L'ANALISI

LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

2

ANNO XXIV 2016

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE
E LETTERATURE STRANIERE

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

2

ANNO XXIV 2016

NUMERO TEMATICO

Ecocritica ed ecodiscorso.
Nuove reciprocità tra umanità e pianeta

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*I contributi di questa pubblicazione sono stati sottoposti
alla valutazione di due* Peer Reviewers *in forma rigorosamente anonima*

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Eco-fashion Lexicon: a Never-ending Story?

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Due to increased awareness of ecological and environmental issues and greater integrity by the fashion industry, the terms 'ecofashion', 'ethical fashion' and 'sustainable fashion' have recently been gaining popularity to refer to garments which are designed and manufactured supporting ethnic communities and without harming the environment. New terms, such as 'environmental', 'green', 'ecological', 'eco-friendly', 'sustainable', 'recycled' and 'organic' have been used to qualify both garments and production practices, to the point that Hanlon (2009) observed that the potential creativity of language in the field of sustainable fashion "is never-ending".

However, fashion experts as well as fashion scholars pointed out that the exact meaning of the terms related to the ecofashion movement is not always clear. This study aims to explore the lexicon of eco fashion from a purely linguistic perspective. Results support with linguistic evidence the claims regarding the cross-fertilisation of the terms related to the ecofashion movement and, in some cases, their lack of clarity.

Keywords: ecofashion lexicon, sustainable fashion, English lexicology, English lexicography

1. *Introduction*

Very recently, articles on the importance of conscious consumers' choices in the field of fashion have appeared in Italian popular press. For example, the article *Da H&M non si butta via niente*[2] dealt with the Swedish brand's *Garment Collecting Project*, started in 2013, which invited consumers to bring their used clothes to H&M selling points to be recycled. *Io so cosa indosso*[3] was about Fashion Revolution Day, April 24th, introduced in 2014 to commemorate the death of 1,133 workers in Bangladesh in 2013, due to the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, where clothes for the Western market were manufactured. As reported in the article, in 2014 sixty-six countries were involved in the global campaign *Who made my clothes?* and people could participate by posting on Facebook a portrait of themselves wearing their clothes inside out, thus symbolising the need to be aware of who and how clothes are made. Fashion Revolution Day has a dedicated website[4] with a rich "Get involved" section, where consumers are suggested ways of joining the 'fashion revolution'. A related video clip even

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[1] Although the two authors have collaborated closely on the paper, Costanza Cucchi is responsible for Sections 1, 2, 4.1 and Sonia Piotti for Sections 3 and 4.2. Section 5 was written together.

[2] M. Truncellito, *Tu Style*, 21.9.2015, p. 28.

[3] M. Gattermayer, *Gioia*, 25.4.2015, pp. 80-82.

[4] http://fashionrevolution.org/ last accessed July 22, 2016.

features in a section of the British Council website for improving one's English[5], thus testifying to the popularity of the topic.

As a result of the increasing awareness of environmental and social issues related to fashion, new terms have appeared and have attracted interest at both popular and scholarly level. At popular level, terminological confusion seems to dominate. For example, in an introductory post to 'sustainable fashion', the term was described as "a part of the larger growing trend of creating more sustainable, environmentally friendly and ethical products"[6], thus suggesting that 'sustainable fashion' is a hyponym of 'environmentally friendly', 'ethical' and 'sustainable' itself. To further complicate the matter, while "a lack of consensus over definitions"[7] was noted, 'sustainable fashion' was also used as a synonym of 'eco fashion'[8]. In turn, in an online directory published by *The Guardian*, 'ethical fashion' was regarded as "a nebulous term", which "can mean any number of different ways of producing a garment", "embrac[ing] the main methods of ethical production such as recycling and sustainability"[9]. Thus, 'sustainable' 'and 'recycled' are considered as hyponyms of 'ethical'. More generally, in an article whose title significantly contains the sentence "Eco-Fashion Needs a Common Lexicon", Vanessa Friedman, fashion editor of the *Financial Times*, was reported to say that "[r]ight now the words we use and their definitions are confused and confusing"[10]. This also emerges from an online article[11] by the same author, in which responses given by various designers to the question "How would you define sustainable fashion?" revealed different interpretations, ranging from the use of traditional techniques, to preservation of the environment, to long-lasting quality.

Even at scholarly level, Sue Thomas, a British academic in fashion design and social justice issues, while claiming that "[e]co-fashion is a crucial area of debate for the fashion industry as well as sustainable fashion design", stated that the term has "various meanings"[12] and that confusion regards, more generally, the use of 'environmental', 'green', 'ecological', 'sustainable', 'recycled', 'organic' and 'ethical' in the fashion industry. Obviously, since she is not a linguist, her claims are not supported by exact linguistic evidence.

It is the aim of the present paper to explore the English lexicon of eco-fashion from a purely linguistic perspective in a corpus of corporate websites. Instead of selecting the terms

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[5] S. Keeling, *Who made your clothes?*, "LearnEnglish Teens", British Council, http://learnenglishteens.british-council.org/study-break/video-zone/who-made-your-clothes last accessed July 22, 2016.

[6] K. Moody, *Sustainable Fashion: A Growing Trend*, "Market Line", 21.2.2013, http://www.marketline.com/blog/sustainable-fashion-a-growing-trend last accessed July 22, 2016.

[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] *Ibidem.*

[9] K. Carter, *Ethical fashion directory*, "The Guardian", 22.7.2008, http://www.theguardian.com /lifeand-style/2008/jul/22/ethicaldirectoryintro last accessed July 22, 2016.

[10] M. Chua, FT Fashion Editor at COP15 Fashion Summit: Eco-Fashion Needs a Common Lexicon, *"Ecouterre"*, 12.09.15, http://www.ecouterre.com/ft-fashion-editor-at-copenhagen-fashion-summit-eco-fashion-needs-a-common-lexicon/ last accessed July 22, 2016.

[11] V. Friedman, *Sustainable Fashion: What does green mean?*, "Financial Times", 5.2.2010, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/2b27447e-11e4-11df-b6e3-00144feab49a.html last accessed July 22, 2016.

[12] S. Thomas, *From "Green Blur" to Ecofashion: Fashioning an Eco-Lexicon*, "Fashion Theory", 12, 2008, 4, p. 526.

to be examined in advance, it was decided to rely on a bottom-up approach rooted in texts. In Section 2 the criteria for corpus selection are described and the terms object of study are identified, while Section 3 traces the history of the terms in the fashion literature. Section 4 illustrates the corpus findings, which are discussed in Section 5.

2. *Corpus and methodology*

The first methodological issue to be solved when compiling the corpus consisted in the selection of the brands which used terms related to eco-fashion. In order to set up a homogeneous corpus, it was decided to choose texts from companies from a single nationality, since the use of terminology might vary across countries. For their importance in the field of sustainability, the British brands Stella McCartney, Vivienne Westwood, Marks & Spencer[13] were assessed as potential candidates. However, an examination of their corporate websites revealed that, although the eco-themes were present, an eco-terminology was not used.

As an alternative criterion for the selection of the companies to be included in the corpus, it was decided to make a Google search for 'eco-fashion brands', as a potential consumer looking for this type of clothes on the Internet could do. The search revealed the existence of various online lists, such as *7 eco-friendly fashion labels to know now*[14] and *10 eco-friendly fashion brands we can get behind*[15]. In addition, the website *Eco Fashion World* offers an *Eco Fashion Guide*, described as "your essential resource to sustainable designer brands and online eco fashion stores"[16]. Although the guide can be conveniently searched by various criteria, including 'eco criteria' and country, the category 'UK' contained only nine companies. The website *Style with Heart*, which had the caption *Your guide to 100s of eco-friendly and ethical fashion brands*[17], on the contrary, displayed a very large number of companies and many of them were British. Interestingly, some of the terms mentioned by Thomas appeared on the homepage:

> The companies you will discover have been carefully chosen based on their *ethical* and/or *eco* principles. But not at the cost of beauty, quality or originality – just have a

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[13] As reported on the website of Market Line, a business information company, "[s]ustainable fashion began to take off in the 2000s with Stella McCartney" (http://marketline.com/blog/sustainable-fashion-a-growing-trend/ last accessed July 22, 2016). Both Stella McCartney and Vivienne Westwood are indicated as 'Green Designers' on Ecouterre, a website devoted to sustainable fashion (http://www.ecouterre.com/category/designers last accessed July 22, 2016). In turn, Vivienne Westwood and Marks & Spencer figure in a recent survey conducted by Sustainability-lab to Corporate Social Responsibility Managers of American and European brands recognized as leaders in the field of sustainability. (M. Ricchetti – A. Magni – F. Guenza – A. Saccavini, *2014 Fashion Brands Sustainable Procurement Survey*, free download at http://change-makers.it/?p=862&lang=en last accessed July 22, 2016).

[14] V. Dawson Hoff, *7 Eco-Friendly Fashion Labels to Know Now*, "ELLE", http://www.elle.com/fashion/g8913/best-eco-friendly-fashion-brands/ last accessed July 22, 2016.

[15] H. Phelan, *10 Eco-friendly Fashion Brands We Can Get Behind*, 20.4.12, "Fashionista", http://fashionista.com/2012/04/10-eco-friendly-fashion-brands-we-can-get-behind last accessed July 22, 2016.

[16] http://www.ecofashionworld.com/Eco-Fashion-Guide.html last accessed July 22, 2016.

[17] www.stylewithheart.com last accessed July 22, 2016.

> browse through some of our clothes and you'll see that style and *sustainability* can (and do) come hand in hand!

In addition, it was possible to select the companies listed in the directory by 'eco-ethical criteria'[18], namely 'eco-friendly', 'fairly traded' or 'ethical', 'fair-trade', 'organic', 'vintage', 'recycled' and 'upcycled'.

In order to ensure that the corpus contained comparable texts, companies which were not based in the UK, as well as companies selling exclusively sports clothes, jewellery, children's or men's clothes were excluded. Thus, 80 UK-based companies producing women's clothes were found. In order to identify texts which were suitable for the analysis of the eco-fashion lexicon, a qualitative examination of the corporate websites of the 80 companies was carried out. It emerged that the eco-fashion lexicon appeared predominantly in sections about corporate history, company principles and ethics. A corpus which included all the texts published in these sections was therefore compiled. Although the corpus is small in size (97,619 tokens), it should be stressed that the texts come from a large number of companies.

As a first step, the corpus was searched for the premodifiers of 'fashion' with *Wordsmith Tools*[19], in order to select the terms object of study. Corpus data revealed that three of the terms mentioned by Thomas, namely 'ethical', 'sustainable' and 'eco(-)', were used as premodifiers of 'fashion'. These terms were chosen for investigation and their history, as reported in the fashion literature, is examined in Section 3. Section 4 considers the terms as they appear in the corpus. Definitions of 'sustainable fashion', 'ethical fashion' and 'eco-fashion' were searched for in the corpus and are illustrated in Section 4.1. Corpus data revealed that other words, besides 'fashion', were at times premodified by 'sustainable', 'ethical' and 'eco(-)', which is shown in Section 4.2.

3. 'Sustainable', 'ethical', 'eco(-)' in fashion literature

The discussion on sustainability originated in the international discourse over environmental issues and development by national governments, with the contribution of scientists, business leaders and international organisations. The origins and later developments of sustainability in these contexts are given by Adams[20], Langenwater[21], Langhelle[22] and Soderstrom[23] and are briefly reported here.

In the late 1960s, sustainability was first discussed in a mandate by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which focused on the preservation, management and

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[18] http://www.stylewithheart.com.

[19] M. Scott, *Wordsmith Tools 5*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

[20] W.M. Adams, *The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-first Century*, Report of the IUCN Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January 2006. Available at http://cmsdata. iucn.org/downloads/iucn_future_of_sustainability.pdf last accessed July 22, 2016.

[21] G. Langenwater, *Planet First*, "Industrial Management", 51, 2009, pp. 10-13.

[22] O. Langhelle, *Sustainable Development: Exploring the Ethics of Our Common Future*, "International Political Science Review", 20, 1999, pp. 129-149.

[23] N. Soderstrom, *Sustainability reporting: past, present, and trends for the future*, "Insights", 13, 2013, pp. 31-37.

enhancement of natural resources. In 1987, the Brundtland Commission released a report which coined the term 'Sustainable Development' and defined it as a combination of three main meanings: an activity which can be continued indefinitely without causing harm; doing unto others as you would have them do unto you; and meeting a current generation's needs without compromising those of future generations. In 1992, 'sustainable development' was discussed at the *Earth Summit* in Rio, which focused on the relationship between human rights, population, social development and the need for environmentally sustainable development. In 1996, the World Council for Sustainable Development released a report defining the framework for businesses to meet sustainable production and consumption goals: from now on 'sustainable development' and 'sustainable consumption' were discussed as a single issue. In the early 2000s, the development of (multi-)life cycle thinking was fostered by the ongoing concern over the environmental impact of industrial waste disposal, thus placing design choices within decision making processes[24]. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) confirmed that the first decade of the new century would reflect on the demands placed by mankind on the biosphere. Thus, 'sustainability' has come to cover three concerns: environmental, social, and economic.

Since the early 1990s, sustainability has begun to matter in fashion. According to Joy, Sherry, Venkantesh, Wang and Chan, "[t]he call to ecologically sustainable fashion is appropriate at a time when, clearly, people consume more natural resources and produce more pollution than the planet can sustain"[25]. Discussing the relationship between sustainability and fashion, Thomas claims that "[i]f sustain means to preserve, protect and provide for the future, then perhaps we can read sustainability as capacious, as including"[26]. 'Sustainable fashion', Thomas argues, should include and combine the environmental impact of textile and clothing production, but should also embrace social aspects, such as human rights and other issues[27]. Therefore, "sustainability could serve as a valuable umbrella term to identify proactive practices"[28].

'Ethical', according to Thomas, "is a recent arrival to fashion terminology (often used in relation to manufacture, consumption, fashion design and trading) from the ethical investment movement"[29], where 'ethical' referred to "philosophically guided actions and behaviours as determined by their impact on others"[30]. As a result, in fashion "at the moment *ethical* reveals philosophical and religious undertones"[31] and 'ethical fashion'*,* in particular, "refers to the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as

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[24] *Ibidem.*

[25] A. Joy – J.F. Sherry Jr – A. Venkatesh – J. Wang – R. Chan, *Fast fashion, Sustainability, and the Ethical Appeal of Luxury Brands*, "Fashion Theory", 16, 2012, pp. 273-296, p. 290.

[26] S. Thomas, *From "Green Blur" to Ecofashion*, p. 536.

[27] *Ibidem.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 535.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 533.

[30] *Ibidem.*

[31] The origins of ethical investing may date back to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in the eighteenth century, which prohibited members from participating in the slave trade, by buying or selling humans. Religious institutions have been at the forefront of ethical investing ever since.

experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment"[32]. Thomas also points out that 'ethical' "may be perceived as judgmental, in part due to the perceived overlap with the word *morals*: there is the supposition of imposed correctness". Accordingly, "[a] polarizing disjuncture exists between ethical and unethical clothing"[33]. Thomas states that the surge in ethical considerations in the fashion industry, in particular, is represented by the aggressive campaigns launched by consumer activists engaged with anti-fur actions and lobbying for animal rights, social justice and corporate social responsibility. While explaining that these activists wonder how ethical considerations may fit with such an ephemeral industry as fashion, Thomas interestingly switches from the term 'ethical fashion' to 'ecofashion'[34], thus implying that 'ecofashion' and 'ethical fashion' are synonyms.

Thomas also deals with 'ecofashion', which "probably dates back to the early 1990s" and is ideologically rooted in the environmental movement in the early 1960s[35]. In academic studies 'ecofashion' is a distinct area and does not relate to social justice and corporate responsibility: it mainly references fibre and fabric selection but can also refer to "cutting patterns for thrifty fabric utilization [...], less construction and the ease of disassembly when the garment has finished its first life"[36]. In the clothing and textile industry, 'eco' involves "the sourcing of environmentally benevolent fabrics"[37]. However, the use of 'eco' extends to the media, where, according to Thomas, it is very popular and pliable, since it is an "approximation"[38]. It references an environmental connection, although no substantiated information is given about which aspect of the conception, fabrication, manufacture or disposal is eco[39].

4. *Findings*

4.1 'Ethical fashion', 'sustainable fashion', 'eco(-)fashion'

'Ethical' is the most frequent premodifier of 'fashion' in the corpus (65 out of the 169 occurrences of 'fashion', corresponding to 38.46% of the occurrences of 'fashion') followed by 'sustainable' (45 occurrences, corresponding to 26.62%). Occurrences of 'eco fashion' and 'eco-fashion' were by far less frequent, 5 (2.95%) and 2 (1.18%) respectively[40].

