

## Football Discourse: Linguistic Variability and Peculiarities of Creation and Consumption on the Example of Football Communities

SARIMSOKOV HURSHID ABDIMALIKOVICH  
ERGASHOV KHURMATILLO SOLIJON UGLI  
*National University of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan*

### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the theoretical foundations of football fan slang and its role in shaping the linguistic identity of supporters. It argues that the speech of football fans possesses a number of distinctive features, which are most vividly manifested today in online forums and virtual communities. Discursive fields of football communities were built and analyzed based on network data using the methods of network linguistics. This made it possible to describe culturally significant concepts and the scenarios of communicative behavior of football fans determined by them as well as to identify universal and specific scenarios of communication patterns of behavior in fan culture.*

**Keywords:** Football discourse, linguistic variability, terminology, football slang, linguistic devices, metaphor, sociolect.

### INTRODUCTION

Football is arguably the most significant team sport worldwide, sustained by the unparalleled enthusiasm of its supporters. Unlike other forms of popular culture, football permeates all social strata and thus has become a central element of global discourse. Both professionals and amateurs actively participate in football, while

millions of fans observe, comment, and engage in collective rituals surrounding the game.

The relationship between language and culture has been explored by leading scholars, including Charles Bally, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Alexander Potebnja, who emphasized the inseparability of cultural and linguistic phenomena. Cultural globalization – understood as the accelerated integration of nations into the global system – has accelerated borrowing processes within languages. Numerous studies (L. Bloomfield, U. Weinreich, L.P. Krysin, A.P. Mayorov) indicate that lexical units from English, as the dominant global lingua franca, are borrowed most frequently.

Team sports, perhaps more than any other form of activity, cultivate and symbolize national values. Football, as the most prominent team sport, plays a crucial role in articulating collective identity. While local matches have limited impact on national identity formation, international competitions take on a symbolic function, with players “literally wrapped in the national flag and singing the anthem” – embodying the nation as a whole.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF FOOTBALL AND ITS SOCIOCULTURAL ROLE

This cultural significance has given rise to a set of symbols, slang, and other attributes of a distinct subculture. These elements constitute the foundation of football fan language, including such expressions as “fan,” “forward,” “goalkeeper,” “referee,” “match,” “bus” (fan transport), “skinhead,” “glory hunter” (supporter of successful teams), and “scarfer” (fan wearing a club scarf) [3: 26].

Fans, as an indispensable element of the football spectacle, express their allegiance through clapping, chanting, singing, and even mocking the opposing team. For outsiders, fan speech may appear opaque or even absurd, given its reliance on metaphor – often martial or aggressive – and its frequent use of slang and humorous expressions.

Fan discourse is characterized by several communicative functions. The informative function relies heavily on clichés such as “spectacular moment,” “obvious problems,” or

systemic errors.” The analytical function emerges after matches, where fans debate coaching decisions, tactics, and future prospects, often using rhetorical questions designed to provoke discussion (e.g., “Will the coaching staff manage to keep the team from collapsing in the next few games?”). The evaluative function dominates during emotionally charged moments, reflected in emphatic, expressive language.

A key feature of football fan speech is its dynamism and syntactic economy – favoring short exclamations (“Great!”, “Super!”) and compressed constructions that convey strong emotional impact. Fans strive to demonstrate competence not only in tactics but also in broader issues such as team management, history, and tradition, signaling cultural literacy within the community.

#### SLANG AS A DYNAMIC SUBLANGUAGE

Football slang is a highly productive, dynamic sublanguage that absorbs vocabulary from other sociolects, creates its own neologisms, and enriches everyday speech. Its close connection with English has led to the widespread presence of Anglicisms. These loanwords are quickly adapted to Russian and Uzbek grammatical patterns and often serve as bases for new derivatives through productive word-formation processes, particularly prefixation, suffixation, and clipping.

Fan slang frequently relies on metaphorical models – for instance, the pervasive metaphor *match = battle*, which reflects the historical roots of sport as preparation for competition and combat [4: 28]. Such metaphors imbue fan discourse with intensity and dramatic tension.

#### BEYOND THE STADIUM: DIGITAL AND MEDIA DISCOURSE

The linguistic creativity of football fans is not confined to oral communication. Messages and slogans are displayed on flags and banners during matches, while beyond the stadium, fans produce fanzines, blogs, and forum posts. These texts often combine youth slang, subcultural language, and media forms, resulting in

hybrid discourse that reflects both oral immediacy and digital interactivity.

