

CALQUES AND LOANWORDS FROM ENGLISH IN ITALIAN SPECIALIZED PRESS. AN INVESTIGATION ON THE NAMES OF SPORTS

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1. Abstract

Within specialized discourse in the Italian language sports journalism communication is certainly one of the richest in anglicisms. This study investigates the influence of English on Italian sports newspaper lexicon with particular reference to the denominations of sports disciplines which are loanwords and calques from English. The corpus studied is made up of the three main Italian sports dailies - “La Gazzetta dello Sport”, the “Corriere dello Sport” and “Tuttosport” - which have been observed in their on line version through the second sixth-month period of 2006. The attention will be focused on the terminological aspects of Italian sports language with respect to: types of borrowings and calques; possible use of Italian equivalents for English sports denominations, including acronyms; synonyms; influence of English on Italian sports press language according to the type of sports discipline, and possible pragmatic, historical and cultural reasons. In order to carry out the linguistic analysis for this paper, the Zanichelli dictionary (1998), by Ragazzini, has been used - the only existing Italian English / English Italian paper sports dictionary so far. For the investigation of the historical-cultural aspects about the use of the terminology observed, the *Compendium of Sporting Knowledge* by Trevor Montague and the on-line encyclopaedia *wikipedia* (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>) have been looked up.

2. Introduction

The influence of English on the Italian language goes back to the 13th century but it was in the course of the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, that a greater number of Anglicisms began to be absorbed into the Italian lexicon. Such influence affected - and still affects - both common language and the language of specialized communication. Depending on the

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professional area of reference, the incidence of English on the Italian terminology has proved to be more or less incisive.

Among the languages of Italian specialized communication those of medicine, information science, economics, finance and sport have undergone a major impact from the English language, mainly because the professional fields those disciplines refer to mainly developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As to sports communication, in particular, the study of its language has so far received little attention within ESP. Last-century important contributions come from the studies carried out by Devoto (1939), who focuses on the language of football match reports; Bascetta (1962), whose research offers a very interesting list of foreign words in Italian sports communication, and Stella (1983), who analyses Italian sports terminology and the impact of anglicisms. Some mentions about the influence of English on Italian sports language also come from Bonomi (1994) and Cartago (1994), both interested in the influence of English and French on the Italian language, with particular reference to the fascist period.

In an essay about the language of sport, Stella (1983: 141) underlined that in the last twenty years of the 19th century the term “sport” had definitively been absorbed by Italian sports press, where the term had become part of the name of the most widespread Italian sports daily: “La Gazzetta dello sport”. Later, “sport” was also included in the names of what would become the second and third most important Italian sports newspapers: the “Corriere dello sport” and “Tuttosport”.¹

Certainly, one of the reasons explaining the impressive number of English loanwords in Italian sports newspapers is the need for brevity of expression, a quality which can be found not only in the language of journalism but also in specialized communication in general. Journalists have limited space and time when writing articles, and the English lexicon, rich in monosyllabic and disyllabic words, provides them with the conciseness of expression they constantly look for. What German scholar Gentsch (2004) says in an article on English borrowings in German press can easily be turned to Italian newspaper language as well. Quoting Pfitzner’s opinion on the reasons why English is so largely used in German press, Gentsch states:

Pfitzner refers to both the usage of Anglicisms to achieve linguistic precision and the use of Anglicisms to achieve brevity as language economization. He suggests that both precision and brevity are vital to newspaper language, yet the motivations behind the two

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¹ Born on 3 April 1896, namely three days before the opening of the first modern Olympic Games, in Athens, “La Gazzetta dello sport” is the first Italian daily for number of readers, that is over 3,6 million everyday. The “Corriere dello sport” was founded in 1924 and today is the first Italian daily for number of readers in the centre-south Italy and the fourth most-read newspaper in all country. “Tuttosport” was founded in 1945 and has about 899,000 readers. It is the only sports daily to have a Lombardy edition, four pages devoted to the Inter and Milan football teams.

are divergent. Brevity decreases the space needed in the publication as well as the time it takes the journalist to write the article, and both of these result in a saving in costs.²

