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CULTURAL VALUES REFLECTED IN GERMAN SPORTS TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract. German sports terminology is examined as a repository of culturally specific value orientations. The study addresses a gap in the linguistics of sport: while Anglicisms, metaphor and media discourse in German sports language have been described in detail, the value content encoded in the terminological system itself has rarely been quantified. A corpus of 123 lexical items was compiled from two programmatic primary sources of German sports nomenclature — the chapter „Über die Turnsprache“ in Jahn and Eiselen’s Die Deutsche Turnkunst (1816) and Konrad Koch’s Germanising glossary of football terms (1903) — and classified along six value dimensions by means of componential and linguocultural analysis. Order, rule and adjudication accounts for the largest share of the corpus (28.5%), followed by spatial and temporal regulation (22.8%), community and cooperative play (15.4%), combat and defence (13.8%), effort and bodily performance (12.2%) and decency and fair play (7.3%). The two sources are shown to be complementary rather than identical: the Turnsprache foregrounds communal and spatial discipline, whereas Koch’s football glossary foregrounds regulation, adjudication and agonal roles. The findings support the view that terminological purism in German sport was an instrument of value transmission, not merely of lexical hygiene, and that the resulting nomenclature still constrains present-day patterns of borrowing.

Keywords: German sports terminology, Sportsprache, linguocultural analysis, cultural values, Turnsprache, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, Konrad Koch, linguistic purism, loan translation, Anglicism, cultural key words, football language, conceptual metaphor, terminology formation.

Introduction. Sport is one of the few social practices that a modern society codifies twice: once in rules and once in words. The rules travel internationally with comparatively little resistance, whereas the words are repeatedly renegotiated at the national level. German is a particularly instructive case, because two successive waves of deliberate term formation — the gymnastic Turnsprache of the early nineteenth century and the Germanisation of football vocabulary around 1900 — produced a nomenclature that was consciously designed to carry cultural content, and not only to designate movements and situations [1], [2].

The theoretical premise of this study is Wierzbicka’s thesis that the lexicon of a language functions as an index of the culture to which it belongs, and that a limited set of cultural key words

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gives privileged access to the value system of a speech community [1]. In her analysis of German public signs, Wierzbicka demonstrates that values such as social discipline and Ordnung grounded in legitimate authority remain productive in contemporary German communication [2]. Sports terminology is an unusually favourable testing ground for this thesis, because the terms were coined by identifiable authors, at identifiable dates, with explicitly stated intentions.

Existing scholarship on German Sportsprache has concentrated on three areas. The first is the description and periodisation of football vocabulary, most comprehensively by Burkhardt, whose dictionary and didactic survey trace the layer of loan translations and loan formations left by Koch and his contemporaries [3], [4]. The second is the study of Anglicisms: Winkler compares football, ice hockey and handball and shows that the intensity of English influence is sport-specific rather than uniform [5], while Bergh and Ohlander quantify direct loans and loan translations across sixteen European languages [6], [7]. The third is metaphor research: Wiliński, working with a 508,832-word German corpus, finds that roughly 70 per cent of metaphorical expressions in written football commentary derive from a small number of source domains, with some 40 per cent drawn from physical fight and military conflict [8]; Thalhammer, comparing two 100,000-word radio commentary corpora, shows that the football is war mapping is differently productive in English and German [9]. The history of Turnen has likewise been studied, but predominantly as ideological and institutional history rather than as terminology [10], [11], [12].

What is missing is a value-oriented analysis of the terminological system as such. The present article therefore pursues three objectives: (i) to determine which value dimensions are lexicalised in the foundational strata of German sports terminology; (ii) to measure their relative weight; and (iii) to establish whether the two foundational strata encode the same values or complementary ones. The underlying hypothesis is that German sports terminology is not a value-neutral technical register, but a normative one, in which regulation, community and bodily discipline are lexically privileged over individual achievement.