Linguists increasingly turn to these materials as a means of exploring contemporary language change. Online fan texts offer insight into new, participatory genres that reshape discourse through real-time interaction

#### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: VK COMMUNITY AND UZBEK FOOTBALL TELEGRAM CHANNELS

Our empirical analysis focused on football-related communities on the Russian social network VKontakte (VK). Among them, the largest community – “Obsessed with Football” and “Football” – counts approximately 552,425 subscribers and, as of August 31, 2022, has published over 108,000 posts. The community describes itself with the motto:

In goal we trust. If you are passionate about football – this is your place. If you are obsessed with football, you are already here!

The content largely reflects international football events, featuring major European clubs such as AC Milan, Atlético Madrid, and Barcelona, and players such as Kylian Mbappé, Zlatan Ibrahimović, and Erik ten Hag.

#### COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES OF USER INTERACTION

##### *Use of superlatives*

Users frequently employ emphatic adjectives (e.g., the best, most powerful).

I always thought Ronaldo was the best, but after playing with Messi this season I realized I was wrong.

##### *Expressive interjections and reduplication*

Wow wowwow!

*Graphic and stylistic devices*

Elongated words (Champioooons!), informal or slang expressions (“to get someone off the hook”), and emotional evaluations (“killer combination,” “terribly unlucky”) are widespread

*Rhetorical questions*

Users pose open-ended, discussion-provoking questions, such as:

- Who do you think will finish in the top four this season?
- Don’t you think Simeone is costing Atlético too much?

*Precedent phenomena*

The community frequently draws on **precedent texts** – culturally significant references that are well known to the audience and repeated across discourse, reinforcing shared cultural knowledge.

*VK community “football”*

The VK community “Football” has approximately 559,327 subscribers. As of August 31, 2022, the number of posts published in the community totaled 104,844. The organizers describe the group with the slogan:

We know everything about football!

Messages in this community are dominated by **emotionally charged interrogative-affirmative constructions**, often accompanied by emojis:

What place is your favorite club in...?  
What is even happening...?

*Emotional and stylistic features*

Particular attention should be paid to the use of **graphic stylistic devices** and **informal vocabulary**, which also reflect the emotional specificity of the community’s users:

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOW  
Crazy match from the Messi-Mbappé-Neymar trio.

*Neutral lexicon*

The community also features more neutral vocabulary, including the naming of players, clubs, and football awards:

- **Lionel Messi** – Argentinian footballer, striker of Inter Miami and the captain of Argentinian national team.
- **Karim Mostafa Benzema** – French footballer, striker of Al Ittihad.
- **KylianMbappéLottin** – French footballer, striker of Real Madrid and the captain of French national team.
- **Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior** – Brazilian footballer, forward, winger, and attacking midfielder for Santos and the Brazilian national team.
- **“Ballon d’Or”** – an annual football award presented to the best footballer of the calendar year by the French magazine *France Football*.
- **“Real”** – Real Madrid, a Spanish professional football club from Madrid, officially recognized by FIFA as the best football club of the 20th century.
- “Messi has caught up with Benzema in the Ballon d’Or contender rankings; Karim Benzema is still leading...”
- “Real Madrid is preparing for major changes – eight players may leave the club this summer.”

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

Our research demonstrates that the networked fan discourse produced and consumed in these communities shapes the sociopolitical practices of football fans. While primarily taking place in the online environment, this discourse has the potential to mobilize participants into offline political action when sufficient political potential accumulates and external triggers arise.

The VK community “Russian Football” appears to be the most susceptible to such mobilization. The identity of its members is particularly flexible and resonates strongly with current geopolitical events. By contrast, the fan discourse of the other two communities (“Football” and “Obsessed with Football”) is largely focused on football-related content and rarely engages with political or conflict-related issues.

## UZBEK FOOTBALL COMMUNITIES: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND LINGUISTIC PATTERNS

- **Overview of Uzbek football communities** – Several active communities within Uzbekistan serve as hubs for football discourse and fan interaction. These include both official and independent initiatives that collectively shape the linguistic and cultural landscape of Uzbek football fandom.
- **Official Fan Club “Uzbekistan”** – a nationwide supporters’ initiative organized by the Uzbekistan Football Association. Its purpose is to mobilize fans, create coordinated stadium support, and strengthen national identity through sport.
- **Pakhtakor Tashkent SC (Facebook, Telegram)** – one of the most engaged fan bases in Uzbekistan, where match-day posts generate threads filled with chants, memes, and evaluative language.
- **FC Bunyodkor (Telegram and official website)** – another major community where club announcements meet fan responses, providing insight into the interaction of formal club voice and informal fan slang.
- **Independent fan hubs** (e.g., Fan Club Uzbekistan on Telegram) – grassroots channels aggregating news and fan commentary, rich with colloquial speech and emotive expression.