Despite the frequency of 'ethical fashion' and 'sustainable fashion', a search for definitions of these terms provided quantitatively scant results. A qualitative analysis revealed, firstly, that both these terms have a very broad meaning, which encompasses a variety of

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[32] S. Thomas, *From "Green Blur" to Ecofashion*, p. 533.

[33] *Ibidem.*

[34] *Ibidem.*

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 531.

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] *Ibidem.*

[38] *Ibidem.*

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 532.

[40] The normalised values of 'ethical fashion', sustainable fashion' and 'eco(-) fashion' per 10,000 tokens are as follows: 6.65 ('ethical'), 4.6 ('sustainable'), 0.5 ('eco'), 0.2, ('eco-').

factors and, secondly, that definitions of both terms relied on several other eco terms (Examples 1, 2, 3, 4). In addition, it was observed that companies provided 'restricted' definitions which described their own ethical/sustainable practices rather than general definitions of these terms, as it emerged from their use of exclusive 'we' in 'we use', 'we aim', 'we source', 'we stock'. Given the similarity of the definitions, the terms 'ethical fashion' and 'sustainable fashion' appeared to be synonymous in the corpus.

(1)
Ethical Fashion. What does it mean?
Ethical fashion is best described as an *"umbrella" term* – it covers *a wide variety of considerations when it comes to the design, sourcing, production, retail and purchasing of garments.* [...]
For Outsider, in practical terms, *ethical fashion means* the following:
[...] *We use* only *organic and/or sustainable* fabrics.
[...] *We aim* for a trans-seasonal slow fashion design aesthetic, a gentle nod to trends, with versatility at it's [sic] heart. Minimalist but with a *vintage* detail here and there.
[...] (*Outsider*)

(2)
Defining Ethical
Think Boutique strive to retail fashion that has the highest possible social and environmental credentials. *We source* products that are from *Fair Trade*, *organic*, *sustainable*, *up-cycled* or locally produced sources or at best *a combination of several of these factors.* (*Think Boutique*)

(3)
What is sustainable fashion?
We use the term sustainable fashion to describe ways of: thinking, engaging, making, consuming, using, valuing, practicing and maintaining fashion in a way that nurtures the environmental, social and cultural health of the planet. [...]
Sustainable fashion promotes *different ways to meet our clothing and fashion needs without exploitation or expense to people or planet.* [...]
[*W*]*e stock organic* cotton dresses and trousers, *upcycled* jumpers and leather accessories, *fair trade* knitted skirts and limited edition digital print scarves. (*Here today here tomorrow*)

(4)
The term *"sustainable fashion" means different things to different people and brands.*
For Outsider it means the following:
1. Only manufacture with *sustainable, organic, eco-friendly or recycled fabrics* [...]
(*Outsider*)

The only definition of 'eco fashion' in the corpus (Example 5) suggests that it is a synonym of 'ethical fashion', since 'eco fashion' in the title is substituted by 'ethical fashion' in the

explanation. It should be also noted that the description of corporate practice is utterly unclear.

(5)
What does eco fashion mean?
"The best designers orchestrate their supply chain and so *ethical fashion* starts at design. Most of our products are soft casual wear styles so we use *organic* cotton, and make our clothes in an *ethically* accredited, wind powered *factory*." (*Rapanui*)

4.2 'Sustainable', 'ethical' and 'eco' as premodifiers

Besides 'fashion', 'sustainable', 'ethical' and 'eco(-)' also premodify an array of nouns. 'Sustainable' qualifies 'fabrics' (11 occurrences), 'design' and 'development' (8), 'fibres', 'clothing' and 'practices' (4), 'sources', 'production', 'communities' and 'materials' (3) (Fig.1)[41].

