

LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LEXICAL UNITS SPECIFIC TO CRAFTSMANSHIP

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Annotation: This article delves into the linguistic and cultural dimensions of craftsmanship, examining the specialized vocabulary and cultural nuances embedded in the lexical units specific to various artisanal pursuits. From the historical references woven into craftsmanship language to the symbolic significance and metaphorical expressions employed by artisans, the article explores how language shapes and reflects the identity of craftsmanship. It also discusses the preservation of craftsmanship language through oral traditions, master-apprentice dynamics, and the ongoing documentation of linguistic shifts in the ever-evolving landscape of artisanal practices.

Key Words: Craftsmanship, Lexical units, Specialized vocabulary, Artisanal identity, Cultural nuances, Linguistic richness, Regional variances, Historical references, Symbolism and metaphor, Artisanal traditions

Introduction: Craftsmanship is a timeless expression of human creativity and skill, deeply intertwined with linguistic and cultural nuances. This article explores the linguistic and cultural characteristics embedded in the lexical units specific to craftsmanship. From the intricacies of specialized vocabulary to the cultural nuances reflected in artisanal expressions, the language of craftsmanship unveils a unique tapestry that reflects the heritage, values, and ingenuity of diverse communities.

Cultural sustainability is thus a response to a shift in our values that seeks to rectify the biases of the past by recognizing the importance of diversity, inclusion, representation, and respect for other people, communities, and their representative material cultures, as well as the role that craftsmanship plays in expressing traditional culture.

Originally, the term sustainability was conveyed predominately from an environmental perspective. The expansion of the concept of sustainability in “sustainable development” has been ongoing since publication of the Brundtland Commission’s report introducing three dimensions: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental balance. The inclusion of a social and economic dimension in this framework was further validated in 1992 in the United Nation’s Agenda 21. In the same year, the Swiss project “Monitoring of Sustainable Development (MONET)” outlined a paradigm for sustainable development that incorporated three pillars, one each for environmental conservation, economic growth, and social equity. In 1994, the World Bank’s “capital stocks” model of sustainable development consolidated this paradigm by evaluating society as equal to the economy and the environment. This approach was based on the banking theory of ecological capital, that if you can live off the interest of your investment, you can maintain prosperity.

This formulation was further amended in 2001 by UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity by adding cultural diversity as an integral component in the form of a bridge connecting the other three pillars, rather than adding a pillar in its own right. The organization

explained cultural diversity as a dynamic process within which cultural change can best be managed with intercultural dialogue and sensitivity to cultural contexts. However, it was not until 2010 that the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) published a policy statement arguing for culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development. Axelsson, Angelstam, and Degerman view the long debate about the need for the inclusion of a fourth pillar that expands upon previous expressions of social inclusion as encompassing a cultural perspective. Decoupling culture from the social pillar demonstrated a specific focus on cultural diversity as a set of shared values within a specific local community that are considered important levers to drive sustainable development and are on par with the environment, economy, and society, as shown by its promotion by the UCLG and adoption by the United Nations. The introduction of this fourth pillar has had profound implications when analyzed in a fashion context, particularly in relation to traditional craftsmanship.

As Boğa-Moisin ([Citation2017](#)) argues, cultural sustainability in the fashion and interrelated textile field means supporting and sharing knowledge of traditional know-how, competencies, and skills of fashion and textile cultures with future generations. Therefore, cultural sustainability in fashion requires that we address the history of cultural appropriation (Kangas, Nancy, and Beukelaer [Citation2017](#)). Central to the problem of appropriation are the issues of ownership, authorship, respect, and power imbalances with brands too often utilizing unique cultural expressions and processes for commercial gain, sometimes in a disrespectful manner (Anderson [Citation2010](#); Vezina 2019). Susan Scafidi, an expert in fashion law and author of *Who Owns Culture?* (2015), cites cultural appropriation as one of the main reasons why some cultures and their material representations are threatened. She sees the commercial exploitation of traditional craft as having devastating implications for indigenous communities, with tradition distributed by brands without gratitude or economic benefit to the original creators.