## LINGUISTIC PATTERNS OBSERVED

Analysis of these communities shows several recurring linguistic patterns that parallel those observed in Russian-language football discourse, while incorporating Uzbek cultural and linguistic specificities:

- **Chants and rallying slogans** – Imperative forms such as *Olg’a, O’zbekiston!* (Forward, Uzbekistan!) are common, serving expressive and identity-building functions.
- **Code-switching and anglicisms** – Borrowings such as *futbol, penalti, derbi, fan, and gol* are fully integrated into Uzbek fan speech.

- **Graphic intensity** – Use of all-caps, elongated words, and emoji clusters convey peak affect and dramatic reaction.
- **Interrogative-affirmative prompts** – Short prompts like *Kim TOP-4 gachiqadi?* (Who will make the top four?) invite discussion threads.
- **Metaphor and evaluative speech** – Fans frequently use metaphorical constructions framing matches as battles or players as heroes.
- **Online-offline identity work** – Official fan clubs translate online mobilization into offline chants, choreography, and stadium atmosphere.

## MINI-CORPUS OF EXAMPLE PHRASES

The following table provides selected authentic examples from ‘Pakhtakor Lions’ Telegram channel, illustrating the range of linguistic strategies employed by Uzbek football fans:

No.	Original text	Gloss /translation	Device /function
1	Olg'a, "Sherlar"!	<i>Forward, "The Lions"!</i>	Rally-call / chant; expressive + identity invocation
2	Kuting, u bunda nda chiroyli gollar bilan kimligini eslatibqo'yadi.	<i>Wait, he'll make us remember who he is with even more beautiful goals.</i>	Evaluative + expectation; identity through performance
3	Shunchakio'zingizuchun bilibqo'ying.	<i>Just so you know.</i>	Tone-setting; assertive and informal
4	Otningo'limi, itning bayrami.	<i>Death of the horse, celebration of the dog.</i>	Metaphor / proverb showing contrast or injustice
5	Omadyigitlar.	<i>Good luck, guys.</i>	Supportive, phatic ritual before match

*Additional findings: Uzbek football communities*

Recent data drawn from public Telegram channels, fan hubs, and media reports provides further insight into how football fandom in Uzbekistan contributes to linguistic variability, identity formation, and social practice.

## KEY COMMUNITIES &amp; PLATFORMS

- **“Pakhtakor Lions” (Telegram)** – The official fan club of Pakhtakor Tashkent maintains a channel (≈4,870 subscribers) through which match announcements, polls, and expressive calls are regularly posted. (Telegram)
- **Uzbekistan football association (Instagram/telegram)** – The official pages use nationalist framing (e.g. *MilliyJamoabu #BizningJamo* – “The National Team is Our Team”) in hashtags and slogans, which are often reposted or echoed by fans. (Instagram)
- **Fan culture during regional/international events** – The FIFA Futsal World Cup 2024 (hosted in Uzbekistan) revealed strong regional solidarity: Uzbek fan leaders organized chants and support not only for their own team but also in solidarity with neighboring Kazakhstan. This points to how fan identity often transcends club lines and enters broader regional / cultural identity. (Inside FIFA)

## RECENT LINGUISTIC &amp; BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

*Use of emotive slogans and rallying calls*

In “Pakhtakor Lions,” posts often include short imperatives and club symbols to galvanize support, especially before matchdays. Example: \**“BugunFutbolKuni! “Navbahor” - “PAXTAKOR” ... Olg’a, “Sherlar”!\** (“Today is Football Day! Navbahor vs Pakhtakor ... Forward, ‘Lions’!”) (Telegram)

*Interactive engagement*

Fans are often invited to vote in polls (e.g. *Sizningtanlovingiz?* – “Your choice?”) about match-line ups or player performance. This fosters analytic discourse and encourages participation, moving beyond passive consumption. (Telegram)

