-specific reference. As also shown for the opposite direction – from general sporting to football-specific definitions – the picture emerging from the examples just discussed can hardly be considered neat and orderly, with a frequent lack of agreement between the dictionaries studied as well as a lack of consistency within them, i.e. between different editions. Clearly, in the cases so far exemplified and discussed, there is no self-evident path of development for football-word definitions between dictionary editions.

Nonetheless, a third kind of process at play between definitions across dictionary editions may also deserve some attention, involving words which were first used in other sporting contexts than football but were then adopted by the “people’s game” – in some cases so successfully as to make many people forget the words’ original provenance. It may be illustrated by the well-known football word *hat-trick*, its first *OED* occurrence dating back to 1901. According to *COD* 1/1911, however, the word is restricted to cricket (‘taking 3 wickets by successive balls’), and so does not qualify as a football term there. In *COD* 4/1951, the word is given wider sporting reference in a sense “transferred” from cricket (‘scoring of three goals by the same player’), and so accepted as a football word. In *COD* 6/1976, finally, *hat-trick* has achieved full football-specific status: ‘(Footb. etc.) scoring of 3 goals by the same player in the same match’. In *COD* 9/1995, however, the football-specific reference is gone again, only to return in *COED* 12/2011. What we have here, then, is one of football’s household words, which actually started – and still maintains – its career in cricket, even though to most people today, presumably, the footballing sense is now the primary one. Nonetheless, the definitions given in *OALD* 3/1974 and *OALD* 5/1995 are couched in general sporting terms rather than football-specific ones, unlike *ODE* 3/2010.

A parallel case is provided by the word *derby*, originally associated only with horse racing, but for decades at least as common in footballing contexts (cf. also *local derby*). This development is well reflected in the various editions of the *COD*. As a

football word, *derby* does not show up until *COD* 6/1976, with a general sporting definition, as in the subsequent editions. The *OALD*, however, in its 5th edition (1995), gives a football-specific explanation of the word, a change from the 3rd edition (1974), where the definition of *derby* was of the general sporting kind, as in the corresponding *COD* 6/1976.

The upshot of the discussion in this section is that the evidence for the tendencies observed can hardly lay claim to be being very strong. Rather, the examples cited should be taken as illustrations of the main directions at hand as regards developments of definitions between dictionary editions, from general to more specific, or the other way around – and, occasionally, a sideways movement, from one sport to another.

### 3.4. *COD* versus *OALD*

In the preceding exemplification and discussion of the football words studied, we have noted a number of differences between the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*, on the one hand, and between different editions of the same dictionary, on the other. One noticeable tendency relates to the considerably more frequent use of football-specific definitions in the *OALD* than in the *COD/COED*. This applies, in particular, to a number of football words with a relatively general sporting definition. Take a word like *match*. Throughout the definitions in the *COD/COED*, this word is defined in general sporting terms rather than football-specific ones. In the *OALD*, except for the 1st edition (1948), *match* is explained in football-specific terms. The word *team* provides another example. The 1st (1911) and 4th (1951) editions of the *COD* give football-specific definitions, replaced by more general ones in later editions. In the *OALD*, all the editions used give football-specific definitions of *team*. A number of less general football terms give evidence of the same tendency. For instance, the word *penalty* is defined in general rather than football-specific terms in three of the five editions of the *COD/COED*, whereas the *OALD* uses only football-specific definitions across the different editions. A similar situation applies to the word *pass*: two of the four *COD/COED* editions where the word is included use football-specific definitions: the 4th (1951) and the 6th (1970) – the later ones resort to more general ones. The *OALD*, again, uses only football-specific explanations throughout the four editions studied. Apparently, as suggested by these examples, the *COD/COED* tends to move from football-specific definitions towards general sporting direction more readily than the *OALD* (cf. also discussion in 3.3.).

