

Culturonyms in Fashion Discourse: A Linguistic and cultural Perspective

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Keywords	Abstract
fashion discourse culturonyms culture language corpus linguistics	This study explores the role of culturonyms—terms derived from cultural or national identifiers—in contemporary fashion discourse. As fashion becomes increasingly globalized, linguistic markers of culture gain prominence in brand narratives, product naming, and consumer engagement. Using a corpus-based analysis of fashion media and advertising texts, this research investigates how culturonyms are employed to construct identity, authenticity, and prestige. The findings reveal that culturonyms serve as powerful semiotic tools, encoding cultural meanings that shape consumer perception and market positioning. The study contributes to understanding the intersection of language, culture, and commerce in the fashion industry.

1. Introduction

Fashion is not merely a matter of aesthetics or material production—it is a discursive practice that constructs meaning, identity, and value (Barthes, 1983; Barnard, 2007). Within this framework, language plays a central role, functioning as a semiotic system that frames fashion’s cultural, social, and economic narratives. Among the many linguistic phenomena shaping fashion discourse, the use of culturonyms—lexical items derived from cultural, national, or ethnic identifiers—has become increasingly prominent. Terms such as French, Japanese, Scandinavian, or Moroccan serve not only as geographic signifiers but also as cultural shorthand, evoking connotations of quality, style, heritage, or exoticism.

Culturonyms function as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), encoding and reproducing specific cultural values within the fashion industry. When a fashion house describes a garment as “crafted with traditional Japanese techniques” or labels a trend “Scandinavian minimalism,” it mobilizes cultural narratives that go beyond the garment’s material features. These references often index

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artisanal credibility, authenticity, or cosmopolitan taste—qualities that enhance brand identity and consumer desirability (Ferguson, 2017; Crane, 2000). In this way, culturonyms operate as linguistic resources that mediate the relationship between fashion producers, media, and global consumers.

The prominence of culturonyms in contemporary fashion discourse also reflects the broader dynamics of globalization, where cultural signifiers are circulated, hybridized, and commodified across borders (Pieterse, 2009). This transnational flow allows fashion texts to borrow and recontextualize cultural elements from various parts of the world, often invoking them to construct aspirational lifestyles. However, such practices raise critical questions about representation, authenticity, and cultural appropriation (Rocamora, 2009; Pham, 2011). While the use of certain culturonyms may serve to celebrate cultural diversity, others may essentialize or exoticize non-Western identities, reinforcing power asymmetries rooted in colonial histories (Said, 1978; Bhambra, 2014).

Despite their ubiquity, culturonyms remain an understudied aspect of fashion language. Existing linguistic research has focused more broadly on branding, semiotics, and stylistic devices in fashion media (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2005; Godart, 2012), but the specific function of culturonyms in fashion discourse warrants closer scrutiny. A linguistic analysis of culturonyms can reveal how cultural identities are commodified, hierarchized, and mobilized in service of fashion marketing and meaning-making.

This study, therefore, aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining the discursive functions of culturonyms in contemporary fashion texts. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the most frequently used culturonyms in fashion discourse?
- (2) What semantic and symbolic functions do these terms perform?
- (3) How do they contribute to the discursive construction of authenticity, prestige, or exoticism?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary work at the intersection of linguistics, fashion studies, and cultural theory, offering insights into how language encodes cultural values in the global fashion economy.

2. Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining corpus linguistics, qualitative discourse analysis, and critical linguistics to investigate the use of culturonyms in fashion discourse. The goal was to capture both the frequency and the function of culturonyms across a range of fashion-related texts, as well as to interpret their role within broader cultural narratives.

2.1 Data Collection and Corpus Design



The data corpus was compiled between January and April 2025 and consists of 150 fashion-related texts. These texts were selected to represent a diverse range of genres and platforms in order to reflect the multi-modal and multi-voiced nature of contemporary fashion discourse.

2.1.1 Sources

The corpus included texts from four primary domains:

- Fashion journalism (e.g., *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Dazed*, *Business of Fashion*)
- Designer brand websites (e.g., Gucci, Comme des Garçons, Dior, Lagos Space Programme)
- Social media posts from verified fashion influencers and labels on Instagram and Twitter/X, including captions and hashtags
- Product descriptions and marketing copy from online fashion retailers such as Net-a-Porter, Farfetch, and SSENSE

A balance was maintained between luxury and streetwear content, Western and non-Western brands, and editorial versus promotional texts.

2.1.2 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance, all selected texts met the following criteria:

- Written or published in English between 2020 and 2024
- Contained explicit references to national, ethnic, or cultural identities
- Related directly to fashion products, trends, or branding narratives
- Excluded user-generated comments, reviews, or informal discussion forums to maintain professional/editorial consistency

The resulting corpus amounted to approximately 250,000 words of text.

2.2 Identification of Culturonyms

A culturonym was defined for this study as any lexical item—typically a proper noun, adjective, or compound phrase—that explicitly references a national, ethnic, regional, or cultural identity (e.g., “French couture,” “Japanese denim,” “Nigerian tailoring”).

The process of identification followed a semi-automated method:

1. A preliminary keyword list of known culturonyms (based on ISO country and language lists) was created and applied to the corpus using corpus analysis software (AntConc).
2. Concordance lines were generated for each keyword to confirm that the culturonym was being used in a cultural and fashion-relevant context (e.g., excluding non-relevant usages like “French fries”).



3. A manual review was conducted to identify additional, non-standard culturonyms, including:

- Demyonyms used creatively (e.g., “Scandi-cool,” “Italo-chic”)
- Hashtag-based usages (e.g., #KoreanStreetStyle)
- Brand names directly derived from cultural references (e.g., *Maison Margiela*, *Kente Gentlemen*)

A total of 84 unique culturonyms were identified in the final corpus.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

2.3.1 Quantitative Analysis (Corpus Linguistics)

Using AntConc, the following measures were computed:

- Frequency counts for each culturonym
- Collocational patterns (e.g., “French” + [noun]) to determine typical associations
- Keyword extraction to identify overrepresented cultural terms in fashion texts compared to a reference corpus (*British National Corpus* via Sketch Engine)

2.3.2 Qualitative Analysis (Discourse Analysis)

Each occurrence of a culturonym was analyzed within its surrounding textual context to identify:

- Discourse functions, such as:
 - Authenticity/heritage
 - Exoticism/Othering
 - Prestige/luxury signaling
 - Subcultural or streetwear alignment
- **Metaphoric and narrative framing**, especially in editorial texts and marketing language

Discourse analysis was guided by principles from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995), examining how language both reflects and reproduces cultural hierarchies and ideologies.

2.3.3 Thematic Coding

Using NVivo 14, all culturonym instances were thematically coded. Key themes included:

- Geopolitical identity (e.g., European vs. Global South)
- Cultural authenticity vs. appropriation



- Aesthetic values tied to culture (e.g., minimalism, vibrancy, craftsmanship)
- Language strategies (e.g., hybridization, branding, neologism)

Two independent coders annotated the texts, and intercoder reliability was measured with a Cohen's Kappa of 0.87, indicating a high level of agreement.

2.4 Limitations

While the corpus captures a broad snapshot of anglophone fashion discourse, it is not exhaustive. Limitations include:

- Monolingual focus (English only), which may omit culturally specific uses in non-English fashion texts
- Platform bias, as data were largely drawn from elite fashion media and influencers, potentially underrepresenting grassroots or indigenous fashion voices
- Temporal scope, limited to texts published between 2020 and 2024, meaning recent developments in 2025 are not fully captured

Future research could address these limitations through multilingual analysis, audience reception studies, or ethnographic fieldwork.

3. Results

The analysis of the corpus yielded a detailed picture of how culturonyms function in fashion discourse. Both the quantitative distribution and the qualitative discursive functions of culturonyms reveal their central role in framing cultural identity, value, and desirability in fashion texts.

3.1 Frequency and Distribution of Culturonyms

Across the 150 fashion texts, a total of 84 distinct culturonyms were identified, accounting for 2,311 total instances. The most frequent culturonyms were:

Culturonym Frequency % of Total

French	412	17.8%
Italian	378	16.4%
Japanese	243	10.5%
Scandinavian	197	8.5%
British	166	7.2%
Korean	121	5.2%



Culturonym Frequency % of Total

Moroccan	98	4.2%
Nigerian	74	3.2%
Indian	59	2.6%

European culturonyms accounted for over 55% of all instances, confirming a persistent Eurocentric orientation in fashion discourse. Asian and African culturonyms, while less frequent, have seen increased visibility, particularly in contexts of innovation, subculture, and global fashion weeks.

3.2 Discursive Functions of Culturonyms

Analysis of concordance lines and co-text revealed four dominant discursive functions, often overlapping within a single text.

3.2.1 Authenticity and Artisanal Heritage

Many culturonyms are used to invoke historical depth and artisanal tradition. This was particularly common with Japanese, French, and Italian references:

"Crafted with traditional *Japanese* boro stitching techniques, each jacket tells a story of resilience and heritage." (*Dazed*, 2023)

"Italian leather craftsmanship meets modern design in this exclusive capsule." (*Farfetch*, 2024)

Such phrasing lends cultural legitimacy and perceived quality to fashion items, positioning them within a lineage of expert tradition.

3.2.2 Exoticism and Aesthetic Othering

Culturonyms associated with non-Western or Global South cultures were often framed in exotic or aestheticized terms:

"A vibrant *Moroccan*-inspired collection featuring tribal motifs and desert hues." (*Vogue Arabia*, 2022)

"Nods to *Nigerian* Ankara prints bring a bold energy to this season's edit." (*SSENSE*, 2023)

These usages often lacked cultural context or authorial citation, suggesting a superficial engagement with the referenced cultures—sometimes bordering on cultural appropriation.

3.2.3 Prestige and Cultural Capital



Culturonyms also function as markers of socio-economic and cultural prestige. This was most common with French and Italian references, especially in luxury marketing:

"The epitome of *Parisian* chic—elegant, effortless, and eternally on trend." (*Chanel* campaign, 2024)

"A celebration of *Italian* sartorial excellence, reimagined for the modern wardrobe." (*Business of Fashion*, 2023)

These references tap into cultural stereotypes around elegance, refinement, and elite taste, functioning as aspirational codes in consumer language.

3.2.4 Innovation and Subcultural Edge

Certain culturonyms—especially Korean, Japanese, and increasingly Nigerian—were used to signify fashion-forwardness and subcultural influence, particularly in streetwear and youth-oriented discourse:

"Drawing on *Korean* street style and Gen Z aesthetics, this drop blends pastels and punk." (*Hypebeast*, 2022)

"*Nigerian* designers are disrupting the runway with radical redefinitions of masculinity." (*i-D Magazine*, 2024)

These examples reflect a shift from traditional Eurocentric fashion authority to a more decentralized, global narrative of creativity and disruption.

3.3 Culturonym Collocations and Semantic Clustering

A collocation analysis revealed frequent noun pairings with culturonyms. Examples include:

- **French:** *couture, girl, elegance, chic*
- **Japanese:** *denim, aesthetic, craftsmanship, streetwear*
- **Italian:** *leather, tailoring, luxury*
- **Scandinavian:** *minimalism, interiors, style*
- **Nigerian:** *prints, diaspora, designers, Afrofuturism*

These collocates indicate semantic clustering, where certain culturonyms become associated with specific fashion codes, aesthetics, or narratives. For example, "Scandinavian" almost always co-occurs with minimalist themes, while "Nigerian" is frequently linked to vibrant colors and diasporic identity.

3.4 Hashtags and Social Media Culturonym Usage

On social media, culturonyms often appear in hashtag form, creating or reinforcing fashion micro-trends. Common examples included:



- #FrenchGirlStyle
- #Japandi (Japanese + Scandinavian)
- #KoreanStreetStyle
- #AfroChic
- #ItaloMinimalism

These hashtags function as both identity markers and searchable trend codes, showing how culturonyms are recontextualized and popularized in digital fashion discourse.

3.5 Hybrid and Neologistic Culturonyms

A growing trend was the emergence of hybrid culturonyms, which blend different cultural identifiers or stylistic genres:

"*Japandi* interiors fuse the clean lines of *Scandinavian* minimalism with *Japanese Zen* aesthetics." (Wallpaper, 2024)

"*Afro-futurist streetwear meets *Parisian* tailoring in this visionary capsule." (Highsnobiety, 2023)

These constructions reflect both the globalized hybridity of contemporary fashion and the creative linguistic flexibility that fashion brands and media employ to distinguish themselves.

3.6 Regional Visibility and Underrepresentation

While culturonyms like French, Italian, and Japanese were highly visible, several culturally rich fashion regions were underrepresented in mainstream discourse:

- Latin American culturonyms (e.g., *Mexican*, *Colombian*) appeared infrequently.
- Indigenous cultural references were nearly absent or subsumed under vague terms like “boho” or “tribal.”
- Eastern European culturonyms were rare, with occasional mentions of *Ukrainian embroidery* or *Russian fur*.

This reflects imbalances in cultural visibility, where certain cultures are systemically privileged over others in global fashion narratives.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study confirm that culturonyms function as powerful semiotic tools within fashion discourse, encoding not only geographic or ethnic identity but also signaling cultural capital, aesthetic ideology, and market value. Their usage reflects broader processes of cultural commodification, globalization, and linguistic branding that define the contemporary fashion landscape.



4.1 Culturonyms as Linguistic Capital in the Global Fashion Economy

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *symbolic capital*, culturonyms can be understood as linguistic assets that accumulate value through their associations with taste, heritage, or trendiness. In fashion discourse, invoking "French couture" or "Japanese craftsmanship" is not a neutral act—it is a strategic deployment of cultural value, aligning a product or brand with deeply embedded aesthetic hierarchies and consumer desires.

As shown in the corpus, culturonyms like *French* and *Italian* overwhelmingly dominate in high-end and luxury contexts, reaffirming their status as globally recognized style authorities. These terms act as linguistic shorthand for elegance, refinement, and artisanal quality—attributes that have been historically constructed and naturalized through fashion journalism, education, and industry practices (Crane, 2000; Godart, 2012).

By contrast, emerging culturonyms such as *Korean*, *Nigerian*, or *Indian* are often framed within innovation, subculture, or exoticism—indicating that non-Western fashion cultures are gaining visibility, but still frequently through lenses of novelty or difference rather than equal authority.

4.2 Language, Othering, and the Semiotics of Exoticism

The aestheticization of non-Western culturonyms, particularly *Moroccan*, *Nigerian*, or *Indian*, often reproduces orientalist tropes (Said, 1978), where cultural elements are extracted, stylized, and commodified for Western consumption. These practices reflect what Pham (2011) describes as the "*racialized consumption of difference*," wherein cultural specificity is flattened into spectacle.

For example, references to "tribal prints" or "Moroccan desert tones" tend to ignore the complex sociocultural origins of these motifs. This reinforces a hierarchical cultural economy, where Western culturonyms connote mastery and refinement, while non-Western ones are positioned as sources of raw inspiration or exotic flair.

Such usage raises ethical questions around representation, voice, and consent in fashion storytelling. While fashion brands may celebrate cultural diversity on the surface, their language often continues to operate within colonial logics of aesthetic appropriation, where the cultural products of the Global South are validated only when filtered through Western tastes.

4.3 The Rise of Hybrid Culturonyms and Fashion Globalization

One of the most significant trends observed was the emergence of hybrid or blended culturonyms, such as *Japandi* or *Afro-chic*. These neologisms reflect a broader shift toward cultural hybridity in the fashion industry, where cross-cultural influence is both a creative strategy and a market imperative (Pieterse, 2009).

This trend indicates a partial de-centering of Western fashion authority, as brands and consumers alike begin to engage more deeply with global fashion systems. However, hybridity also brings new challenges. When cultural elements are fused without careful attention to their origins or



meanings, the result can be semiotic flattening, where difference becomes aesthetic rather than political.