*National identity & hashtag framing*

Posts and slogans often carry national sentiment: emphasizing the national team, pride, and solidarity. Example: official UFA Instagram’s *#MilliyJamo* *#BizningJamo*. Such framing strengthens collective identity among fans. (Instagram)

*Solidarity & regional/international fan relations*

During regional events (e.g. Futsal World Cup), Uzbek fans show not only support for their team but also embrace symbolic friendship with neighbors, using discourse that stresses brotherhood and shared culture. Such examples suggest that football discourse in Uzbekistan has a political/social solidarity dimension in certain contexts. (Inside FIFA)

*Frequent use of borrowed vocabulary and mixed codes*

Posts from “Pakhtakor Lions” show use of Uzbek terms mixed with borrowed terms such as “match,” “fan,” “superliga,” etc. These borrowings are often seamlessly integrated, sometimes unmarked, indicating normalization of code-mixing in football fan speech. (While I did not extract full original phrases beyond the ones already provided, the presence of English and/or Russian borrowings is evident in names of competitions and clubs.) (Telegram)

*Suggested material (Examples for Your Mini-Corpus/quotations)*

From “Pakhtakor Lions” channel:

- *BugunFutbolKuni! ... Olg'a, 'Sherlar'!* — “Today is Football Day! ... Forward, ‘Lions’!” (Telegram)
- *Sizningtanlovingiz ?* — “Your choice?” (poll query) (Telegram)

## CONCLUSION

The study of football discourse reveals its role as a powerful socio-linguistic phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of sport and functions as a mirror of collective identity, emotional expression, and cultural transformation. Through our theoretical analysis and empirical exploration of Russian-language VK communities and Uzbek football fan platforms, we have demonstrated that football language is not merely a reflection of sporting events but a site of meaning-making where fans negotiate identity, solidarity, and emotional connection.

One of the central findings of this research is the dynamic nature of football fan slang. Far from being a fixed or marginal

code, fan slang represents a productive sublanguage that is continuously replenished with new lexical units, many of which are borrowed from English or adapted from Russian and Uzbek vernacular speech. This vocabulary is marked by semantic creativity, metaphorical density, and syntactic economy, often compressing complex evaluations into short, emphatic utterances. The metaphor “match = battle” is especially salient, underscoring the perception of football as a symbolic contest that mobilizes national pride and community loyalty.

Another important conclusion concerns the communicative functions of fan discourse. Our analysis identified informative, evaluative, and analytical functions that structure fan communication both online and offline. Informative functions dominate live commentary and post-match summaries, while evaluative speech, often marked by exclamations, memes, and elongated graphic forms, intensifies during moments of victory or defeat. The analytical function, expressed through rhetorical questions and dialogic prompts, transforms fans from passive spectators into active participants in tactical and managerial debates.

The digitalization of football culture has significantly expanded the discursive space of fandom. Online communities such as “Obsessed with Football,” “Football,” and “Pakhtakor Lions” function as interactive arenas where linguistic creativity thrives. Here, hybrid discourse emerges – mixing Uzbek, Russian, and English elements, textual and visual semiotics, and synchronous and asynchronous communication modes. The presence of polls, hashtags, and direct calls for engagement reflects the participatory turn in fan culture, making it a collaborative, co-constructed space.

Importantly, the Uzbek case demonstrates that fan discourse also serves as a tool for national and regional identity construction. Chants such as *Olg'a, O'zbekiston!* and hashtags like *#BizningJamo*a act as linguistic vehicles for collective self-assertion. During major international tournaments, the potential of fan communities to extend beyond sport into political mobilization becomes visible, as solidarity with neighboring teams or expressions of national pride take on a broader symbolic weight.

In conclusion, football discourse should be understood as a multi-layered communicative ecosystem characterized by linguistic innovation, emotional intensity, and socio-cultural resonance. It not only documents the experience of the game but also actively shapes how fans experience, interpret, and remember football events. Future research should examine the longitudinal evolution of this discourse, paying special attention to the interplay between global linguistic influences and local linguistic creativity, as well as the potential of fan networks to act as agents of cultural and even political change.

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**SARIMSOKOV HURSHID ABDIMALIKOVICH**  
DSC, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,  
FACULTY OF FOREIGN PHILOLOGY,  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF UZBEKISTAN,  
TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN.

**ERGASHOV KHURMATILLO SOLIJON UGLI**  
PHD STUDENT,  
FACULTY OF FOREIGN PHILOLOGY,  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF UZBEKISTAN,  
TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN.