

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli*

‘My almost-leggings-so-I’m-kind-of-cheating jeans’: Exploring hyphenated phrasal expressions in fashion discourse

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Abstract: The language of fashion was first investigated by Roland Barthes in his influential book *Système de la Mode*, but it has since received scant attention from linguists, perhaps due to perceptions of frivolousness associated with the fashion world. This study explores contemporary fashion discourse through a systematic analysis of hyphenated phrasal expressions as linguistic features that are analytically challenging, but with strong expressive potential. The Fashion Discourse Corpus consists of 396,125 words compiled from the traditional fashion press (Vogue, Women’s Wear Daily, Harper’s Bazaar) and two leading fashion blogs, representing both American and British English. For comparative purposes, a reference corpus was extracted from American and British benchmark corpora. The quantitative analysis revealed that hyphenated phrasal expressions were considerably more frequent in the Fashion Discourse Corpus. Follow-up qualitative analysis identified conventional, semi-conventional, and non-conventional types, along with recurring structural patterns and communicative functions used to describe and evaluate fashion phenomena. The fashion blogs in particular contained richly expressive items that seemed to reflect the writer’s unique voice and identity within the discourse community. The findings can be applied in journalism and communication courses to help aspiring writers learn to use hyphenated phrasal expressions effectively.

Keywords: fashion discourse, fashion blogs, fashion journalism, multi-word items, hyphenated phrasal expressions, corpus methodology

1 Introduction

Interest in the world of fashion and its language dates back to Roland Barthes’ seminal work *Système de la Mode*, first published in 1967 and translated into English in 1990. Applying Saussurian concepts in a highly complex analysis of

*Corresponding author: Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli, Dipartimento di Filologia, Letteratura e Linguistica, Università di Pisa, Via Santa Maria 67, Pisa, PI 56126, Italy,
E-mail: belinda.crawford@unipi.it; bcrawford@unipi.it

women's fashion magazine editorials, Barthes (1990 [1967]: 213) formulated the notion of a 'vestimentary sign', which unites a *signifier* (i.e. an item of clothing or feature associated with it) with a *signified* (i.e. a personality trait or event associated with the clothing). In his example of the fashion statement *This year, prints are winning at the races* (Barthes 1990 [1967]: 215), the vestimentary signifier *prints* is linked to the signified *races* by means of the rhetorical element *winning*, thereby communicating a certain ideological representation of the world. Barthes (1990 [1967]: 235) in-depth analysis of the linguistic features of the editorials also highlighted the richly expressive and rhetorical dimension of fashion writing, which he aptly characterized as 'the poetics of clothing'.

Following Barthes, fashion journalism has continued to play an important role within the fashion discourse community which brings together an interesting mix of industry and media professionals, consumers, celebrities, and enthusiasts. Wylie (2012) noted that, from a disciplinary perspective, fashion journalism represents a complex intersection of the themes and professional practices of the two domains it represents, i.e. *fashion* (modernity and consumerism), and *journalism* (communication and the media). Bradford (2015) listed a number of globally influential publications, including consumer magazines (e.g. *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*), trade magazines (*Women's Wear Daily*, *Drapers*), as well as online sources of fashion news (e.g. *The Business of Fashion*, *Fashionista*).

In recent years, the rise of the new media has led to a profoundly changing landscape in fashion journalism. As Rocamora (2012: 98) pointed out, fashion blogs in particular have become 'a central platform for the circulation of fashion-related news and information'. Engholm and Hansen-Hansen (2014) described fashion blogs as a genre that first emerged in the early 2000s, used by private individuals to share fashion-related content and interact with others who have similar interests. The popularity of this phenomenon then inspired the traditional fashion press to introduce blogs on the online versions of their publications, although they relied instead on professional fashion journalists to write them. The increasingly prominent role of fashion blogs has thus led to shifting patterns in how, where, why, and by whom fashion discourse is produced and consumed. Indeed, there is now a vast and multi-faceted online community engaging in 'fashion discourses', or 'ways of talking about fashion' to express personal meanings and shared cultural experiences related to fashion phenomena (Thompson and Haytko 1997: 15).

Some individual fashion bloggers, called 'citizen journalists' by Rocamora (2012: 98), have gained huge popularity and now exert a strong influence on the fashion industry, also by establishing forms of collaboration with the traditional fashion press and fashion branding. As a result, the distinction between amateur and professional fashion writers is becoming increasingly blurry. However, one

characteristic that distinguishes individual fashion bloggers is the personal dimension of their writing, reflecting what Myers (2010: 98) described as a propensity to express ‘personal aesthetic preference, moral judgement or emotional response’. In this way, individual fashion bloggers express their unique voices and construct self-identity within the fashion community.

In the present study, I aim to expand the scarce body of research on contemporary fashion discourse with a linguistic analysis of fashion blogs representing the new media, as well as traditional sources of fashion journalism. The analysis focused on hyphenated phrasal expressions (hereafter HPEs) and was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are HPEs used in fashion discourse?
2. To what extent are HPEs used in fashion blogs vs. the traditional fashion press?
3. Which types of HPEs are found in fashion discourse and what are their structural patterns and communicative functions?

In Section 2, I first review prior research on the language of fashion and then turn to the literature on multi-word expressions as the linguistic focus of the present study, with particular reference to different approaches used to determine their status and classification, as well as the challenges involved in their analysis. Section 3 describes the corpus of fashion discourse compiled for the study and the analytical approach, while Section 4 presents and discusses the findings of the analysis. Section 5 summarizes the key findings and suggests possible applications for professional fashion writing.

2 Literature review

2.1 The nexus between fashion and language

Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to fashion writing (Borrelli 1997; Rocamora 2012). This seems somewhat surprising considering that ‘it is, indeed, the use of language that transforms clothing into *fashion*’ (Moeran 2004: 35, original emphasis). This lack of interest could be due in part to some perceptions of fashion writing as being rather frivolous in nature. For example, in an overtly critical socio-economic account of both the fashion industry and fashion journalism, McRobbie (1998: 174) argued that the fashion media perpetuates a ‘marginalized, trivial image of fashion as though it cannot be bothered to take itself seriously or to consider its own conditions of existence’. Nevertheless, two studies

inspired by the iconic *Vogue* magazine stand in contrast to this scathing critique by pointing out the highly articulate and distinctively creative nature of the language found within it. Borrelli (1997) analyzed *Vogue* editorials over a twenty-five year period from 1968 to 1993 and identified four different functional aspects with supporting examples. The *visual* aspect was encoded with colorful adjectives and metaphors (e.g. *seraglio shimmer* and *red stockings à la the Wife of Bath*), also by means of hyphenated adjectival forms, such as *the knit-two-purl-two look*. The *oral* aspect was rendered with alliteration and rhyme (e.g. *fringe is flicking, flashing, flying*), the *emphatic* aspect was seen in hyperbole and repetition (e.g. *bigger, furrier, luxe-ier than anyone's, anywhere, ever* and *belt it tight, tight, tight at the waist*), and the *popular* aspect emerged in references to pop culture (e.g. *shiny leather motorcycle-style clothes with a rock 'n' roll/Brando glamour*). It is quite clear from her analysis that 'Vogue speak' is, in her own words, 'colorful, inventive, and over-blown' (Borrelli 1997: 254).

König (2006) traced changes in content, tone, cultural references and lexicon in samples of text from British *Vogue* during the period from 1980 to 2001. Particularly interesting were a decreasing amount of technical fashion and textile terminology, an increasing use of irony, a greater focus on celebrities (signaling a cultural shift from high fashion to pop culture), and increasingly elaborate and dynamic descriptions by means of strings of adjectives. In line with the focus of the present study, she noted a trend toward more hyphenated adjective forms in the later period, such as *hot-pants-and-boob-tube stage outfits*, which contributed to a 'decidedly choppy, syncopated rhythm' (König 2006: 214), as compared to the smoothly flowing prose found in texts from the earlier period.

2.2 From multi-word items to hyphenated phrasal expressions

Within the over-arching area of phraseology, multi-word items are a topic of considerable interest as linguistic features with marked expressive and creative potential (Carter 2004; Jaki 2014; Kecskes 2016). According to Moon (1997: 43), a multi-word item is a sequence of two or more words that 'semantically and/or syntactically forms a meaningful and inseparable unit'. In the literature, various terms have been used over the years, including multi-word units (Lewis 1993), formulaic sequences (Wray and Perkins 2000), fixed expressions (Moon 1998), and phraseological units (Howarth 1996). Regardless of the terminology, these linguistic features also share other properties, starting from the notion that they are perceived as a single unit (Lewis 1993). Moon (1997) further articulated three factors that come into play: 1) conventionality of the expression; 2) fixedness of the word sequence; and 3) non-compositionality, i.e. the global meaning is

different from the meaning derived from each word summed together. However, it is widely agreed that these factors are not absolute, but rather exist along a cline of greater or lesser conformity, depending entirely on the particular multi-word item (Moon 1997; Granger and Paquot 2008).

With reference to multi-word items that are conventional and mostly fixed in nature (Moon 1997), Carter and McCarthy (2006: 321), classified *right-of-way* as a ‘phrasal compound noun’, noting that such items joined together by a preposition are very common in English. For Bauer and Renouf (2001: 103), *mother-in-law* is a ‘compound-like’ phrasal item derived from the lexicalization of a head noun with a prepositional phrase. Quirk et al. (1985: 313) instead cited *mother-in-law* as an example of a ‘compound noun’. The use of the term *compound* in these descriptions highlights one of the challenges of analyzing multi-word items, namely, distinguishing them from compounds, defined by Bauer (2006) as two or more independent lexemes that combine to create a new lexeme, and thus analogous to Moon’s (1997) definition of multi-word items. This issue was raised by Granger and Paquot (2008), who concluded that there is no consensus on how to discriminate between compounds and multi-word items, and that attempts at finding clear criteria to do so have not been successful.

The classification of multi-word items that are less conventional and/or fixed also reflects contrasting interpretations. Bauer et al. (2013: 437–438) categorized both *soon-to-be-divorced* and *circle-a-word* as *phrasal compounds*. These exemplify multi-word items that allow considerable variation within the constituents, for example, *yet-to-be-married* and *dial-a-cab*. Štekauer (2002: 108) also referred to such items as *phrasal compounds*, but described them as ‘special cases’ that make use of synsemantic words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. For Scalise and Bisetto (2009: 47), in ‘so-called phrasal compounds’, *phrasal* indicates the syntactic nature of the constituents that precede the head on the far right, which can range from relatively simple (e.g. *pipe and slipper husband* with a coordinated noun phrase) to more complex (e.g. *God is dead theology* with a complete clause, cited in Lieber 1992).

The term *phrasal compound* has also been used for more elaborate multi-word items that can be interpreted as non-conventional, or in Bauer et al.’s (2013: 437) words, ‘unlikely to become institutionalized and highly specific in meaning’. These would comprise hapax legomena such as *I-keep-forgetting-you’re-watching-me smile*, which Štekauer (2002: 98) referred to as a type of ‘nonce-formation’. However, some linguists reserve *phrasal compound* only for one particular form of non-conventional multi-word items. Specifically, Trips (2012: 1) considered *phrasal compounds* to be distinctive forms in which ‘the left-hand member is a complex, maximal phrase’, as in *Learn what is there and don’t question it attitude*. Similarly, for Meibauer (2007: 248), *phrasal compound* refers

only to multi-word items with a nominal head, e.g. *let-us-stay-friends platitude*. Among the few studies of ad-hoc multi-word items in naturally occurring data, Trips (2012: 322) analyzed frequencies and forms of phrasal compounds with nominal heads in the British National Corpus (BNC). She found that heads were most frequently preceded by nominal forms (e.g. *sex in shiny packets literature*) and verbal forms (e.g. *the Have you heard the Good News routine*). Trips (2014: 33) further investigated the ‘expressive flavour’ of selected of phrasal compounds in the BNC and discussed their special capacity to encode wittiness, e.g. *the “Whoops, sorry, we forgot you” Oscars*. The characteristic of wittiness was first identified by Meibauer (2007: 250) in his study of German phrasal compounds with nominal heads, as exemplified by *Kaufe-Ihr-Auto-Kärtchen* (buy-your-car cards).