3. *English loanwords in Italian sports newspapers*

Anyone reading Italian sports newspapers knows that some sports disciplines are always referred to in the English language, both in the titles of the sections and in the body of the articles. This happens either because these denominations have no Italian equivalents or because the Italian equivalents have almost completely disappeared from use. Examples of English loanwords with no Italian equivalents are “tennis”, “hockey”, “curling”, “softball”, “netball”, “cricket”, and “golf”. Some of these terms were banned during the fascist period, when the use of most foreign words was forbidden within a general program of cultural and linguistic italianization carried out by Mussolini’s regime. In particular, “hockey” was substituted with “maglio sul ghiaccio” (De Grazia & Luzzatto 2002-vol.2: 664), and it was thought to replace “curling” with “piastra su ghiaccio” (Cortelazzo & Zolli 2004) on the initiative of the Royal Academy of Italy.³ “Tennis” was one of the few terms to be accepted by the authorities of the time - together with other anglicisms such as “bar”, “sport” and “film” (Bonomi 1994: 689) - but it was proposed to spread also its Italian equivalents “pallacorda” and “giuoco della racchetta” (Cartago 1994: 741).

The other category of loanwords is that represented by names of sports whose Italian equivalents are still attested in the Zanichelli dictionary (1998) but no more used in Italian sports language. Three examples are “rugby”, “baseball” and “bob”, whose counterparts “pallaovale”, “pallabase” and “guidoslitta” are included in the dictionary next to the non-adapted loanwords.

All the English denominations in this section mentioned have been absorbed into the Italian language without undergoing any morphological change. Differently, there are other sports discipline names whose ‘signans’ has been reduced in the passage from English to Italian. In particular, there has been a drop of either a lexeme of compound nouns, as in the case of “volley” for “volleyball” (and so also of “beach volley” for “beach volleyball”), and “basket” for “basketball”, or the morpheme “-ing”, as in the case of “snowboard” for “snowboarding”, and “surf” for “surfing”.⁴ The drop of the morpheme “-ing” has also extended to the compound nouns “windsurf” and “kitesurf”, whose English equivalents are, respectively, “windsurfing” and “kitesurfing”. Finally, “-ing” has also disappeared in “boxe” - from the English “boxing” - but in this case the

² GENTSCH K., *English Borrowings in German Newspaper Language: Motivations, Frequencies, and Types, on the Basis of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Muenchner, and Bild*, 2004, <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/Linguistics/papers/2005/gentsch.pdf>.

³ As for other Italian equivalents of English sports terms during the fascist period, see DE GRAZIA V. & LUZZATTO S. (eds), *Dizionario del fascismo*, vol. II, Einaudi, Torino, 2002, pp. 663-664.

⁴ In the Italian language “surfing” is used in the denomination of the Italian association of surf “Federazione Italiana Surfing” (“FISURF”).

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reduction has occurred in the French language, from which Italian has absorbed the term. However, the drop of the morpheme “-ing” concerning English terms assimilated into the Italian language does not represent an absolute rule, as there are cases of denominations - such as “curling”, “spinning”, “rowing”, “wrestling” and “bowling” - which have kept the original form.⁵

4. *Calques from English in Italian sports newspapers: denominations of disciplines*

4.1. *Pallacanestro, pallavolo, pallamano*

Among the Italian denominations of sports disciplines occurring in the three dailies observed three are calques - precisely structural calques - from the corresponding English terms: “pallacanestro”, from “basketball”; “pallavolo”, from “volleyball”; “pallamano”, from “handball”.

The term “pallacanestro” has undergone several changes in the course of time, precisely since the birth of the “Federazione Italiana Basket-Ball”, on 2 November 1921 in Milan. In 1925 the name of the association was changed into “Federazione Italiana Palla al Cesto”. Since the new denomination was considered inaccurate, in 1930 it was modified into “Federazione Italiana Palla al Canestro”, later contracted in “Federazione Italiana Pallacanestro” (“FIP”)⁶.