Scafidi ([Citation2015](#)) cites the vast gulf between cultural appropriation, cultural appreciation, and cultural exchange. First, cultural appropriation is commonly mentioned as contributing to the loss and devaluation of cultural heritage and its material representation through unsolicited use and misuse. Second, cultural appreciation generally refers to the admiration for “another” culture and an interest in learning about it. Finally, cultural exchange is a sharing of skills and knowledge. UNESCO’s report on Intangible Cultural Heritage (2018) documents hundreds of different forms of intangible cultural heritage from around the world. The interactive listing offers insight into the major contributing factors to the loss of tradition worldwide, citing cultural appropriation as one of many threats to continued viability.

There are currently few to no legal protections in place to safeguard indigenous material culture, allowing brands to continue to raid cultural heritage as a source of inspiration, despite being publicly shamed in social media for doing so. With multiple indigenous communities in the process of trying to expand upon intellectual property law to include collective material culture under its protection, the time will soon pass when a designer can dip into another culture for inspiration and produce designs without recompense to the community that inspired their work. Despite the progress of several initiatives including the Maasai Intellectual Property Initiative, the National Mayan Weavers Movement, the Mexican government’s public commitment to developing legislation, the Lao Traditional Arts and Ethnology Centre’s efforts, the overarching work of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the Cultural

Intellectual Property Rights Initiative (CIPRI), most protections remain aspirational. Collectively these proposals seek to safeguard the traditional knowledge and the custodians of traditional cultural expressions with protection against misappropriation under law. However, until these legal protections are implemented within comprehensive frameworks, brands will continue to “copy and borrow” indigenous material culture with impunity (Vézina [Citation2019](#)).

Multiple examples of blatant cultural appropriation litter Western fashion history, from Victoria’s Secret’s 2012 fashion show with Karlie Kloss strutting down the catwalk wearing a traditional First Nations war bonnet and turquoise jewelry to Carolina Herrera’s Resort 2020 collection (Friedman [Citation2019](#)). Herrera’s collection, naïvely intended as a homage to Latin America, resulted in the Mexican government accusing her of plagiarizing several indigenous communities and setting in motion the development of legal protections for the country’s intangible cultural heritage. Isabel Marant’s Spring/Summer 2015 collection, which copied a traditional Mexican blouse from Oaxaca, resulted in the designer being sued in a French court (Larson [Citation2015](#)). Dior’s direct copy of a traditional Romanian vest resulted in the launch of an online platform called Bihor Couture selling original Romanian artisan-made versions while publicly shaming Dior for the theft (Bihor Couture [Citation2018](#)). This is a long conversation, punctuated with periods of dormancy and outrage, reminiscent as it is of colonialism, fueled anew with activism in defense of threatened tribal peoples and traditions from around the world.

A virtuous example of cultural appreciation followed by cultural exchange, in line with Scafidi’s argument, is represented by Oskar Metsavaht, the Creative Director of Osklen and the Ashaninka collection. Metsavaht collaborated with the Ashaninka people from the rainforests of Amazonia for his Spring 2016 collection. The collection was a collaboration and an exchange, with Metsavaht working directly with elders from the community to ensure that no symbols, colors, or patterns were utilized inappropriately. He developed a logo for community use and effectively treated the relationship as an artistic collaboration, with the tribe benefitting from royalties from every sale and their accreditation in all communication as the source of inspiration (Quartz [Citation2015](#)). Metsavaht showed that by using the vehicles of traceability, transparency, provenance, and authorship, material culture and craftsmanship can be reclaimed and honored.

In the following sections, we discuss how design accesses craft culture through a knowledge exchange of practices and techniques in order to reconfigure processes and to encode different meanings into new narratives rooted in the appreciation of a specific culture.