The marked variation in the orthographic representation of English multi-word items also makes them analytically challenging. As pointed out by Lieber and Štekauer (2009: 7), there is ‘hardly a hard-and-fast rule’. Even in the authoritative *Oxford Handbook of Compounding* (Lieber and Štekauer 2009), there appears to be no consistent approach to hyphenation; the same item cited for illustrative purposes is expressed in both hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms: *floor-of-a-bird-cage taste* (Lieber 2009: 573) vs. *floor of a bird cage taste* (Lieber and Štekauer 2009: 5). In an analysis of phrasal compounds drawn from scholarly literature, Wiese (1996: 184) addressed this problematic issue by simply opting to normalize all items into hyphenated forms due to what he characterized as ‘somewhat erratic spelling’. Trips (2012) also noted inconsistencies in how phrasal compounds were represented orthographically and marked in the BNC.

In the present study, I analyze multi-word items with a minimum of three constituents joined together with hyphens used by fashion writers to describe and evaluate fashion-related entities. The analysis builds on Crawford Camiciottoli’s (2016) case study of linguistic creativity in a professional fashion blog which revealed some particularly interesting cases of elaborate hyphenated multi-word expressions with three or more words, thus suggesting the need for a targeted investigation. To overcome the numerous issues discussed above, I refer to these items broadly as ‘hyphenated phrasal expressions’ (HPEs), meaning strings of three or more words that act as a single and meaningful unit (Lewis 1993; Moon 1997).¹ Although any non-hyphenated multi-word expressions will obviously escape detection with this approach, it will nonetheless

¹ It is important to note that the upper boundary is quite flexible. Crawford Camiciottoli (2016) provided the example of the ten-hyphen hapax (*the people-like-dead-celebs-because-they-are-reminded-of-their-childhood thing*) found in a fashion blog.

allow for an exhaustive analysis of all hyphenated forms. This is likely the most effective strategy for adjective-heavy fashion discourse (Borrelli 1997; König 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2016) because the multi-word items that are the most consistently hyphenated are those with an adjectival function (Biber et al. 1999; Bauer et al. 2013). Moreover, following Giammarresi (2010), I would suggest that the deliberate insertion of two or more hyphens within a multi-word item signals that the writer perceives it as a unit and intends for it to be interpreted as such. For these reasons, I believe that my decision to analyze only HPEs represents an acceptable analytical compromise and fills a gap in the literature by offering a systematic and relatively large-scale analysis of notoriously challenging and variable linguistic features.

3 Methodology

3.1 The corpus

The Fashion Discourse Corpus (hereafter FDC) was compiled to represent both fashion blogging and professional fashion journalism. FDC contains a total of 396,125 tokens and is structured into two components: fashion blogs (124,825 tokens) and fashion journalism (271,300 tokens).

To identify sources for the fashion blog component, I browsed a number of top-ranking blogs signaled by both industry news sources² and the scholarly literature (Sedeke and Arora 2013). The main issue here was finding fashion blogs with a sufficient amount of textual data for a corpus-based study. In fact, most fashion blogs are predominantly image-oriented with very little text beyond sporadic phrases. Only two leading blogs offered an adequate amount of paragraph-length data for collection: Nicolette Mason and Style Bubble.³ Nicolette Mason is based in New York and Los Angeles and caters to so-called ‘curvy’ or ‘plus-size’ fashion enthusiasts. As a result of her high popularity, she now writes a column for the magazine *Marie Claire*, appears on television, and has her own clothing collection. Her blog, however, remains a personal journal of her fashion experiences, as well as a discussion forum for social issues, including sexuality and body image. Style Bubble is written by Susanna Lau,

² <http://fashionista.com/2015/02/most-influential-style-bloggers-2015>

³ <https://www.nicolettemason.com/> and <http://stylebubble.co.uk/>. The fact that only two bloggers could be represented in this corpus component constitutes a limitation that will be addressed later.

of Hong Kong origin but born in the United Kingdom. She is based in London and often writes about young and unknown fashion talents. Although she is a full-time blogger, she also contributes to *Elle UK*, *The Daily Rubbish*, and *Dazed Digital*, and has acquired a celebrity status in her own right within the global fashion community.

In addition to their top-ranking status and text-rich content, these two blogs were selected due to their relative stability and strong following. Nicolette Mason was launched in 2008 and has a Google PageRank of 5/10, while Style Bubble was launched in 2006 with a Google PageRank of 6/10. Moreover, the two blogs represent American and British English, respectively, which could yield insights into potential regional variation in the use of HPEs. For both blogs, I collected all posts from the years 2013 and 2014, excluding any follower comments.

The fashion journalism component was collected from LexisNexis Academic, a searchable database of a wide variety of documents with extensive coverage of news sources, including newspapers and magazines. To compile the fashion journalism component, I selected *Vogue* (US), *Women's Wear Daily* (US), and *Harper's Bazaar UK* to include the same varieties of American and British English represented in the fashion blog corpus and collected texts from issues published across the same time span (i.e. 2013–2014). Table 1 provides a structural overview of FDC.

Table 1: The fashion discourse corpus (FDC).

Component	Source	English variety	Tokens
Fashion blogs	Nicolette Mason	American	49,556
	Style Bubble	British	<u>75,269</u>
			124,825
Fashion journalism	Vogue	American	40,607
	Women's Wear Daily	American	57,635
	Harper's Bazaar UK	British	<u>173,058</u>
		271,300	
Total			396,125

In terms of size, the objective was to create a corpus that was suitable for corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington 2010), which implements corpus tools to extract features in specific discourse types, followed by extensive contextual analysis to discover trends in usage. For this reason, following Flowerdew (2004), I aimed for an overall size that ranged from 100,000–500,000 tokens as appropriate for this type of analysis, i.e. large enough to generate meaningful

quantities, but small enough to permit manual analysis. This also drove the decision to collect data within a two-year timeframe, regardless of the various amounts of data available from the different sources. In fact, as can be seen from Table 1, the number of tokens across the different components varies considerably.