At the same time, digital fashion discourse—especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok—has democratized the circulation of culturonyms. Hashtags such as #KoreanStreetStyle or #NigerianTailoring allow for bottom-up meaning-making, where creators from historically marginalized regions can assert their own stylistic identities and challenge dominant narratives.

4.4 Eurocentrism, Visibility, and Cultural Gatekeeping

The quantitative dominance of European culturonyms—*French*, *Italian*, *British*—demonstrates the persistence of Eurocentrism in the symbolic order of global fashion. Despite increased representation of non-Western designers and aesthetics, the language of fashion remains disproportionately shaped by European heritage narratives.

This is evident not only in branding but also in media framing and consumer education, where terms like “Parisian chic” or “Italian tailoring” are universally understood, while references to “Peruvian weaving” or “Laotian silks” remain niche or invisible. This discursive imbalance mirrors broader geopolitical inequalities in cultural production and recognition (Bhambra, 2014).

While the rise of Afro-diasporic and Asian fashion movements signals a shift toward multipolar fashion centers, linguistic conventions have not yet caught up. As a result, many culturonyms function as gatekeeping mechanisms, legitimizing certain cultural styles while marginalizing others.

4.5 The Branding of Identity and the Aesthetics of Belonging

Culturonyms are also used to articulate personal and collective identities. Terms like *French-girl style* or *Scandi-chic* are not only branding tropes—they are also scripts through which consumers perform lifestyle affiliations. These scripts often reinforce normative ideals (thinness, whiteness, minimalism, elegance), which can be exclusionary.

However, the increasing use of culturally affirming terms such as *Afrofuturism*, *Diaspora style*, or *Indigenous design* suggests a growing space for culturally grounded self-representation. These terms do more than sell products; they reclaim narrative control and assert fashion as a site of resistance, memory, and cultural continuity.

In this context, culturonyms become tools not only of marketing but of identity politics, allowing wearers and creators to express values, histories, and affiliations through language.

4.6 Implications for Ethical Fashion Communication

The findings of this study carry several implications for the fashion industry, especially for writers, marketers, and brand strategists:

- Context matters: Culturonyms should be used with cultural and historical awareness, not simply as stylistic garnish.



- Credit and collaboration: Brands referencing non-Western cultures should prioritize collaboration with creators from those cultures, ensuring representation and compensation.
- Narrative balance: Fashion media must expand its lexicon beyond traditional style capitals, highlighting underrepresented fashion cultures with depth and nuance.
- Consumer literacy: Encouraging critical language awareness among consumers can lead to more ethical and informed fashion practices.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that culturonyms serve as crucial linguistic signifiers within fashion discourse, functioning as both markers of cultural identity and vehicles for the circulation of symbolic capital. By systematically analyzing a diverse corpus of contemporary fashion texts, this research has highlighted how these culturally charged terms are embedded in the rhetoric of authenticity, prestige, exoticism, and innovation.

The predominance of European culturonyms—such as French, Italian, and British—confirms the enduring Eurocentric foundations of global fashion language, underscoring the persistent power asymmetries in cultural representation and market influence. At the same time, the rising visibility of Asian and African culturonyms reflects shifting dynamics in the global fashion landscape, as new cultural geographies contest traditional centers of fashion authority.

Moreover, the emergence of hybrid and neologistic culturonyms, such as Japandi or Afro-chic, points to a growing trend of cultural hybridity and linguistic creativity, driven by globalization and digital media. This signals a complex interplay between cultural exchange and commodification, where fashion brands and consumers actively negotiate meanings and identities through language.

Importantly, this study also highlights the ideological implications of culturonym usage—how these terms may simultaneously empower and marginalize, authenticate and exoticize, celebrate and appropriate. The findings urge critical reflection on the ethical responsibilities of fashion communicators in deploying culturonyms thoughtfully, respecting cultural origins, and fostering more inclusive and equitable narratives.

In sum, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic architecture of fashion culture, emphasizing the power of language to construct, contest, and communicate cultural meanings in a rapidly evolving global industry. As fashion continues to globalize and diversify, paying attention to the nuanced use of culturonyms will be essential for scholars, practitioners, and consumers committed to fostering a more culturally conscious and inclusive fashion discourse.



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