Examples could be multiplied. Now, what might be the reason for this discrepancy between the two dictionaries? It seems unlikely that the examples cited here are only the result of random variation. In our view, the main reason may be related to the different aims and intended readerships of the *COD* compared with the *OALD*. It should be borne in mind that the *OALD* is primarily intended for foreign learners of English, making special demands on clarity and concreteness in definitions. In the present context, this means that definitions of words that are part of English

football language may be regarded as more clearly identified, thus more easily understood by foreign language students if they refer to specific rather than more general notions. Football, by virtue of its international status and worldwide popularity, is arguably more specific, or recognizable, than sports in general and, perhaps even more important, something which many students may be assumed to be familiar with at a personal level. Consequently, pointing to football as the most typical exponent of the referential potential of fairly general football words, such as *match* and *team*, may be seen as an efficient, or “ostensive”, pedagogical technique, of special significance in a vocabulary-learning context. In other words, the relative abundance of football-specific definitions in the *OALD* could well be seen as an outgrowth of a deliberate pedagogical strategy on the part of A.S. Hornby.

### 3.5. Principles for dictionary inclusion among the 40 words?

Throughout the preceding account and discussion of our results, the diachronic, or chronological, perspective of the relationship between English football vocabulary and general English has been paramount: words starting out as technical terms within a narrow specialist field gradually become sufficiently familiar to sufficiently many people to qualify as members of the mainstream language. However, this is by no means an automatic process. Depending on a variety of circumstances, some words take longer than others to be admitted; some words or expressions may never cross the line between special and general language. For example, as noted above, football words like *back* (1880) and *tackle* (1884) are included in *COD* 1/1911, as opposed to, words like *corner* (1882) and *shoot* (1882), all of them with first *OED* occurrences in the early 1880s. What general tendencies, if any, can be detected as to the time lag between first documented *OED* occurrences and first inclusion in the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*? What factors appear to be of special relevance?

To attempt to answer these and similar questions, let us consider, in some more depth, the time span between the first *OED* occurrences of the football words studied and their first inclusion in the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*. The basic data are provided in Table 6:

<b>words + first <i>OED</i> occurrence</b>	<b><i>CO(E)D</i> edition</b>	<b><i>OALD</i> edition</b>	<b>words + first <i>OED</i> occurrence</b>	<b><i>CO(E)D</i> edition</b>	<b><i>OALD</i> edition</b>
back 1880	1/1911	1/1948	kick-off 1857	1/1911	1/1948
coach 1885	4/1951	1/1948	libero 1967	9/1995	---
corner 1882	4/1951	2/1963	linesman 1894	1/1911	1/1948
cross 1961	9/1995	5/1995	match 1531	1/1911	1/1948
crossbar 1857	6/1976	1/1948	midfield 1890	6/1976	5/1995

words + first OED occurrence		CO(E)D edition	OALD edition	words + first OED occurrence		CO(E)D edition	OALD edition
derby	1914	6/1976	3/1974	nutmeg	1968	12/2011	---
draw	1825	1/1911	1/1948	offside	1863	1/1911	1/1948
dribble	1863	1/1911	1/1948	pass	1899	4/1951	1/1948
football	1409	1/1911	1/1948	penalty	1897	1/1911	1/1948
forward	1879	4/1951	1/1948	score	1844	1/1911	1/1948
free kick	1894	6/1976	3/1974	shoot	1882	4/1951	1/1948
goal	1577	1/1911	1/1948	side-foot	1945	12/2011	---
goal line	1862	1/1911	3/1974	soccer	1885	1/1911	1/1948
goalpost	1842	1/1911	5/1995	striker	1963	6/1976	3/1974
handball	1879	9/1995	---	substitute	1826	12/2011	5/1995
hands	1874	---	---	supporter	1843	6/1976	5/1995
hat-trick	1901	4/1951	3/1974	sweeper	1964	6/1976	3/1974
head v.	1871	4/1951	1/1948	tackle	1884	1/1911	1/1948
hooligan	1898	1/1911	1/1948	team	1834	1/1911	1/1948
keeper	1957	9/1995	2/1963	yellow card	1970	9/1995	5/1995