Intangible cultural heritage in the fashion system. Given the challenges of craft retention, a design-oriented approach offers a strategic option for solution-oriented implementation of artisan knowledge. This strategy would redefine directions in support of the development of territory and community through the conservation of culture. Artisans would be provided with the tools for self-evaluation, enabling them to better articulate the intrinsic qualities of their work. A methodological process of product development can be designed through successive phases of knowledge, reflection, activation, and preservation of specific know-how, thereby informing the continuous enhancement of craft-knowledge from a design-oriented perspective. As Fry ([Citation2009](#)) argues, design participates in the planning of culture through the introduction of an object into the world. Therefore, the history of designed objects is the history

of culture. Design is never culturally neutral, but always transports socio-cultural values, with the value dependent upon the “the symbolic, emotional and identification of meaning it embodies” (Rullani [Citation2004](#), 13). According to Oppenheimer ([Citation2019](#)), craft is not a finished product, or even a set of refined technical skills, but a means of understanding the material world. By producing handicrafts that strengthen and valorize local culture, meaning transcends simple income generation, allowing people to act in line with their values and to create new means to overcome their circumstances. This concept is called platforming by Fry ([Citation2009](#)) and described as a strategy that maintains existing and traditional economic activity and work culture, while building a new direction with new products.

LVMH, one of the largest luxury conglomerates in the world with over seventy brands to its name, understands the need to maintain the renowned French metiers that luxury fashion relies upon as a means to retain and retrain young people for the longevity of luxury craftsmanship. For the company, preserving know-how has become an increasing concern (Hope [Citation2015](#)). In an effort to maintain tradition, LVMH developed an initiative called L’institut des Métiers d’Excellence (IME) (The Institute for the Professions of Excellence) in 2014. The IME provides training for young people to learn these skilled trades while providing long-term investment and support for their most valued suppliers (LVMH [Citationn.d.](#)). The loss of traditional craft skills in France has been magnified by the loss of global craftsmanship, which is disparate, splintered, and exacerbated by modernization and globalization (Murphy [Citation2018](#)).

Other examples of retention exist in the educational space, with some universities fostering collaborations between students and artisanal communities. While these examples are limited, they represent a realization of the importance of retaining these endangered crafts. One example is Officina Borbonese which is a collaboration between The New School’s Parsons Paris campus and the craft cooperative Su Trobasciu in Mogoro, Italy. This small Sardinian village plays host to an innovative project that reinterprets the iconic tapestries and carpets typical of the region. A specific initiative called Savoy Faire focuses on sustainability by enhancing local culture and operating a traceable and transparent supply chain. The idea was founded on the identity and values of the Borbonese and reinterpreted through the material culture of Sardinian craftswomen and fashion-design students. This venture is further supported by students from programs in strategic design and management and they created the marketing and communication strategy for a Fall/Winter 2021 capsule collection.

Handcraft and artisan production is estimated to be the second largest employer in the developing world (Alliance for Artisan Enterprise [Citation2016](#)), with women representing the overwhelming majority of garment workers and artisans. Globally, the artisan market is valued at approximately US\$34 billion with 65% of this activity taking place in developing economies (Kerry [Citation2015](#)). UNESCO ([Citation2018](#)) lists a number of specific threats to the retention of tradition with both globalization and mass production featuring prominently in addition to the higher costs and the investment of time required to perform hand-crafted labor, the inability of artisans to adapt to market needs, the environmental pressures, and the loss of access to raw materials. A further factor is the lack of interest from the next generation to learn the requisite skills. Global craftsmanship does not enjoy the benefits of one of the world’s largest luxury conglomerates to protect it and to ensure its longevity, retention, and relevance

(Black Citation2016). Moreover, the cultural and creative sectors have been disproportionately affected by the global pandemic (OECD Citation2020).