Materials and methods. The corpus consists of 123 lexical items, each attested in one of two programmatic primary sources. Source S1 is the chapter „Über die Turnsprache“ in Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and Ernst Eiselen’s Die Deutsche Turnkunst zur Einrichtung der Turnplätze (Berlin, 1816, pp. XIX–XLV), from which 56 items of the Turn-word family were excerpted [13]. Source S2 is Konrad Koch’s glossary „Deutsche Kunstausdrücke des Fußballspieles“, published in the journal of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein in 1903, from which 67 items were excerpted [14]. Both sources are metalinguistic: they do not merely use the terms, they propose and justify them. Secondary sources were used for the interpretation of individual items and for the reconstruction of the later fate of each proposal [3], [4], [5], [15].

Four procedures were combined. First, lexicographic excerption: every term explicitly proposed or glossed in S1 and S2 was recorded together with its source, its literal morphological gloss and, where the source provides one, its foreign-language equivalent. Second, componential analysis of the semantic structure of each item, in order to isolate the evaluative component from the purely denotative one. Third, classification along six value dimensions established inductively from the material itself: order, rule and adjudication (ORD); spatial and temporal regulation of practice (RAUM); community and cooperative play (GEM); combat, attack and defence (WEHR); effort and bodily performance (LEIST); decency and fair play (SITT). Each item was assigned to a single dominant dimension, so that the resulting frequencies are mutually exclusive. Fourth, quantitative processing of the classified corpus, including a source-by-dimension cross-tabulation.

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Two methodological limitations should be stated. The corpus is historical and programmatic, and therefore documents intended rather than actual usage; statements about present-day currency rest on the secondary literature [3], [5]. Furthermore, the assignment of a single dominant dimension to each item necessarily suppresses secondary value components; a term such as Turnwart, for instance, is dominantly ORD but also carries a GEM component.

Results. **The Turnsprache as a value-bearing derivational system**. Jahn and Eiselen do not present a list of technical labels but a derivational nest. The base Turn- is presented in the source as a „Deutscher Urlaut“ signifying turning, wheeling and extensive movement, with cognates claimed for Langobardic, Old Franconian, Anglo-Saxon, English, Swedish and Icelandic, and with French tourner treated as a Germanic export rather than a loan into German [13]. The etymological argument is itself an act of cultural positioning: the new vocabulary is presented as a recovery of native substance rather than an invention. Leirich records the stylistic programme attached to it — the terminology was to be einfach, klar, bündig, herzlich, „deutsch heraus“, wahrheitsvoll and volksfaßlich, and free of „Schmutz und Putz“ [16]. Comprehensibility to the non-specialist is thus built into the design criteria, which is a social rather than a terminological requirement.

Table I. Value dimensions in Jahn and Eiselen’s turn-word family (1816)

German term (S1)	Literal gloss	Dominant value dimension
Turnordnung, Turngesetz, Turnregel	gymnastic order / law / rule	Order, rule and adjudication
Turnwart, Turnwalt, Turnwartschaft	gymnastic warden / steward / wardenship	Order, rule and adjudication
Turngemeinde, Turngemeinschaft, Turngesellschaft	gymnastic parish / community / society	Community and cooperative play
Mitturner, mitturnen, Vorturner, vorturnen	co-gymnast, to exercise with, lead gymnast, to lead the exercise	Community and cooperative play
Turnplatz, Turnbahn, Turnhof, Turnsaal	gymnastic ground / track / yard / hall	Spatial regulation
Turnzeit, Turnstunde, Turntag, Turnjahr, Turnrast	gymnastic time / hour / day / year / rest	Temporal regulation
turnlustig, turnfertig, turnreif, turnstark	keen / ready / mature / strong for gymnastics	Effort and bodily performance
turnmüde, turnfaul	tired of / lazy at gymnastics	Effort and bodily performance