For benchmarking purposes, a corpus of texts was extracted from British National Corpus (BNC) Baby and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) sampler in order to represent the same varieties of British and American English found in FDC. In an effort to make the BNC/COCA reference corpus as comparable as possible to FDC, I selected texts from the newspapers sub-folder in the BNC Baby and texts from newspapers and magazines sub-folder in the COCA sampler.⁴ The BNC/COCA reference corpus thus compiled contains 1,920,934 tokens, with 1,128,007 and 792,927 tokens contributed by the BNC and COCA components, respectively.

3.2 The analysis

Both FDC and the BNC/COCA reference corpus (hereafter BNC/COCA) were processed with *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott 2010) to extract all hyphenated items with at least three constituents using the search string **-*-**. The concordances were then submitted to a series of filtering phases to facilitate further analysis. First of all, it was necessary to eliminate large numbers of duplicates created when multiple identical concordance lines were generated on the basis of various combinations of three words contained in items having more than three words. In addition, items with hyphens embedded in numbers, such as telephone numbers and dates were removed.

Across FDC and BNC/COCA, instances of hyphens found in non-standard spellings of single words were removed, e.g. *e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g*, *uh-may-zing*, and *v-r-o-o-ming*. Reduplicative-like items (e.g. *tee-hee-hee*),⁵ as well as hyphenated proper names (e.g. *Statford-upon-Avon*) were also eliminated. Finally, I opted to remove all items that incorporated numerical expressions (e.g. *twenty-four-year-old student*) as they offer little of interest from a discourse perspective. For illustrative purposes, Figure 1 reproduces a small sample of the final filtered output from FDC, specifically the fashion blog component.

⁴ The texts in BNC Baby were collected in the early 1990s. The COCA sampler texts range from 1990 to 2012. It was not possible to strictly match the timeframe of FDC as there are currently no more recent and freely available large corpora of American and British English that are also downloadable, which was necessary to perform the type of analysis undertaken in this study.

⁵ Following Bauer (2006), I excluded such items from compound-like status due to a lack of independent meanings among the constituents.

room. On the racks in Lucky Chouette's cute-as-a-button store in Gangnam, this S/S 14 show Christian Siriano , and truly had my Princess-for-a-Day moment, while Ali looked incredibly calling in samples for photoshoots, writing draft-after-draft of copy, and on location for my first any surface-driven aesthetic, it's the don't-give-a-fuck spirit inherited from London's premier on their own site - with new, unique, and one-of-a-kind pieces added regularly (* P.S. *, they're choice - and with the listing comes our one-of-a-kind skirts /and/ a \$250 gift card to shop at liner. They're perfect to use as a lip-liner or stay-all-day base, and for a skilled user, can also be learning how to layer for my skirts-and-dresses-almost-exclusively-style has been a process of high-waist /anything/. This whole minimalism-as-an-aesthetic thing is starting to grow on me, too. PMQ, where the draw isn't just Hong Kong born-and-bred design, but as a lifestyle destination. sweater is lined with the same super soft wool-and-cashmere blend. (Psst , if you're looking for /but I know the ins-and-outs and pros-and-cons of pretty much everything out there I've bucked up against most of the fashion do's-and-don'ts, the rules of "dressing for your new love, work frustrations, and all the ups-and-downs that come with life, (we also share a site I click on seems to have an amazing friends-and-family sale going on that applies to all

Figure 1: Screenshot sample of filtered concordances from the fashion blog component.

After filtering, the remaining 1,276 items in both FDC and BNC/COCA were subjected to extensive analysis in their context of usage in order to a) distinguish types of HPEs and b) to identify recurring structural patterns and interpret communicative functions. As the first step, I carefully read all the concordance lines generated by the fashion blogs, fashion journalism, BNC, and COCA components to identify types of HPEs based on the degree of conventionality (cf. Moon 1997).⁶ This process led to the identification of three broad categories:

1. Conventional: lexicalized HPEs that are familiar and common in the general lexicon of native English speakers (Gagné and Spalding 2006), and/or present in standard dictionaries as fixed expressions based on idioms or collocations (e.g. *one-of-a-kind*, *pros-and-cons*, *do's-and-don'ts*, *ups-and-downs*, *born-and-bred*, *cute-as-a-button*, *Princess-for-a-day* in Figure 1)
2. Semi-conventional: HPEs that are similar to or inspired by conventional expressions, but with sufficient variation within the constituents so as not to be present in standard dictionaries (e.g. *friends-and-family*, *wool-and-cashmere*, *stay-all-day*, *don't-give-a-fuck* in Figure 1). The first two items in the list can be described as variations on the **-and-** coordinated phrase

⁶ In this study, I did not analyze the grammatical function of HPEs. Previous studies of fashion discourse have noted the prominent use of adjectival multi-word items (Borrelli 1997; Anna 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2016). Figure 1 corroborates this trend: 10 out of 15 HPEs shown in the screenshot sample function as adjectives.

pattern, as in the conventional *black-and-white*. *Stay-all-day* expands on the conventional expression *all-day*, while *I-don't-give-a-fuck* is a variation of the well-known quote *I don't give a damn*. In this category, I also included non-prenominal HPEs in which hyphens had been inserted, even if such expressions would more typically appear without hyphens. A case in point is the noun phrase *draft-after-draft* shown in Figure 1, which occurs 14 times in the 560-million COCA corpus⁷ in non-hyphenated form, but only once in hyphenated form, where it is actually embedded in a string of other HPEs.

3. Non-conventional: HPEs that are not present in standard dictionaries, were not clearly inspired by other expressions, or appear to be hapaxes coined for the particular context of usage (e.g. *minimalism-as-an-aesthetic*, *skirts-and-dresses-almost-exclusively-style* in Figure 1)

I then re-examined all the concordance lines to classify the HPEs within them as conventional, semi-conventional, or non-conventional. Online dictionary sources were used to resolve dubious cases when items were not clearly attributable to one of the three categories.⁸ Items found in at least one of these sources were classified as conventional; otherwise they were classified as semi-conventional or non-conventional, according to the criteria described above. Then, to control for reliability of the categorization, I asked a colleague with extensive scholarly expertise in the area of English phraseology to similarly classify a random sample of 100 concordance lines with HPEs extracted from FDC and BNC/COCA. Cohen's kappa was used to measure the degree of inter-rater agreement. It returned a value of 0.718 which is considered to be good or substantial agreement. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

In the second step, I re-analyzed HPEs within their context of usage to shed light on their structural patterning and communicative functions.⁹ Due to the large number of HPEs retrieved across both FDC and BNC/COCA (N = 1,276), it was not feasible to analyze all of them in this way. I therefore limited this analysis to HPEs identified in FDC as the target discourse domain of this study.