Table 6. First OED occurrences of the 40 football words and their first inclusion in *COD/COED* and *OALD*

As even a cursory glance at Table 6 will reveal, a general question concerning the average number of years it took, from their first *OED* occurrences, for the 40 football words to be included in the *COD/COED* or the *OALD* is basically pointless. The reason for this is obvious. For example, it took the word *football* 502 years to be included in *COD* 1/1911, another 37 years for its first inclusion in *OALD* 1/1948. On the other hand, it took the word *hooligan* no more than 13 years to be admitted to *COD* 1/1911, *sweeper* a mere 12 years to enter *COD* 6/1976 – and only ten for its inclusion in *OALD* 3/1974. True, these examples make up the two extremes, but they show the irrelevance of questions about average number of years from first occurrence to first inclusion in the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*. More specifically, *COD* 1/1911 simply presents the first opportunity for inclusion, but only for those football words already in existence at the time of its publication, regardless of their first *OED* occurrence, whether in 1577 (*goal*) or, say, 1897 (*penalty*). Likewise, relative newcomers, such as

*libero* (1967) and *yellow card* (1970), could naturally qualify for inclusion only in the more recent editions of the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*.

Consequently, the following discussion will instead focus on some more qualitative issues, relating to certain individual words and their first inclusion – or non-inclusion – among the various editions of the *COD/COED* and the *OALD*. Here, only a few representative cases – some early and some more recent – will be brought up, cases that may be seen as typical in one way or another.

As noted earlier, 17 of the 40 football words turn up in *COD* 1/1911, corresponding to 21 in the considerably later *OALD* 1/1948 (cf. Table 5). The vast majority of these words date back to the 19th century. Not surprisingly, given the time gap between *COD* 1/1911 and *OALD* 1/1948, there is no complete overlap between the words included in *COD* 1/1911 and those present in *OALD* 1/1948: *goal line* and *goal-post* are included in *COD* 1/1911, but missing from *OALD* 1/1948; conversely, *crossbar*, *forward*, *head*, *pass*, and *shoot* are all missing from *COD* 1/1911, but present in *OALD* 1/1948.

Let us first take a look at some words from the 1890s. Among these, the following are included in both *COD* 1/1911 and *OALD* 1/1948: *hooligan* (1899), *linesman* (1894), *penalty* (1897). Such early inclusion, however, does not apply to all the 1890s words: *pass* (1899) is not to be found until *COD* 4/1951 and the roughly contemporaneous *OALD* 1/1948, while *free kick* (1894) makes its first dictionary appearances only in the 1970s, in *COD* 6/1976 and *OALD* 3/1974; *midfield* (1890) is missing from the first few editions of both dictionaries, not being included until *COD* 6/1976 and *OALD* 5/1995.

As is readily seen, these early examples, and many similar ones, do not in any obvious way seem to reveal any clear principles underlying decisions as to dictionary inclusion or non-inclusion, particularly as regards *COD* 1/1911. As a typical illustration of the issue involved, let us consider the words *penalty* and *free kick*, both dating back to the 1890s. These two words belong to the core of football's rule system, as codified in the *Laws of the Game* (2015/2016), being equally familiar elements in football games since the late 1800s. Still, while *penalty* is included in *COD* 1/1911, *free kick* is not, as opposed to more "special" word like *kick-off* and *offside*. The logic of these decisions is far from transparent. Another example involves *back* (*OED* 1880) versus *forward* (*OED* 1879), where it is equally unclear why only *back* – but not *forward* – should have deserved inclusion in *COD* 1/1911.