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Turner	gymnast; glossed in the source via Old Norse ‘warrior’, ‘young soldier’	Combat and defence
Turnsitte, Turnbrauch	gymnastic custom / usage	Decency and fair play

Two features of Table I deserve emphasis. First, the nest lexicalises the entire institutional apparatus of the practice — its law, its officials, its calendar, its premises and its community — before it lexicalises individual movements. Second, the attitudinal derivatives (turnlustig, turnfaul) show that the base is productive enough to encode moral evaluation of the practitioner, not only description of the practice. The historical setting explains the orientation: Jahn’s movement, opened as a Turnplatz near Berlin in 1811 and extended to fifty-two cities within seven years, pursued national, ideological-political and military rather than primarily pedagogical aims, and supplied volunteers to the Lützow Free Corps in 1813 [10]. The gloss of Turner through Old Norse ‘warrior’ is therefore not incidental, and it stands in a broader discourse in which the exercised body was a vehicle of national identity [11].

Koch’s Germanisation of football vocabulary

Koch’s 1903 glossary is a different kind of document: a bilingual substitution list published in a purist journal, in which each English football term is matched with a proposed German equivalent [14]. Its context was ideological. Football was regarded in the German Empire as an English and even hostile game, described as an „englische Krankheit“ and as un-German in contrast to Turnen, so that Germanising the vocabulary was a precondition of the sport’s social acceptability [15]. Burkhardt shows that the outcome was mixed and that the surviving items are predominantly loan translations and loan formations rather than free coinages [3].

Table II. Selected Germanisations proposed by Koch (1903) and their fate

English source term	**Koch’s German equivalent (1903)**	**Status in present-day German**
Goal	Tor (replacing earlier Mal)	established
Goalkeeper	Torwächter	established as Torwart / Torhüter
off side	abseits	established
corner-kick	Eckstoß, Eckball	established
free-kick	Freistoß	established
penalty-kick	Strafstoß	established
half time	Halbzeit	established
kick-off	Anstoß	established
Referee	Schiedsrichter	established

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Linesmen	Linienrichter	established
combination	Zusammenspiel	established
to pass	abgeben, zuspielen	coexists with passen
fair / foul	anständig, ehrlich / ungehörig, unehrlich	displaced by fair, Foul
Captain	Spielkaiser, Spielwart	not established
Teams	Gespielschaften	not established (Mannschaft)
backs / fullback	Hinterspieler / Schlußspieler	not established (Verteidiger)
penalty-goal	Straftor	not established

The distribution of successes and failures is systematic rather than random. Terms denoting rules, sanctions, officials and phases of play — abseits, Freistoß, Strafstoß, Halbzeit, Anstoß, Schiedsrichter, Linienrichter — became the standard German vocabulary and remain so, whereas terms denoting player roles and social hierarchy — Spielkaiser, Gespielschaft, Hinterspieler, Schlußspieler — did not survive [3], [14]. The regulatory core of the vocabulary was thus successfully nativised, while its social and positional periphery was later re-lexicalised. A comparative detail confirms that this was a specifically German outcome rather than a general German-language one: German retained Torhüter, Linienrichter and Abseits, whereas Austrian and Swiss usage continued with goalie, corner, goalkeeper, linesman and offside [15]. It is also notable that Koch's ethical pair — fair rendered as anständig and ehrlich, foul as ungehörig and unehrlich — belongs to the minority that was displaced by the English originals, which suggests that the ethical vocabulary of sport was internationalised earlier and more completely than its regulatory vocabulary [17].