⁷ <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>

⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>

⁹ For the latter, I take inspiration from Jakobson's (1960) functions of language, specifically the *referential*, *expressive*, and *poetic* functions.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Overall frequencies of HPEs

Table 2 illustrates the frequencies of HPEs across FDC and BNC/COCA, reported in both raw counts (N) and the normalized parameter of occurrences per thousand words (ptw).

Table 2: Frequencies of HPEs in FDC vs. BNC/COCA.

Corpora	N	ptw
FDC		
Fashion blogs	244	1.95
Nicolette Mason (US)	165	3.33
Style Bubble (UK)	79	1.05
Fashion journalism	289	1.07
Vogue/Women's Wear Daily (US)	150	1.53
Harper's Bazaar (UK)	139	0.80
Total	533	1.35
BNC/COCA		
BNC	329	0.29
COCA	414	0.52
Total	743	0.39

The Chi squared test was used to compare the two overall total proportions of FDC and BNC/COCA. It returned a p-value of 0.0563, not quite reaching statistical significance at the 0.05 level of confidence. Tests run on differences between the individual components of FDC and between BNC and COCA did not return any values close to $p < 0.05$.¹⁰ However, some interesting trends nonetheless emerged. As can be seen by comparing the normalized totals, HPEs were more than three times as frequent in FDC (1.35 ptw) compared to BNC/COCA (0.39 ptw). Moreover, they were more frequent overall in the fashion blogs (1.95 ptw) than in fashion journalism (1.07 ptw). Much of this difference comes from the high frequencies in the Nicolette Mason blog (3.33 ptw). Interestingly, the Style Bubble blog had fewer occurrences (1.05 ptw) and was even surpassed by the U.S. fashion journalism component, *Vogue/Women's*

¹⁰ Bestgen (2014) cautioned against using the chi squared test in a confirmatory capacity in corpus studies as it can return too many significant results (though not the case here). Following this recommendation, I consider the test as an indicator for further analysis.

Wear Daily (1.53 ptw). Thus, HPEs appear to be a relatively prominent feature of fashion discourse on the whole, but especially so of discourse produced within the U.S. fashion discourse community.¹¹ The difference between the frequencies in BNC (0.29 ptw) vs. COCA (0.52 ptw) further suggests somewhat higher usage of HPEs in American English, which was similarly reflected in FDC.

4.2 Types of HPEs

Table 3 shows the results of the classification of HPEs as conventional, semi-conventional, and non-conventional, according to frequencies across FDC and BNC/COCA.

Table 3: Types of HPEs in FDC vs. BNC/COCA.

Corpora	Conventional		Semi-conventional		Non-conventional	
	N	ptw	N	ptw	N	ptw
FDC						
Fashion blogs	80	0.64	115	0.92	49	0.39
Nicolette Mason (US)	47	0.95	83	1.67	35	0.71
Style Bubble (UK)	33	0.44	32	0.43	14	0.18
Fashion journalism	159	0.58	123	0.45	7	0.03
Vogue/Women's Wear Daily (US)	66	0.67	80	0.81	4	0.04
Harper's Bazaar (UK)	93	0.54	43	0.24	3	0.02
BNC/COCA	389	0.20	332	0.17	22	0.01
BNC	198	0.17	123	0.11	8	0.01
COCA	191	0.24	209	0.26	14	0.02

All three types of HPEs were more frequent in FDC vs. BNC/COCA, except for semi-conventional HPEs that were slightly more frequent in COCA compared to *Harper's Bazaar UK* and non-conventional HPEs that had the same frequencies in these two components. Although chi squared tests comparing all the proportions in the table did not return any statistically significant differences, some trends can be interpreted.

Conventional HPEs were more frequent in FDC compared to BNC/COCA, with a peak of 0.95 ptw in the Nicolette Mason (US) blog vs. 0.44 ptw in the Style Bubble (UK) blog vs. only 0.17 ptw in BNC. These results essentially mirror the overall trends

¹¹ While it was not possible to verify the language background of journalists who contributed to *Vogue* and *Women's Wear Daily*, it is reasonable to assume that texts are produced for an American audience, also because American spelling was used systematically. Similarly, British spelling appeared throughout the texts collected from *Harper's Bazaar*.

found in BNC/COCA vs. FDC (see Table 2), where HPEs were more frequent in the U.S. components and particularly so in the Nicolette Mason blog. Some conventional HPEs (e.g. *year-on-year*, *up-and-coming*, *down-to-earth*, *black-and-white*) occurred multiple times across FDC and BNC/COCA, suggesting their well-consolidated usage in both American and British English. Higher frequencies of conventional HPEs in FDC can be traced to multiple instances of items linked to various aspects of the fashion world (e.g. descriptions/evaluations of fashion products, entities, designers, media professionals). Examples include *head-to-toe*, *over-the-top*, *born-and-bred*, *coming-of-age*, *editor-in-chief*, and *ready-to-wear*. These items were absent from BNC/COCA, with the exception of *editor-in-chief* (one occurrence in COCA) and *ready-to-wear* (2 occurrences in BNC). In BNC/COCA, frequently occurring conventional HPEs instead did not reflect any clear topical alignment, e.g. *back-to-back*, *side-by-side*, *do-it-yourself*, *out-of-state*, *over-the-counter*, *run-of-the-mill*, *top-of-the-range*. However, conventional HPEs displayed considerable variation across FDC and BNC/COCA, with many occurring only once or twice, e.g. *song-and-dance*, *meet-and-greet*, *happy-go-lucky*, *ins-and-outs*, *cat-and-mouse* in FDC vs. *across-the-board*, *first-come-first-served*, *case-by-case*, *tongue-in-cheek*, *warts-and-all*, *rank-and-file* in BNC/COCA.

Semi-conventional HPEs had higher overall frequencies in both fashion blogs (0.92 ptw) and fashion journalism (0.45 ptw) vs. BNC/COCA (0.17 ptw). They were also somewhat more frequent than conventional HPEs across all the U.S. corpus components: Nicolette Mason blog (1.67 ptw), *Vogue/Women's Wear Daily* (0.81 ptw), and COCA (0.26 ptw). Closer examination of the concordances generated from the Nicolette Mason blog showed that there were many semi-conventional non-prenominal HPEs where hyphenation had been inserted in atypical ways, as discussed Section 3.2, which is perhaps a reflection of her own personal style, shown in (1–2).

However, a few of these types were also found in fashion journalism. As shown in (3–4), superfluous hyphens appear in expressions functioning as predicate adjectives. Thus, the atypical hyphenation employed by these writers hints at the existence of a personalized approach and therefore adds a further layer of complication to the thorny issue of inconsistent hyphenation in multi-word items. In COCA, only two items of this type were found, where hyphens have been inserted into a predicate adjective (5) and a verb phrase (6), while none were found in BNC.

- (1) *When the world feels **more-or-less** in shambles.* (Nicolette Mason/US)
- (2) *I could write **on-and-on** about people who have been at Marie Claire.* (Nicolette Mason/US)

- (3) *She isn't **make-up-free**.* (Harper's Bazaar/UK)
- (4) *The collection seems **out-of-time**.* (Vogue/US)
- (5) I wondered if it was still **first-aid-equipped**. (COCA/US)
- (6) They require a ton of birds to **keep-them-tuned-up**. (COCA/US)

Non-conventional HPEs were relatively infrequent across FDC and BNC/COCA, even if the fashion blogs had higher frequencies. These can mainly be traced to the peak of 0.71 ptw in the Nicolette Mason blog, where non-conventional HPEs often incorporated more than three constituents, e.g. *minimalism-as-an-aesthetic (thing)*, *always-long-but-moving (line)*, *LBD-with-a-twist* (LBD = little black dress). In some cases, these HPEs expressed personal meanings related to her own life experiences and values: *(the early) I'm-trying-to-impress-you (stage of the relationship)*, and *(list of) things-that-are-expected-of-us-by-a-certain-age (and that, by the way, I think are BS)*, and *(my) skirts-and-dresses-almost-exclusively-style*. There were also some items of this type in the Style Bubble blog used to convey positive evaluation, e.g. *all-girls-will-heart-this (type of clothing)*, *chic-to-the-next-level (clothes)*, or to take a critical stance, e.g. *(Julia Roberts) ho-ho-cut-out (dress)*, *too-much-right-on (adornment)*. In contrast, in the fashion journalism component, only one syntactically elaborate non-conventional HPE was found: *just-took-the-shears-to-my-own-ponytail (quality)*. There were only two items of this type in BNC: *Bisto-to-Mr-Kipling-cakes (giant)* and *minister-with-the-film-star (looks)* and three in COCA: *elk-on-public-land (pack)*, *I-could-have-had-a-V8 (moment)*, and *Girl-Who-Trod-on-a-Loaf (principle)*.

4.3 Structural patterns and communicative functions of HPEs in FDC

Table 4 illustrates the most frequently occurring structural patterns of conventional and semi-conventional HPEs in FDC. Following the default setting of *Wordsmith Tools*, this analysis was limited to items with a minimum frequency of five.

As can be seen, the most prominent structural pattern in FDC was *-and-*. Alongside conventional items such *black-and-white* and *year-on-year*, also found in BNC/COCA, there were many semi-conventional *-and-* items characterized by a high level of variety in constituents (e.g. *puce-and-magenta*, *black-blue-and-purple*, *pink-and-glitter*, *nappa-and-mink*, *gold-and-crystal-embellished*). These were used to meticulously and vividly describe specific fashion products, thus performing a referential function. Other relatively frequent structural patterns incorporated various prepositions in both conventional and semi-conventional

Table 4: Structural patterns of conventional (C) and semi-conventional (SC) HPEs in FDC.

Structural patterns	Fashion blogs		Fashion journalism		Examples
	N	ptw	N	ptw	
-and-	36	0.29	49	0.18	tried-and-tested (C), jeans-and-a-T-shirt (SC)
-to-	27	0.22	16	0.06	day-to-day (C), office-to-party (SC)
PP-the-*	14	0.11	13	0.05	behind-the-scenes (C), on-the-tube (SC)
*-a- <i>infinitive</i>	11	0.09	19	0.07	pret-a-porter (C), net-a-porter (SC)
-in-	12	0.10	30	0.11	shop-in-shop (C), only-in-NYC (SC)
*-of-	8	0.06	16	0.06	out-of-sight (C), closet-of-fame (SC)
*-to- <i>infinitive</i>	7	0.06	36	0.13	hard-to-please (C), dare-to-wear (SC)
(*)-of-the-moment	–	–	7	0.03	hairstylist-of-the-moment (SC), of-the-moment (SC)
-so-	6	0.05	–	–	not-so-distant (C), oh-so-rad (SC)
-turned-	–	–	6	0.02	star-turned-designer, bookseller-turned-model (SC)
-on-	–	–	6	0.02	one-on-one (C), tan-on-brown (SC)
-at-	5	0.04	9	0.03	director-at-large (C), right-at-this-very-moment (SC)
-to-be	5	0.40	5	0.02	spouse-to-be, yet-to-be-shared (SC)
*-PP-a-NP	5	0.04	–	–	one-of-a-kind (C), couture-on-a-shoestring-resource (SC)
-but-	5	0.04	–	–	look-but-don't-touch, (C), busy-but-exciting (SC)
VP-it-*	5	0.04	–	–	buy-it-now, wear-it-on-your-chest (SC)
	146/195		212/282		

ways. Of particular interest is the *-a-*infinitive* pattern exclusive to *prêt-à-porter* (not always spelled with diacritical marks) and its semi-conventional counterpart *net-a-porter*, which reflects the strong influence of the French lingua-culture within the fashion discourse community. The higher frequency of *-to-*infinitive* in fashion journalism could be traced to relatively large numbers of the item *ready-to-wear*, i.e. a traditional marketing category in the fashion industry, perhaps reflecting the more pronounced commercial interest of fashion journalism vs. fashion blogs.