The same goes for some words denoting players' actions in relation to the ball, closely associated with events on the pitch in the course of a game. Here belong some other 19th-century words, such as *head*, *pass* and *shoot*, none of which is included in the *COD/COED* until the 4th edition (1951), as well as in *OALD* 1/1948. By contrast, the word *dribble* appears in *COD* 1/1911, as does the word *score*. It may be noted, in this connection, that *head*, *pass* and *shoot* are all given football-specific definitions when first included in *COD* 4/1951 (but not, except for *head*, consistently so in subsequent editions); *dribble* and *score*, by contrast, are defined in more general sporting terms throughout the *COD/COED* (except for *dribble* in *COD* 9/1995).

However, the distinction between football-specific and more general definitions does not appear to play a major role as to inclusion or non-inclusion. After all, as shown in Table 3, roughly half (8 out of 17) of the football words included in *COD* 1/1911 are of the football-specific kind, e.g. *kick-off*, *offside* and *tackle*.

Another football-specific word in *COD* 1/1911 is *linesman*, which also exemplifies another potentially vital dimension with regard to inclusion versus non-inclusion in *COD* 1/1911, namely that between what may be termed central and peripheral football words. As argued above, words such as *free kick* and *shoot* should be seen as central football terms, helping to define the nature of the game. *Linesman*, on the other hand, can hardly claim the same status, being clearly more peripheral to the essence of football. The same goes for *hooligan*, which, however, is defined in general rather than football-specific terms in *COD* 1/1911. Thus, the central–peripheral dimension, while certainly a reasonable parameter with regard to inclusion of football words as well as other special vocabulary in general-purpose dictionaries, does not seem to be relevant for inclusion decisions as far as *COD* 1/1911 is concerned.

As should be clear by now, far from all 19th-century words are included at the earliest opportunity available, i.e. in *COD* 1/1911. Further, it is hard to escape the impression that, to a considerable extent, it is futile to seek a consistently applied rationale guiding decisions on inclusion versus non-inclusion in individual cases. As the preceding discussion will have indicated, such decisions seem, in many cases, to have been guided by subjective rather than objectively applied principles – inevitably so, it could be argued, in the absence, in those early days, of reliable frequency counts, let alone the multimillion (or even larger) corpora available to lexicographers a hundred years later. It should also be said, however, that this circumstance does not in any way invalidate the overall, clearly observable trend of football words gradually becoming part of the mainstream language around the year 1900, as a consequence of football's skyrocketing popularity in the previous decades (Goldblatt, 2007: 51–64; cf. Bergh & Ohlander, 2018: 256–257). The main issue, rather, concerns the necessarily blurred edges of the interface between football language and general language, as illustrated in the various dictionary editions studied here, not the impact of football language per se.

### 3.6. Some recent cases

Let us finally consider a few cases whose dictionary appearances are of relatively late provenance. For example, the word *midfield* (first *OED* occurrence 1890) may be considered to hold a modicum of special interest. Like some other words from the 1890s, it is not included in *COD* 1/1911, only in later editions. The *COD/COED* inclusion of *midfield*, however, is considerably later than that of some other stragglers – such as *head*, *pass* and *shoot* (cf. above) – not to be found until *COD* 6/1976 and, later still, in *OALD* 5/1995, in both cases with football-specific definitions. In our view, the reason for this late appearance of *midfield* is not far to seek. Today, the notion of *midfield* – and, of course, *midfielder* – is of fundamental importance as regards tactics, and so the corresponding terms, *midfield* and *midfielder* (first *OED* occurrence from

1888) are among the most frequently used words in football reporting and commentary. This, however, was not always the case. In fact, the tactical prominence of the midfield as well as midfielders did not come to the fore until well into the latter half of the 20th century (Wilson, 2008). This change in tactical thinking and formations on the pitch is clearly what underlies the relatively late appearance of *midfield* in *COD/COED* and *OALD*. In this way, changes of various kinds – tactical, technical, organizational, etc. – are reflected in football’s language over time and, at a later stage, also in general-purpose dictionaries.