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	THE	THE	AND	AND	AND	SUSTAINABLE	FASHION	WE	FASHION	THE	THE
2	AND	AND	AND	THE	OF		AND	AND	AND	FRIENDLY	TO
3	A	IN	IS	TO	A		FABRICS	ETHICAL	THE	IS	PEOPLE
4	OF	TO	IN	ORGANIC	FOR		DESIGN	IN	AND	OF	AND
5	IS	FOR	IT	OF	MORE		DEVELOPMENT	WITH	OUR	WE	WE
6	IN	AS	TO	A	TO		FIBRES	FOR	IS	OUR	ON
7	WORLD	WE	OF	ETHICAL	IS		PRACTICES	THE	AS	AND	FASHION
8	THE	USING	A	MADE	FROM		CLOTHING	TO	RESPECT	FROM	ARE
9	CREATIVE	TAINABLE	FOR	APPROACHES	OR		RESOURCES	BY	ALL	A	OUR
10	COTTON	THAT	TRADE	CENTRE	ETHICAL		PRODUCTION	AWARDS	PEOPLE	TAINABLE	IS
11	ARE	DICRAFTS	THAT	TRADE	ENVIRONMENTALLY		COMMUNITIES	A		FASHION	OF
12	FROM	FAIR	FAIR	THAT	WITH		CITY	WHERE			
13	FOR	ETHICAL	FROM	IS	THE		MATERIALS	THAT			
14	FASHION	OUTSIDER	RGANICI	HOME	ARE			ECO			
15		OUR		SUSTAINABLE	MOST			ENVIRONMENTALLY			
16		OF			BUILD			IS			
17					PROMOTE			SUSTAINABLE			
18								SUCH			

Figura 1 - Nouns premodified by 'sustainable' with a minimum raw frequency
of 3 occurrences (*WordSmith Tools* 5.0)

'Sustainable' has a tendency towards positive semantic prosody ("need for more sustainable clothing", "to implement environmentally sustainable work practices", "environmentally sustainable solutions by forging long-term relationships", "creative handicrafts to build sustainable communities") and often co-occurs with another adjective to reference practices

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and products identified positively with the people and the environment ("in a more sustainable and responsible way", "crafted in organic cotton and sustainable materials", "ethically sourced and sustainable fabrics").

The nouns premodified by 'ethical' include 'consumer' and 'clothing' (11 occurrences), 'production' (10), 'trading' (8), 'brand', 'policy' and 'principles' (5) (Fig. 2)[42]. 'Ethical trading', in particular, reveals the "potentially [...] ideological connection to ethical trading and ethical fashion, thus conferring on both an altruistic intent and political stance"[43].
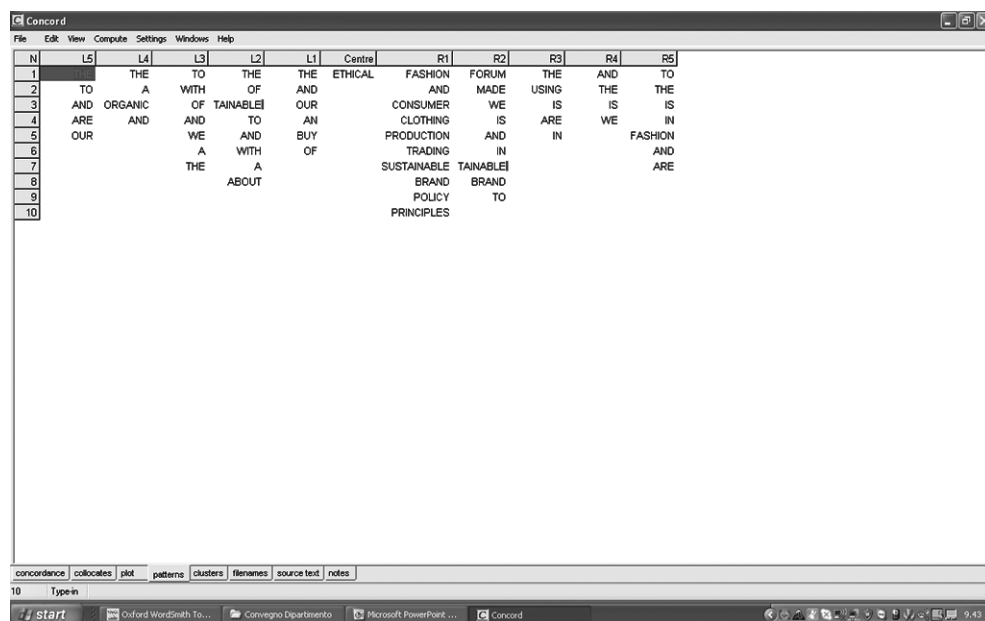
N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1		THE	TO	THE	THE	ETHICAL	FASHION	FORUM	THE	AND	TO
2	TO	A	WITH	OF	AND		AND	MADE	USING	THE	THE
3	AND	ORGANIC	OF	TAINABLE	OUR		CONSUMER	WE	IS	IS	IS
4	ARE	AND	AND	TO	AN		CLOTHING	IS	ARE	WE	IN
5	OUR		WE	AND	BUY		PRODUCTION	AND	IN		FASHION
6			A	WITH	OF		TRADING	IN			AND
7			THE	A			SUSTAINABLE	TAINABLE			ARE
8				ABOUT			BRAND	BRAND			
9							POLICY	TO			
10							PRINCIPLES				