Some of the less frequent structural patterns are also worth mentioning. For example, *-to-be-(*), as in *soon-to-be-launched*, *still-to-be-revealed*, or *spouse-to-be*, performs a referential function to describe something or someone in terms of future status, while also conveying a sense of anticipation experienced in the world of fashion that constantly projects itself forward with new seasonal

collections and emerging personalities. The pattern (*)-of-the-moment was used to refer to people and phenomena of the fashion world, while also highlighting trendiness: *of-the-moment (prints)*, *of-the-moment (Russian style star)*, *model-of-the-moment*. Because trendiness is a desirable attribute among fashion enthusiasts, these HPEs also performed an expressive function, i.e. ‘a direct expression of the speaker’s attitude toward what he is speaking about’ (Jakobson 1960: 354). The structural pattern *-turned-* characterized people of interest in the fashion community, e.g. *model-turned-mogul*, *star-turned-fashion-blogger*, *reality-star-turned-designer*. The effect of these expressions is to underline their shifting roles, sometimes with a tongue-in-cheek interpretation, as illustrated in (7–8), thereby also performing an expressive function. König (2006) noted a similar use of irony in her analysis of texts from *British Vogue*. The following two examples also reflect the *popular aspect* of fashion journalism (Borrelli 1997), with references to personalities linked to pop culture rather than to fashion per se.

- (7) Amanda Lear, the former Salvador Dalí *muse-turned-camp-disco-diva* (*Women’s Wear Daily/US*)
- (8) The cat-and-mouse chase between Gillian Anderson’s DSI Stella Gibson and the *social worker-turned-serial-killer* Paul Spector (Jamie Dornan) resumes. (*Harper’s Bazaar/UK*)

Various expressions based on *-so-* were used to describe specific entities, while also emphasizing certain attitudes, e.g. *ever-so-enviable (hourglass shape)*, *oh-so-rad (feather specimens)*, *not-so-secretly (obsessed)*, *(a luxury that I) not-so-secretly (revel in)*, and *(a) not-so-good (thing)*, again combining referential and expressive functions.

Non-conventional HPEs were not particularly numerous, but nonetheless among the most interesting in FDC. A complete list is provided in the Appendix, which shows that only four items occurred more than once in the fashion blogs, as indicated by (2). These items were blogger-specific, apparently coined and recycled as preferred forms of expression. However, on the whole, non-conventional HPEs were largely ad hoc in nature, conveying specific meanings or attitudes and performing both referential and expressive functions. For example, in (*my family’s annual*) *Jews-on-Christmas (dinner)* and (*sleeping away the*) *Tryptophan-via-Turkey*, Nicolette Mason shares aspects of her cultural background and social activities. With (*a major*) *washing-you-out-moment*, she criticizes the effect of a piece of clothing, and with (*my first dose of*) *very-California-girl (highlights)*, she implies the banality of her youthful hair color choices. Susanna Lau uses the expression (*the whole*) *one-dangly-earring thing* to emphasize her enthusiasm for this style. In *Vogue*, the expression (*a six-foot-two*) *rock-star-confident (swagger)* was used to

underscore the masculine attitude of a female model in a discussion of gender-flipping in the fashion industry. Most of these items (40 out of 56) are in the prenominal position, e.g. *almost-leggings-so-I'm-kind-of-cheating (jeans)*, *deep-end-Ghesquière-clad (actresses)*. Non-prenominal forms include hyphenated nouns (e.g. *other-other-town*, *post-post-party*, *sparkly-stripe-sisterhood*), extended adjectival items (*insanely-rich-but-somehow-refreshing*, *comfortable-yet-put-together*, *overwhelming-to-me*), a noun + relative clause (*things-that-are-expected-of-us-by-a-certain-age*), and the expression *bee-tee-dubs*, the written rendition of the abbreviated spoken form of the acronym BTW. What all these various forms share is the capacity to express nuanced meanings that also convey wittiness and a playful attitude (cf. Meibauer 2007).

Multiple hyphens in non-conventional HPEs not only signal constituency and may be inserted by writers to facilitate the comprehension of particularly heavy prenominal HPEs (see footnote 3 for an example), but their mere repetition also seems to visually call the reader's attention to the writer's clever combinations and verbal prowess. In some cases, HPEs were actually embedded in a series of hyphenated items, which served to further emphasize them, as illustrated in examples (9–14). In this way, they seem to perform a poetic function to highlight the 'verbal art' and to 'focus on the message for its own sake' (Jakobson 1960: 356). Multiple HPEs seem to be especially suited to conveying the fashion writer's sense of humor and intention to entertain readers while describing and expressing attitudes towards fashion phenomena.¹²

- (9) *A take-that, I-hate-your-rules, double-whammy* (Nicolette Mason/US)
- (10) *This to-the-point, in-yer-face category of casual wear* (Nicolette Mason/US)
- (11) *Christopher Kane's jam-packed, ideas-a-buzzing, hit-hit-hit collection* (Style Bubble/UK)
- (12) *The pile-it-on, pile-it-high, hope-for-the-best approach* (Style Bubble/UK)
- (13) *The all-hands-on-deck, no-sleep-till-show-day slog* (Harper's Bazaar/UK)
- (14) *The couldn't-care-less-where-you-came-from, anything-could-happen excitement of New York* (Vogue/US)

The increasing trend in the use of HPEs in fashion journalism identified in König's (2006) analysis of British *Vogue* from 1980–2001 appears to be

¹² Only one non-conventional HPE that consisted of a series of hyphenated items was found in COCA in a highly stylistic and informal characterization of an American baseball player: *He is home-run-beltin', side-burn-wearin', nonstop-talkin', bear-hug-dispensin', self-proclaimin' good.*

confirmed and perhaps even amplified in FDC spanning 2013–2014, with the two individual fashion bloggers clearly adopting a similar strategy to construct their unique identities and personal narratives within the fashion discourse community (Myers 2010).