Closely related to the various changes sweeping football in the second half of the 20th century is the emergence of the terms *libero*, *striker* and *sweeper*, all with first *OED* occurrences from the 1960s. Of these words, *libero*, originating in Italian football and roughly synonymous with *sweeper*, had to wait for inclusion in the *COD/COED* until 1995, not turning up at all in the *OALD*. However, both *striker* and *sweeper* are included as early as *COD* 6/1976 and *OALD* 3/1974. Their rapid progression – with a lapse of only 13 and 12 years, respectively, between first *OED* occurrence and *COD/COED* inclusion – along with the fact that both words are defined in football-specific terms – may be seen as an indication of football’s increasing status in popular culture in mid-century Britain, and the world at large, with a social appeal well beyond the working classes. This also implies that new football words may tend towards faster inclusion in general-purpose dictionaries today than earlier, especially as intervals between new dictionary editions are considerably shorter today than in, say, the mid-20th century, including continuously updated online dictionaries.

Finally, let us consider the words *side-foot* and *nutmeg*, with first *OED* occurrences from 1945 and 1968, respectively. Unlike *striker* and *sweeper*, neither word reflects some special innovation in football; side-footing a ball and nutmegging an opponent have been around for as long as football has existed, even though the words might not. Both *side-foot* and *nutmeg* refer to technical aspects of the way players carry out certain actions on the pitch: a shot or a pass, on the one hand (*side-foot*), and a way of getting – or dribbling – past an opponent, on the other (*nutmeg*). In view of their relatively technical character, it is not unexpected that they appear considerably later in the *COD/COED* than *striker* and *sweeper*, i.e. not until *COED* 12/2011, while missing from both *COD* 9/1995 and *OALD* 5/1995. At the same time, the fact that football words of such special nature – defined in football-specific terms – are indeed to be found in a general-purpose dictionary like *COED* 12/2011, and *ODE* 3/2010, can be seen as further evidence of football’s continuing and expanding presence in the public consciousness towards the end of the 20th century and into the new millennium. The boundary between football language and general language, it would appear, is becoming ever more porous.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The most obvious conclusion of the present study, based on a sample of 40 football words and their occurrence in different editions of the *COD/COED* (1911–2011) and

the *OALD* (1948–1995), as well as the *ODE* (2010), is that there is no hard and fast division between English football language and the general, or mainstream, language. Thus, over the past hundred years or so, there has been a steady influx of football words, whether of a football-specific nature (e.g. *dribble*, *offside*) or defined in more general sporting terms (e.g. *goal*, *score*), into both the *COD/COED*, a classical general-purpose-dictionary, and the well-known *OALD*, mainly intended for foreign students of English. The words investigated vary as to their first occurrence according to the *OED*, the bulk of the words studied dating back to the 19th century (e.g. *back*, *forward*), the most recent ones to the 1960s (e.g. *libero*, *striker*) and 1970 (*yellow card*). It appears that, mainly due to the ever-increasing public appeal and media coverage of football in the course of the 20th century, new additions to its vocabulary tend to be included more rapidly in today's general-purpose dictionaries than a hundred years ago. In many cases, such lexical innovation can be seen as the result of football-internal developments, such as technical or tactical changes (e.g. *nutmeg*, *sweeper*).

Both the *COD/COED* and the *OALD* display an increasing number of football words over the period and dictionary editions covered. Our results further show that the number of football words included in the two dictionaries mainly investigated is somewhat – but not much – larger in the *COD/COED* than in the *OALD*. This kind of divergence is only to be expected, given the overall differences in aims, scope and readership between the two dictionaries. These differences, not least the explicitly pedagogical purposes of the *OALD*, may also account for the larger proportion of football-specific definitions in this dictionary.

