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

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This paper is part of a project on the study of bipartite nouns used as singulars in the language of fashion, and aims to contrast the use of the most frequently occurring noun denoting a bipartite item of clothing (viz., E. *trouser(s)* and It. *pantalone/i*) in the English and Italian editions of the Vogue fashion magazine.

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, p. 342), and to be emblematic of the iconic relationship between grammatical (plural) form and (plural) meaning (Wierzbicka 1988, pp. 514–515; Wisniewsky 2010, pp. 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 data retrieved from 2,941 issues of The Vogue Archive (America) (i.e., spanning from the first 1892 issue to the December 2021 issue), 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.

Here I would like to examine the behaviour of the corresponding Italian lexical item *pantaloni* 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 the Vogue fashion magazine (Italian edition) from the first issue (October 1964) to present. The data collected show that *pantaloni* passed Allan’s (1980) “A + N Test” for countability, as it occurs with quantifiers which identify one or more discrete entities. Frequency of occurrence with some of these quantifiers suggests that It. *pantaloni* seems to have a higher degree of countability than E. *trousers* (which never occurs in combination with an indefinite article in the Vogue America database), and therefore its status as “plural only” is even more questionable. In terms of reference, the Italian singular form *pantalone* was found to be used with both a generic and a specific reference just like E. *trouser*, although specific reference is somewhat more frequent for It. *pantalone* than it is for E. *trouser*. Finally, like its English correspondent, the singular It. *pantalone* is also used to refer to one leg of the garment but differs from *trouser* in frequency and recency of usage.

These results suggest that the two bipartite nouns enjoy the same status as “plural dominant” rather than “plural only” in both languages, while the differences in terms of countability need to be further investigated on a variety of discourse types to determine whether they are ascribable to cognitive, typological, and possibly normative differences concerning fashion language in formal contexts (print magazines).

## References

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