Figura 2 - Nouns premodified by 'ethical' with a minimum raw frequency of 3 occurrences
(*WordSmith Tools* 5.0)

As a premodifier, 'eco(-)' is extremely pliable and gives birth to a variety of word forms, which mainly reference fibres, materials, products, trends, production practices and types of consumption behavior which are benign to the environment. The only consistent pattern in which 'eco' is a premodifier is 'eco-friendly' (30 occurrences)[44] (Fig. 3), which loosely references environmentally benevolent materials, fabrics, substances ('Lenzig Tencel', 'pigment dyes') and processes in clothing manufacture ('T-shirt printing'), while most expressions, such as 'eco-shoppers', 'eco-T-shirt', 'eco-savvy', 'eco hippy', 'eco style' are used only once in the corpus.

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[42] The normalised values per 10,000 tokens are as follows: 'ethical consumer' and 'ethical clothing' (1.12); 'ethical production' (1.02); 'ethical trading' (0.81); 'ethical brand', 'ethical policy', 'ethical principles' (0.5).

[43] S. Thomas, *From "Green Blur" to Ecofashion*, p. 532.

[44] The normalised value per 10,000 tokens is 3.07.

Figura 3 - Nouns premodified by 'eco(-)' with a minimum raw frequency of 3 occurrences
(*WordSmith Tools* 5.0)

5. *Discussion and conclusion*

While previous observations on eco-fashion lexicon were made by non-linguists in the popular press and in fashion studies, the present investigation has explored eco-fashion lexicon in a corpus of corporate websites from a purely linguistic perspective. Since several eco terms co-occur in the definitions of 'ethical fashion', 'sustainable fashion' and 'eco fashion', corpus findings substantiate Thomas' claim that various eco terms "coexist" and "cross-fertilize"[45]. In addition, while Thomas noted that this "has fuelled misunderstanding"[46], especially in fashion journalism, whose "terminology can sometimes confuse the reader with its multiple layers of definition and usage"[47], the present findings indicate that confusion is reflected in the very discourse of eco-fashion companies. Significantly, company discourse shows that 'sustainable fashion' and 'ethical fashion', which are by far more frequent than 'eco-fashion', are used interchangeably to cover several aspects ranging from production methods to consumer choices and can therefore be regarded as synonyms. 'Eco-fashion', in turn, appears as a synonym of 'ethical fashion'. This seems to indicate that 'sustainable' may not conveniently be used as the hypernym of 'environmental', 'ethical', 'organic' and 'recy-

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[45] S. Thomas, *From "Green Blur" to Ecofashion*, p. 530.

[46] *Ibidem*.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 527.

cled', unlike what Thomas suggested. However, since only one definition of 'eco-fashion' was found in the corpus, further evidence is needed.

Corpus findings show no clear-cut boundaries between the concerns covered by 'sustainable', 'ethical' and 'eco(-)'. On the contrary, within the academic field of fashion theory, eco considerations are separate from ethical and sustainable ones. With specific regard to 'eco(-)', corpus findings reveal that the term does not substantiate any precise information about the type and degree of environmental benevolence. This corroborates Thomas' claims in relation to media discourse, despite the fact that, in fashion theory, environmental concerns cover specific issues such as fibre selection, and the ease of disassembly when the garment has finished its first life.

A fuller understanding of eco-fashion discourse may be expected to go well beyond eco-related terms. For example, whether the discourse of 'eco-friendly' companies differs from 'sustainable' and 'ethical' ones is an open question, which deserves investigation.

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