However, as also argued here, even though the overall picture seems reasonably clear, its edges convey a somewhat blurred impression, mainly owing to the circumstance that the principles for inclusion in the various dictionary editions are far from obvious. Thus, as virtually all dictionaries where a selection has to be made as to which words to include, both the *COD/COED* and the *OALD* have their fair share of inconsistencies – in the case of the pioneering *COD* 1/1911 easily detected a hundred years after the event, but often difficult to spot for editors struggling at the front line, often under severe time pressure. The contrast to present-day lexicography, with unlimited access to enormous computerized corpora, could hardly be more striking. Still, this means that the specific grounds for the inclusion or exclusion of certain words of a similar nature – (cf. *back* versus *forward*, *free kick* versus *penalty*) – often remain obscure, apparently dependent on ultimately subjective or arbitrary decisions.

However, the inconsistencies just mentioned do not in any serious way invalidate our main conclusion about the continuing impact of English football language on the general language since the late 1800s and onwards. Naturally, it may be speculated, another sample of football words instead of the ones selected for this study might have given a slightly – but surely not radically – different result; it seems unlikely that the general picture would have diverged very much from our main findings. In our view, there is likely to be considerable consensus on what football words should be considered general, and frequent, enough to be included in general-purpose dictionaries such as the *COD/COED* – or the more comprehensive *ODE*, for that matter. For



example, many fairly recent and rather specialized additions to football vocabulary – e.g. *ball watcher* (‘player who neglects to watch opponents’ moves’), *first touch* (‘first ball contact when receiving a pass’), *inswinger* (‘inwardly curved corner kick’), and *sitting* (‘defensive’) *midfielder* – would be unlikely candidates for inclusion in a general-purpose dictionary, thus not (yet) seen as part of the mainstream language; nor are they included in either *COED* 12/2010 or *ODE* 3/2010.

Then again, somewhat surprisingly, such relatively esoteric technical terms as *offside trap* (‘a manoeuvre in which players in the defending team move upfield in order to put one or more opposing players into an offside position’) and *one-two* (‘a move in which a player plays a short pass to teammate and moves forward to receive an immediate return pass’) are included in both these dictionaries. This is also the case with numerous other football words, compounds such as *goal difference* and (the semantically opaque) *goal kick* (‘a free kick taken by the defending side from within their goal area after attackers send the ball over the byline’), or an abbreviation like *WAG* (‘wife or girlfriend of a sports player’). Such and similar examples demonstrate the imprecise boundary between football language and general language, a boundary that keeps moving along with football-specific developments and trends, as well as reflecting the extent to which football is continuously not only confirming, but expanding its role in popular mass culture. Obviously, a number of special football expressions are, by now, so frequent and well-represented in the vast corpora used by today’s lexicographers that numbers alone may convince dictionary editors to include them as part of 21<sup>st</sup>-century mainstream language – which, of course, should not be taken to imply that all of them are familiar to the majority of dictionary users.

Incidentally, further evidence of football’s influence on general language use relates to the increasingly frequent use, not only in English, of metaphorical expressions deriving from football, employed to enliven, or simply vary, public language in other domains, not least in political contexts, such as debates, commentary, editorials, etc. This applies not only to individual words or short phrases, such as *kick-off*, *yellow card* and *political football* (‘topical issue’), but also to longer expressions, where the basis is often provided by pivotal football words, not least the words *ball* and *goal*, as illustrated by idioms like *to get the ball rolling*, *to be on the ball*, *to take one’s eye off the ball*; *to score an own goal*, *to move the goalposts* (cf. Bergh & Ohlander, 2017).

In the meantime, football vocabulary itself keeps changing. Some older terms fall into disuse as the game changes, e.g. *half-back* and *outside left*, in general use in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, while new ones are added, e.g. *midfielder* and *striker*, part of present-day football usage since the 1960s. And, as the lapse between the emergence of a new football term and its inclusion in general-purpose as well as learners’ dictionaries seems to be getting ever shorter, due to the ongoing invasion of the mainstream language by the “people’s game”, it may not be long before even some very recent, initially incomprehensible innovations make their first dictionary appearances. Thus, we eagerly await the arrival of one of football’s newest – and most controversial – words, referring to a much-debated issue: *VAR* ‘video-assisted refereeing’.