As to the term “pallavolo”, the second lexeme of the compound, “volo”, is not exactly the equivalent of “volley”, as in common English “volley” means ‘burst’ (‘raffica’), ‘stroke’ (‘colpo’) (Longman 2005). That is the reason why Volpicella (1994) suggests “palla colpita violentemente” as a possible appropriate Italian calque of “volleyball”⁷. However, the choice for “volo” as the second lexeme in “pallavolo” probably lies in the fact that in English sports

⁵ In the Italian language “bowling” is used to refer to (ten-pin) bowling, that is “a competitive sport in which a player (the “bowler”) rolls a bowling ball down a wooden or “synthetic” (polyurethane) “lane” with the objective of scoring points by knocking down as many pins as possible” (wikipedia, <http://www.wikipedia.org/>). “Bowling” is used as distinct from “bocce”, which refers to a game similar to what in the English language is most-commonly known as “bowls” (sometimes the synonyms “lawn bowls” or “lawn bowling” are used). For information about the main differences between the game of bocce and the game of bowls, see MONTAGUE T., *A to Z of sport. The Compendium of Sporting Knowledge*, Little, Brown, London, 2004, p.156. Besides, in the Italian language “bowling” has also been adapted into “boling”.

RANDO G., *Dizionario degli Anglicismi nell'italiano post-unitario*, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Firenze, 1987.

⁶ There are 51 acronyms “FIP” existing up to now, 49 of which are registered in *THE FREE DICTIONARY*, <http://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/>, while 2 in the *Dizionario degli acronimi*, edited by the Community Policy Department, <http://politichecomunitarie.it/DefaultDesktop.aspx?page=693&NavPage=6&lettera=C>. The acronyms refer mostly to information science technology, but also cover other fields of human knowledge (pharmaceutics, medicine, topology, engineering, etc.).

⁷ VOLPICELLA G., *Il manuale della pallavolo*, Idealibri, Milano, 1994, http://www.archivio.volleysovico.20m.com/html/cenni_storici.html

The term “pallavolo” can also be found in a different graphic form in the Italian acronym “FIPAV” (“Federazione Italiana Palla A Volo”), not because there is still uncertainty in the form of the name of the sport but to distinguish “FIPAV” from “FIP”. For investigations on the different graphic forms that many sports names, including “pallacanestro” and “pallavolo”, had in the first half of the twentieth century, see BASCETTA C., *Il linguaggio sportivo contemporaneo*, Sansoni Editore, Firenze, 1962, pp. 94 -95.

language the term “volley” is used as a synonym of “flight” (‘volo’), especially in the language of football and tennis. The on-line dictionary *your dictionary.com* (www.yourdictionary.com) offers the following definition of “volley” when the term is used in sports contexts: “The flight of a ball before it touches the ground”. Further, “volley” comes “from the Latin *volāre* through the French *voler, volée*”. With reference to the Italian denomination “pallavolo”, the term had the graphic form “palla al volo” in 1920, later modified into “pallavolo” in 1930 (Rando 1987).

Finally, the Italian term “pallamano” is a perfect structural calque from the English “handball”. Its early denomination was “palla a mano campestre”, even though the date of first registration is still uncertain -1946 or 1950 (Rando 1987).

4.2. The cases of pallanuoto / water polo and calcio / football

Not all the Italian sports denominations beginning with “palla-” are the result of a direct influence of English on the Italian language. The term “pallanuoto”, for instance, is the equivalent of “water polo” but it does not represent its calque. “Pallanuoto”, in fact, can be defined as a “loan creation”, since it has been coined to substitute the English lexeme “water polo” with a native word without undergoing any linguistic influence from the foreign denomination⁸. The neologism “pallanuoto” has been most likely coined on the structure of the terms “pallavolo” and “pallacanestro”⁹. Moreover, the reasons leading to the coinage of “pallanuoto” - and not, for instance, of ‘polo d’acqua’ or ‘polo in acqua’ or still ‘polo acquatico’, as possible loan translations from English would suggest - might also lie in the evolution of the technical characteristics of water polo. When this sport was born, namely at the end of the nineteenth century in England, its form was quite different from its current one, because athletes used to play on barrels with horses’ heads, and pushed themselves on the water by oars. Since in this early form the sport was similar to polo played on horseback, it was called “water polo”¹⁰. Later, when water polo began spreading throughout Italy (the first tournaments were held in 1901 and 1902), the sport had already acquired its current form, that is oars and barrels had already been eliminated, and athletes had become mainly swimmers. The new features water polo got could contribute to explain the non-recourse to the technique of the structural calque from English in the specific case of “pallanuoto”, differently from what has happened for all the other Italian denominations beginning with “palla-”. Besides, in the English language “water

⁸ The expression “loan creation” has been taken from Betz, quoted by Weinreich, in turn quoted by KLAJN I., *Influssi inglesi nella lingua italiana*, Leo S. Olschki Editore, Firenze, 1972, p. 109.