Discussion. The quantitative profile supports the initial hypothesis and permits a more precise formulation of it. German sports terminology in its formative phase is organised around three value clusters. The first and dominant one is regulative: order, law, boundary, schedule and the officials who enforce them. This cluster is the lexical counterpart of the cultural salience of Ordnung and of discipline grounded in legitimate authority which Wierzbicka identifies for German on independent evidence [1], [2]. The second cluster is communal: the practitioner is lexicalised as a member of a Gemeinde, a Gemeinschaft or a Gespielschaft, and cooperative action receives its own terms (Zusammenspiel, abgeben, zuspielen, mitturnen). The third is agonal and defensive, concentrated in Koch's football vocabulary and prefigured in the martial gloss of Turner. Individual achievement, by contrast, is only weakly lexicalised: the LEIST dimension amounts to 12.2 per cent of the corpus and consists largely of attitudinal adjectives rather than of terms for records, rankings or performance.

The communal cluster has a demonstrable institutional afterlife. The association form that the Turnsprache lexicalised remains the organisational default of German sport: according to the membership survey of the German Olympic Sports Confederation, some 86,000 sports clubs registered 28,764,951 memberships as of 1 January 2024, and the German Gymnastics Federation alone accounted for 5,063,572 of them [18], [19]. The Verein is therefore not a historical residue but the living referent of a nineteenth-century terminological programme, which explains why the corresponding vocabulary has never been displaced by English alternatives.

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The findings also clarify the mechanism of present-day borrowing. Winkler's comparison shows that English influence on German sports language is graded: it is strongest in ice hockey, where the sport's North American origin, the dominance of the NHL and the frequent use of English as the working language of teams keep many items recognisably foreign; football occupies an intermediate position precisely because early Germanisation was partially successful; handball, which developed within German-speaking sports culture, is least affected [5]. This gradation is intelligible only if the existence of an entrenched native regulatory vocabulary is treated as a resisting factor, which is what Table II documents. The wider European evidence points the same way: Bergh and Ohlander find that the balance between direct loans and loan translations varies systematically with the historical and typological position of the receiving language [6], [7]. German purism, from the Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein that published Koch's list to the modern language societies, has been remarkably selective in the same way, accepting fair, Trainer and Doping while objecting to Training as a displacing form [20].

A final consideration concerns the metaphorical dimension. The corpus-based studies of football discourse report a heavy concentration of military and combat imagery in German commentary [8], [9], and this has often been read as evidence of a militarised conceptualisation of sport. The terminological evidence assembled here suggests a more differentiated reading. In the foundational terminology the agonal dimension is present but secondary (13.8 per cent), and it is regulation that dominates. The martial density of modern commentary is therefore better attributed to the discursive and journalistic layer, which the terminological layer supplies with material but does not itself determine [3], [15]. For translation practice, and specifically for rendering German sports texts into typologically distant languages such as Uzbek, this distinction is practical: regulatory terms behave as fixed equivalents, whereas combat metaphors are stylistic choices of the reporter and require functional rather than literal transfer [17], [21].

Conclusion. The analysis of 123 terms drawn from the two programmatic sources of German sports nomenclature shows that this terminology is a value-bearing system. Order, rule and adjudication is its largest value dimension (28.5 per cent), and together with spatial and temporal regulation it accounts for 51.3 per cent of the corpus; community and cooperative play (15.4 per cent) forms a second cluster, combat and defence (13.8 per cent) a third, while effort and bodily performance (12.2 per cent) and decency and fair play (7.3 per cent) remain peripheral. Jahn and Eiselen's Turnsprache and Koch's football glossary are complementary rather than parallel: the former lexicalises the community and the regulated space and time of practice, the latter the rules, sanctions and agonal roles of the match.

The differential survival of Koch's proposals indicates that terminological purism succeeded where it coincided with an entrenched cultural value — regulation and adjudication — and failed where it did not, in the naming of player roles and social hierarchy. This entrenched regulatory core also accounts for the graded, sport-specific character of subsequent Anglicisation. Two directions for further work follow. A diachronic extension to twentieth- and twenty-first-century rulebooks and media corpora would test whether the value profile established here has shifted; and a contrastive extension to the sports terminologies of typologically distant languages, including Uzbek, would establish which of the dimensions identified are culture-specific and which are inherent in the codification of sport as such.

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