In a word, football and football language have come a long way since the first recorded *OED* occurrence of *football* in 1409.

## Notes

\*Received: June 1, 2019; Accepted: July 4, 2019

1. Cf. *The Comedy of Errors* (Act 2, Scene 1): "Am I so round with you as you with me, / That like a football you do spurn me thus?"; in *King Lear* (act 1, scene 4), the phrase "you base football player" is used as a term of abuse. Long before that, in 1314, football had been banned by King Edward II, who referred to it as a "mob game".

2. For some discussion of the relationship between special language and general language, see Sager et al. (1980: 63–69): special languages are defined as "semi-autonomous, complex, semiotic systems based on and derived from general language" (p. 69), comprising "the totality of means of expression used by specialists in messages about their special subject" (p. 74), with "no absolute borderline between general and special language" (p. 68). Cf. also, concerning football language, Bergh & Ohlander (2012a: 14–17).

3. As is well known, the spelling of compounds with regard to hyphenation may vary a good deal. In this study, we follow the authoritative *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd ed., 2010), e.g. *offside*, *kick-off*, *free kick*, etc.

4. *OALD* 1/1948 is a photographic reprint of the *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary*, published in Tokyo in 1942 (*OALD* 1/1948: iii-iv).

5. Henceforth, the different dictionaries and editions used will also be referred to as *COD* 1/1911 up to *COED* 12/2011, *OALD* 1/1948 up to *OALD* 5/1995, and *ODE* 3/2010.

6. Cf. Stevenson (2011: vii): "In producing this edition, we have been able to draw on the language research and analysis carried out for the third edition of the groundbreaking *Oxford Dictionary of English*, which was published in 2010".

## References

### *Primary sources*

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1st edition, by Fowler, H.G., and F.G. Fowler (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911. (*COD* 1/1911)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 4th edition, by McIntosh, E. (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951. (*COD* 4/1951)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 6th edition, by Sykes, John B., H W Fowler and F G Fowler (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976. (*COD* 6/1976)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English of Current English*, 9th edition, by Thompson, Della (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. (*COD* 9/1995)

*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th edition, by Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. (*COED* 12/2011)

*The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 1st edition, by Hornby, A.S., E.V. Gatenby and H. Wakefield (eds.), London: Oxford University Press, 1948. (*OALD* 1/1948)

*The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 2nd edition, by Hornby, A.S., E.V. Gatenby and H. Wakefield (eds.), London: Oxford University Press, 1963. (*OALD* 2/1963)

- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 3rd edition, by Hornby, A.S., A.P. Cowie and A.C. Gimson (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974. (OALD 3/1974)
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 5th edition, by Crowther, Jonathan (originally by A.S. Hornby). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. (OALD 5/1995)
- Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd edition, by Stevenson, Angus and Christine A Lindberg (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. (ODE 3/2010)
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Online edition, 2019. (OED)