⁹ The date of first registration of “pallanuoto” is 1935, while that of “pallacanestro” and “pallavolo” is 1930 (Rando 1972).

¹⁰ There are few documents about the origins of water polo. It seems that first it was called “water football”, later “aquatic polo”, and finally “water polo”.

For detailed information about history, evolution and technical characteristics of modern sports see AIELLO M., *Viaggio nello sport attraverso i secoli*, Le Monnier Università, Firenze, 2004.

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polo” is an example of semantic instability of a term, as the process of semantic evolution it has undergone has not been accompanied by a parallel renewal on a lexical level (a proposal of appropriate name to refer to water polo in its current form could be, for example, ‘swimmingball’, also in accordance with other English sports denominations ending in “-ball” (“baseball”, “basketball”, etc.).

Another Italian name of sport which is not a calque from English is “calcio”, whose British English equivalent “football” (in American “soccer”) could have brought to a possible ‘palla piede’. The choice for “calcio” to refer to what would become the most popular sports in Italy was made in memory of an ancient game called “calcio fiorentino”. It was just the great success the sport (in its modern form) got as soon as it arrived in Italy in 1893 that did not allow the term “football” to be absorbed in the Italian language for a long time. In fact, the “Federazione Italiana Football”, born in 1893, was soon changed into “Federazione Italiana Gioco Calcio” (“FIGC”) in 1909.

5. Use of calques and their English equivalents in Italian sports press

5.1. Pallacanestro / basket, pallavolo / volleyball, (palla base) / baseball

The analysis of the corpus used for this study has shown that to refer to the basketball game Italian sports newspapers use the term “basket” as the title of the section devoted to the corresponding sport, while “pallacanestro” is only used in the body of the articles, although its occurrence has shown to be definitely less frequent than its English counterpart.

“Pallavolo” is used both as the title of the section devoted to the corresponding sport and in the body of the articles, while its English equivalent “volleyball” only appears in the Italian acronym “FIV” (“Federazione Italiana Volleyball”).

“Pallamano” is used both as the title of the section devoted to the corresponding sport and in the body of the articles, while its English equivalent “handball” only appears in the Italian acronym “FIGH” (“Federazione Italiana Gioco Handball”).

The reason why in Italian sports press journalists sometimes refer to a specific sports discipline using the English name instead of its Italian equivalent (if any equivalent exists), and other times they make the opposite choice can be of different nature - stylistic, pragmatic, historical-geographical, cultural - and may vary according to the type of sport of reference.

One of the reasons explaining the use of “basket” as the name of the section concerning basketball lies in the fact that “basket” is more concise and immediate than “pallacanestro”, thus resulting more effective in catching the readers’ attention.

The criterion of conciseness is largely respected by journalists (as well as by specialists in general) and this concerns all the parts of a newspaper -

headlines, articles, section names - because journalists, as discussed earlier, need to use space economically.

But if lexical conciseness is an important factor in determining journalists' linguistic choices, so it could be asked why to refer to the volleyball game they turn to the Italian denomination "pallavolo" - at least as far as the title of the section devoted to this sport is concerned - and not to the more concise English lexeme "volley". In this case the principle of conciseness might have been neglected in favour of the 'variety of expression', since "volley" is the second lexeme of the title of another sports section, that is "beach volley". The term "beach volley" has been asorbed into the Italian language as a non-adapted loanword, as proved by the Zingarelli dictionary (1997) - even though in the on-line archive of the three examined dailies the following cases of calque have been found: "pallavolo su spiaggia" ("Gazzetta dello sport", 03/06/00), "pallavolo in spiaggia" ("Gazzetta dello sport", 20/06/97) and "pallavolo da spiaggia" ("Corriere dello sport", 21/07/07).