5 Concluding remarks

By means of corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Partington 2010), this study has provided insights into how HPEs are used in a corpus of fashion discourse, comprising both fashion blogs and traditional fashion journalism. On a quantitative level, HPEs were found to be more frequent in fashion discourse than in non-fashion journalistic texts extracted from BNC and COCA. This result suggests that they are a distinctive feature of fashion discourse, although further research using other methodological approaches would be useful to determine their salience with respect to possible non-hyphenated alternatives. In addition, HPEs were more frequent overall in the fashion blogs than in fashion journalism, likely influenced by the highly personalized approach to writing among bloggers (Myers 2010: 98). However, this result may have been skewed by the particular writing style of one of the bloggers (Nicolette Mason) who frequently over-used hyphenation in atypical ways.

To acquire a better understanding of possible differences in the use of HPEs between fashion bloggers and professional fashion journalists, it would be necessary to expand FDC to include other fashion bloggers and thus be more representative of the fashion blog genre. As mentioned previously, fashion blogs typically contain little text, which rendered data collection problematic. However, as new fashion blogs emerge, there may be more opportunities to collect more data. The findings also suggest that HPEs are more prominent in American English, as the U.S. components of FDC and COCA all had higher frequencies. Further research based on other types of data from different discourse domains and communicative contexts representing American and British English would provide more insights into potential regional variations in the use of HPEs.

The follow-up qualitative analysis revealed three types of HPEs: conventional, semi-conventional, and non-conventional. All three types were, on the whole, more frequent in FDC vs. BNC/COCA, further reinforcing their prominent role in fashion discourse. There were some conventional HPEs that were

common to both corpora, but several were distinctive of FDC and strongly linked its fashion content. Semi-conventional HPEs were more frequent than conventional HPEs across all the U.S. components, with a peak of usage in the U.S. fashion blog, likely for the same reason explained above. Non-conventional HPEs were relatively infrequent in both corpora, although somewhat more were found in FDC.

Concerning the analysis of structural patterns and communicative functions of HPEs in FDC, the *-and-* pattern was the most prolific, performing a referential function to evoke detailed and striking images associated with visually-oriented fashion products, thus also reflecting the *visual aspect* of the language of fashion identified by Borrelli (1997). Other structural patterns of HPEs with both referential and expressive functions included *-to-be-* (anticipating the future), *-turned-* (highlighting shifting roles), (*)-of-the-moment (highlighting trendiness), and *-so-* (emphasizing attitudes). In addition to referential and expressive functions, elaborate strings of HPEs seemed to perform a poetic function (Jakobson 1960: 356) by calling attention to the fashion writers' verbal prowess and focusing on 'the message for its own sake', as further testimony to Barthes (1990 [1967]: 235) notion of 'the poetics of clothing'. Thus, fashion journalists' and fashion bloggers' use of HPEs reflects the distinctive style of a well-consolidated community of practice that prides itself on an articulate, sophisticated, and witty approach to writing, similar to the type of wittiness that both Meibauer (2007) and Trips (2014) identified in their studies of phrasal compounds with nominal heads.

In conclusion, the findings of this exploratory study have contributed to a better understanding of the language of fashion, which has thus far received little attention from linguists. HPEs appear to play an important role because they allow fashion writers—both professional and lay—to express personal meanings and construct self-identity within a dynamic discourse community characterized by evolving participant roles (Rocamora 2012). On a pedagogical level, the findings can inform courses in the areas of professional communication, digital media communication, and journalism to help aspiring writers understand the descriptive and expressive potential of HPEs. This is particularly important for native speakers of languages other than English who may lack knowledge of and experience with HPEs as resources that can be exploited to develop an effective writing style in both personal and professional contexts.

Appendix: Non-conventional HPEs in FDC

Fashion blogs (N = 49)	Fashion journalism (N = 7)
all-girls-will-heart-this (type) almost-leggings-so-I'm-kind-of-cheating (jeans) also-surprisingly-temperate (weekend)	deep-end-Ghesquière-clad (actresses) enormous-on-anyone (coat) just-took-the-shears-to-my-own-ponytail (quality)
always-long-but-moving (line) be-tee-dubs chic-to-the-next-lev (clothes) (2) cinched-in-at-the-waist (shapes) comfortable-yet-put-together Elvis-nostalgia-tinged (collection) go-throw-a-party (etiquette) hit-hit-hit (collection) ho-ho-cut-out (dress) I'm-trying-to-impress-you (stages) I-hate-your-rules (double whammy) insanely-rich-but-somehow-refreshing Jews-on-Christmas (dinner) LBD-with-a-twist (2) look-at-me (sloganizing/print) (2) minimalism-as-an-aesthetic (thing) mohair-patched-up (knits) more-at-home-feeling (bustle) mostly-blank-canvas uniform-du-semain new-new-new (designers) no-white-after-the first-week-of-September (rule) one-dangly-earring (thing) on-trend-but-accessible (take) other-other-hometown overwhelming-to-me (38H) pink-ribbon-branded (products) pull-on-immediately (skirts) Sargent-Pepper's-era-1960s skirts-and-dresses-almost-exclusively-style sparkly-stripe-sisterhood still-fresh-feeling (adventure) things-that-are-expected-of-us-by-a-certain-age too-much-right-on (adornment) totally-outdated-concept-of-daylight-savings	orange-flower-water (salads) post-post-party racing-car-driver (boyfriend) rock-star-confident (swagger)
Tryptophan-via-turkey	

(continued)

*(continued)***Fashion blogs (N = 49)****Fashion journalism (N = 7)**

unexpected-for-me (color)
 updated-as-items-are-added (2)
 very-California-girl (highlights)
 washing-you-out (moment)
 white-picket-fence-suburban (paradigm)
 wind-slapping-in-the-face

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Bionote

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli is Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Pisa. Her research focuses on corpus-assisted analysis of discourse in academic, professional, and digital settings. She has published in leading journals, including *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *Discourse & Communication*, *Text & Talk*, *Discourse, Context & Media*, and *English for Specific Purposes*. Address for correspondence: Università di Pisa, Via Santa Maria 67, 56,126 Pisa – PI, Italy. Email: belinda.crawford@unipi.it