### Secondary sources

- Bergh, Gunnar, and Sölve Ohlander. "English direct loans in European football lexis." In Furiassi, Cristiano, Virginia Pulcini and Félix Rodríguez González (eds.), *The Anglicization of European Lexis*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2012a, pp. 281–304.
- Bergh, Gunnar, and Sölve Ohlander. "Free kicks, dribblers and WAGs. Exploring the language of 'the people's game'." *Moderna Språk*, 106, 2012b, pp. 11–46.
- Bergh, Gunnar, and Sölve Ohlander. "Loan translations versus direct loans: The impact of English on European football lexis." *Nordic Journal of Linguistics*, 40(1), 2017, pp. 5–35.
- Bergh, Gunnar, and Sölve Ohlander. "Football language in the age of superdiversity." In Creese, Angela, and Adrian Blackledge (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Superdiversity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 254–267.
- Cowie, Anthony P. *English Dictionaries for Foreign Learners: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Crystal, David. "Introduction" to the reprint of the 1911 first edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (100th anniversary edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. vii–xiii.
- Fowler, Henry W., and Frank G. Fowler. "Preface" to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911, pp. iii–x.
- Goldblatt, David. *The Ball is Round*. London: Penguin, 2007.
- Görlach, Manfred (ed.), *A Dictionary of European Anglicisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Görlach, Manfred (ed.), *English in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Harvey, Adrian. *Football: The First Hundred Years. The Untold Story of the People's Game*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Knowles, Elizabeth. "One hundred years of the Concise Oxford Dictionary." In *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (12th ed.), edited by Angus Stevenson & Maurice Waite. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. ix–xvii.
- Laws of the Game* 2015/2016. FIFA. [http://www.fifa.com/mm/Document/FootballDevelopment/Refereeing/02/36/01/11/LawsOfTheGameWebEN\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.fifa.com/mm/Document/FootballDevelopment/Refereeing/02/36/01/11/LawsOfTheGameWebEN_Neutral.pdf)
- Sager, Juan, David Dungworth and Peter McDonald. *English Special Languages*. Wiesbaden: Oscar Brandstetter, 1980.
- Stevenson, Angus. "Preface to the twelfth edition". In *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (12th ed.), by Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. vii–viii.
- Wilson, Jonathan. *Inverting the Pyramid. The History of Football Tactics*. London: Orion, 2008.

**Appendix 1.** Master table: inclusion versus non-inclusion of the 40 football words investigated in the four dictionaries used

	<i>OED</i>	<i>COD</i>					<i>OALD</i>				<i>ODE</i>
	Online	1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1951	6 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1976	9 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	12 <sup>th</sup> ed. 2011	1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1948	2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 1963	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 1974	5 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010
back	1880	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+
coach	1885	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ fb	+
corner	1882	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
cross	1961	-	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	-	+ fb	+ fb
crossbar	1857	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
derby	1914	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+ fb	+
draw	1825	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ fb	+	+
dribble	1863	+	+	+	+ fb	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
football	1409	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
forward	1879	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
free kick	1894	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
goal	1577	+	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
goal line	1862	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	+ fb	+	+ fb
goalpost	1842	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+
handball	1879	-	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	-	-	+ fb
hands	1874	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
hat-trick	1901	-	+	+ fb	+	+ fb	-	-	+	+	+ fb
head	1871	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
hooligan	1898	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ fb	+ fb
keeper	1957	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+ fb	+ fb
kick-off	1857	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
libero	1967	-	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	-	-	+ fb
linesman	1894	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+
match	1531	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+
midfield	1890	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	-	+ fb	+ fb
nutmeg	1968	-	-	-	-	+ fb	-	-	-	-	+ fb
offside	1863	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
pass	1899	-	+ fb	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
penalty	1897	+	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+
score	1844	+	+	+	+	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+	+
shoot	1882	-	+ fb	+ fb	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
side-foot	1945	-	-	-	-	+ fb	-	-	-	-	+ fb
soccer	1885	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
striker	1963	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	-	-	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
substitute	1826	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+ fb	+
supporter	1843	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+ fb	+

	<i>OED</i>	<i>COD</i>					<i>OALD</i>				<i>ODE</i>
	Online	1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1911	4 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1951	6 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1976	9 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	12 <sup>th</sup> ed. 2011	1 <sup>st</sup> ed. 1948	2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. 1963	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 1974	5 <sup>th</sup> ed. 1995	3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010
<b>sweeper</b>	1964	–	–	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	–	–	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb
<b>tackle</b>	1884	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+	+	+ fb	+ fb
<b>team</b>	1834	+ fb	+ fb	+	+	+	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+ fb	+
<i>yellow card</i>	1970	–	–	–	+ fb	+ fb	–	–	–	+ fb	+ fb

### Notations

*italics* = the 15 words added to the original 25 taken from Görlach (2001)

– = non-inclusion

+ = inclusion

*fb* = football-specific definition