Apart from the possible stylistic criteria, other factors may intervene in the preference for either the English language or the Italian one to refer to sports disciplines. The prevalence of "basket" over "pallacanestro" in Italian journalism is also brought about by the identification of basketball with the country where it was born and developed, namely the United States. In fact, if on the one hand basketball is one of the most practised sports in our country (as well as all over the world), on the other it is still considered a typically American game; hence, perhaps, the tendency to use an English lexeme to refer to the sport - not only in Italian newspapers but also in common usage.¹¹

The same 'American connotation' regarding "basket" also concerns two other sports denominations, the already mentioned "beach volley", and "baseball". As said before, the former has no codified Italian equivalents; the latter has an Italian equivalent, "pallabase", which, despite being still recorded in the Zanichelli dictionary (1998), has completely disappeared from use in Italian sports language.¹²

5.2. *Pallamano/ handball*

The question concerning "pallamano" is much more complex and deserves a deeper investigation. The fact that Italian journalism always uses the Italian denomination "pallamano" (except in the acronym "FIGH") is probably due to a certain vagueness in the English equivalent "handball". Handball, in fact, in the

¹¹ "Basket" is also included in the name of a recently founded association, the "Federazione Italiana Sportiva Basket Acquatico" ("FISBA"), born in consequence of the spreading of water basket throughout Italy a few years ago. The "Federazione Italiana Pallacanestro" ("FIP") has officially recognised this new discipline with the name "water basket". The fact that in the acronym "FISBA" the denomination "basket acquatico" has been preferred to that of "water basket" is most likely due to practical purposes of easier pronunciation ("FISBA" and not "FISWB").

¹² The denomination "palla base" to refer to the baseball game appeared in 1950 when the "Federazione Italiana Palla Base" ("FIPB") was founded. Later, in 1970, the name of the society changed into "Federazione Italiana Baseball e Softball" ("FIBS").

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English language does not refer to only one discipline in particular, but to a ‘group’ of sports disciplines, though some of them are quite similar one another. Montague, one of the major sport experts in Great Britain, writes about handball:

Handball is the generic name for any game played in a walled court or against a single wall, with a small rubber ball that is struck with hand or fist against the wall, the object being to cause the ball to rebound in such a way that the opposition cannot return it. [...] Many accounts of handball are given by 18th century writers who indicate that on-wall handball was being played in Ireland from at least 1700. [...] Irish migrants moving to England introduced the game to the English and while some one-wall play took place, indoor tennis courts became popular sites for three-wall handball. (Montague 2004: 397)

In the chapter devoted to handball, Montague also writes about another kind of handball: “team handball”. This game differentiates from one-wall, three-wall, and four-wall handball in many aspects concerning techniques, court and ball dimensions, and number of players. This is what the scholar says about team handball:

Team handball originated in Europe in the 1900s and is a completely different sport from that described above. The International Handball Federation (IHF) is the governing body and has in excess of 140 member countries. [...] Team handball combines elements of both soccer and basketball. (Montague 2004: 398)

Looking up “handball” in wikipedia, what we are brought to is a page whose title is “Team handball”. Apart explaining what the game consists of, the on-line encyclopedia also provides the synonyms of “team handball”: “field handball”, “European handball”, “Olympic handball”, and, simply, “handball”.

On the same page where “team handball” appears, *Wikipedia* also offers a link showing other uses of “handball”, whose results are the following:

“Handball” is the name of several different sports:

- “Team handball”, or “Olympic/European Handball”, a game somewhat similar to association football, but the ball is played with the hand, not the foot;
- “American handball”, predecessor to Racquetball played in a walled court with a smaller rubber ball and gloved or bare hands; similar to British Fives, Pelota and Gaelic handball;
- “Chinese handball”;
- “Four square” is known as “handball” in Australia/New Zealand, where it is played on two or more squares (eight is about the practical limit);
- “Gaelic handball” - similar to the American game. Played in Ireland;
- “Pelota” - a Basque sport, similar to American handball.

Other sporting uses:

- The phrase “hand ball” can refer both to a type of handball, as well as the (illegal) use of hands while playing football (soccer);
- A “handball” is a legal method of disposing of the ball and an alternative pass to a kick (or drop punt) in Australian rules football.

