

English and Italian bipartite garment nouns as singulars in the language of fashion.

This paper contrasts the use of bipartite nouns as singulars in the English and Italian language of fashion. Bipartite nouns (such as *trousers* (It. *pantaloni*), *spectacles* (It. *occhiali*), *tights* (It. *calze*)) denote objects or items of clothing consisting of two equal parts joined together (Quirk et al. 1985: § 5.76), and are a semantic subcategory of *pluralia tantum* nouns, that is, nouns that are said to occur only in the plural, to be uncountable (Payne & Huddleston 2002: 342), and to be emblematic of the iconic relationship between grammatical (plural) form and (plural) meaning (Wierzbicka 1988: 514–515; Wisniewski 2010: 181–182). It is also said of bipartites that they can be used as singulars only to refer to the type, model or style of garments, not to individual items (Wickens 1992).

In a recent paper (Biscetti 2022) I challenged these claims using evidence from *The Vogue Archive* (America) and concluded that the lexical item *trouser(s)* chosen to represent English bipartite garment nouns is at best plural dominant, not plural only; that the singular form (*trouser*) can be used not only to refer generically to model or type of garment, but also indexically to specific items; and that the use of the singular to denote one leg of a pair of trousers is not arbitrary but iconic of the way of conceptualizing the human body (i.e., as two symmetrical halves) in this specific domain of human activity.

In this paper I would like to examine the behaviour of the corresponding Italian lexical item *pantaloni/e* and put it to the same countability, reference and iconicity tests as *trousers* using evidence from *The Vogue Italia Archive*, which contains the entire run of *Vogue* magazine (Italian edition) from the first issue (October 1964) to present. The data collected show that *pantaloni* seems to have a higher degree of countability than E. *trousers* (which never occurs in combination with an indefinite article in this database). In terms of reference, the Italian singular form *pantalone* was found to have both a generic and a specific reference just like *trouser*, although specific reference is somewhat more frequent for *pantalone* than it is for *trouser*. Finally, Italian *pantalone/i* is also used to refer to the leg(s) of the garment it denotes but differs from *trouser* in frequency and recency of usage.

These results suggest that bipartite garment nouns enjoy the same status as “plural dominant” rather than plural only in both languages notwithstanding certain differences ascribable to typological and possibly normative differences concerning fashion language in formal contexts (printed magazines).

References:

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