Other lexical data resulting from the exploration of the entries in the list just now mentioned are:

1. There is another kind of handball: “prison handball, a simplified version of American handball popular in north American prisons;”
2. the variant of handball called “Chinese handball” is also known as “Ace-King-Queen, King(s)”, and “Slugs”;
3. the term “American handball” is also known as “court handball”;
4. the variant of handball called “Gaelic handball” is also known as “Irish handball”, “court handball” and “wall handball”.

As can be noted the terms “American handball” and “Gaelic handball” have a synonym in common, that is “court handball”. This is due to the fact that “American handball is basically identical to Gaelic handball, except for certain minor differences.” (*Wikipedia*, <http://www.wikipedia.org/>)

The results obtained from the research conducted on “handball” show that the English term can have several different uses. This can produce semantic ambiguity and confusion in the attribution of one ‘specific’ meaning for the term in question which, as a consequence, cannot be isolated from its ‘specific’ context.

As to the Italian language, the Zanichelli bilingual sports dictionary (1998) provides the following equivalents of “handball”:

1. pallamano, handball;
2. pallone da pallamano;
3. (in U.S.A.) pallamuro (la palla è colpita con le mani guantate ; cfr. racquetball).

As can be noted from item 1, the Zanichelli dictionary registers both the Italian terms “pallamano” and “handball” as denominations used in the Italian language to refer to the sport. Actually, “handball”, as said before in section 5.1., is only included in the acronym “FIGH”, where the preference for the English denomination is most likely determined by an easier pronunciation of the acronym itself (“FIGH” and not “FIGP”).

6. Conclusions

The influence of English on Italian sports language is part of a wider phenomenon which has seen a massive absorption of anglicisms into our language mainly since the second postwar period.

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What has led to the deep impact of the English language on Italian sports terminology - besides that of other European languages - can be identified in three major factors: the spread of homegrown American and British sports like baseball, basketball, rugby and cricket all over the world; the ever growing importance of English as the language of international interchange; the global character of communication. The second and third factors have made the English language predominate in the terminology of those sports which are by now popular also in our country, such as tennis, boxe, golf and cycling. Moreover, the media - especially television - have dramatically contributed to the introduction of English sports terms into the Italian language, thanks to the wide diffusion of satellite channels and thus to the broadcasting of international sports events.

Through the exploration of the names of sports in Italian newspapers an attempt has been made to highlight not only the influence that the English language has had on Italian sports press but also the importance anglicisms have in allowing journalists to satisfy the need for lexical richness and variety of expression, besides, most often, that of conciseness. The recourse, for example, to both the use of “basket” and “pallacanestro”, or “volley” and “pallavolo” in an Italian sports newspaper article meets journalists’ will to avoid phenomena of terminological redundancy in written communication. At the same time, lexical conciseness is obtained through the use of both English morphologically-reduced compound nouns (“basket” and “volley” as the abbreviations of “basketball” and “volleyball”), and some “-ing”-ending English nouns (i.e. “surf” from “surfing”), thus coining terms whose surface form and meaning are different from those of the original lexemes.

The language of sport is still an unexplored area of investigation within the study of specialized discourse. The reason for this could be the close relationship between sports terminology and common language - which happens not only in English - a much stronger relationship than that occurring between common language and other specialized languages. From a quantitative point of view, the terms belonging to the language of sport which have entered everyday vocabulary are much more numerous than those, for example, coming from the language of medicine, law or economics. Terms such as “goal”, “smash”, “dribbling”, “referee”, “out”, “net”, “match” - as well as innumerable other lexemes - have been definitively absorbed into common lexicon and are also used by those who don’t have any particular familiarity with the language of sport nor, in the case of Italian-speaking people, with the English language in general. Perhaps, it’s just the weak boundary between sports communication and common lexicon the cause of the tendency to favour the study of languages which are considered ‘more specialistic’ (i.e. the legal language). It would be enough thinking about the role of great importance sports terminology has played not only towards common language but also towards other specialized languages. In fact, both the vocabulary of everyday communication and that of many domain-specific fields - especially the political one - have assimilated a

considerable number of similes, metaphors and idiomatic expressions from the practise of sport, as well as from its techniques and strategies.

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