Research methodology: cultural sustainability through craft. In accordance with the definition of cultural sustainability, material culture consists of practices, techniques, and processes that are curated constantly by human capital. In many cases that capital has enabled the preservation of unique and distinctive knowledge and expertise within specific territorial contexts (Faro Convention Citation2005). These cultural heritage resources are facing major challenges today because of resource depletion, cultural appropriation (Pham Citation2014; Scafidi Citation2015), and globalization which has reduced the diversity and uniqueness of practices and knowledge. However, the distinctive practices and knowledge of authentic craft production have sparked renewed interest (Castells Citation2004; Kapferer and Bastien Citation2009; Mazzarella et al. Citation2015; Walker Citation2018) and these developments have led the fashion system to rediscover “cultural capital” (Throsby Citation1999) at a time when local communities and their material culture are suffering from impoverishment of meaning and value. Craftsmanship can support the codification of a new cultural language and, at the same time, target consumers who are increasingly attentive to the exclusivity and personalization of particular products (Sennett Citation2008). The interaction of craft and design can generate real value through the transfer of knowledge among stakeholders (EFI Citationn.d.). In this way, a craft-design approach can reconfigure the traditional codes and languages and outline a process of continuous innovation that can be replicated over time and is able to penetrate and compete in globalized markets, thereby valuing cultural diversity as a form of evolved creativity (Vacca Citation2013).

This study explored emerging design scenarios in the field of fashion and craftsmanship. It is oriented toward combining and consolidating the design disciplines with experimentation, innovation, sustainability, and inclusive processes and tools consistent with the four pillars of sustainability (UCLG Citation2010): (1) environment as biological diversity and resource preservation; (2) society as people and social inclusion; (3) culture as cultural values and heritage preservation, and (4) economy as circular and performance-based (Figure 1). Through a holistic vision of the combined themes of sustainable development (WCED Citation1987) and sustainable fashion (Williams et al. Citation2019), the model attempts to identify strategic assets to deploy in the fashion system to address the challenges of sustainable transformation by enhancing, preserving, and integrating material culture. Accordingly, this study has four objectives. First, we sought to interpret, through the identification of significant and recurring trends, the most developed craft-based strategies in the field of fashion. Second, the work reported here was designed to highlight the dynamics and evolution that the craft and fashion sectors are experiencing currently to promote positive and sustainable changes within the cultural dimension. Finally, we strove to overcome the dynamics of cultural appropriation and misappropriation that have been carried out to the detriment of territories and communities that possess cultural heritage.

To design this speculative model, we drew on the results of several of our studies related to the phenomenon of cultural sustainability through traditional craft, with an emphasis on the cultural potential of processes oriented toward the valorization and incorporation of material practices and expertise in fashion (Brown Citation2021; Vacca Citation2013). In the past

decade, we have developed personal research paths related to the themes of craftsmanship and cultural sustainability. In this context, we have analyzed skills, practices, methods, processes, materials, tools, relations, communities, and territories. Through these projects, we have come into contact with both micro-scale communities of autonomous and independent artisans and artisanal businesses that are larger and structured and organized more extensively. This study is based upon a global sample of 105 cases of crafting initiatives, each of which we evaluated through preliminary desk research and then developed a map based upon their characteristics. This was followed by a case study that allowed us to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Nixon and Blakley [Citation2012](#)). Then, we identified ten case studies and conducted semi-structured interviews with key respondents in each of them to gain deeper insight into their values, processes, approaches, and methodologies. These entities represent excellence in cultural sustainability practices, oriented toward the recovery and enhancement of fashion-design approaches to material culture. We refer to these examples as “culture-intensive artefacts” (Bertola et al. [Citation2016](#)). The semi-structured interviews were conducted to enable us to study the techniques, traditions, and customs behind these ancient producers. We identified their connections with the contemporary world, the products they produce, the means through which they communicate and distribute their work, and the nature of their collaborations—whether occasional or continuous—with brands and/or independent designers. Some of the cases were explored through participatory, co-design, and social innovation projects, while others were documented through observation and other modes of investigation. This feature of the project initiated the applied dimension of this research, which allowed us to experiment with models of preservation and the sustainable development of cultural heritage (Bertola, Colombi, and Vacca [Citation2014](#)). The expertise that we gained over several years and the sharing of corresponding studies, reflections, and results with us, has provided the data on which our model is based.

We conducted a comparative analysis, examining all of the interview data to identify common themes that came up repeatedly with an inductive approach. Then we clustered the cases to generate themes and to track the directions and behaviors of similar initiatives (Brown [Citation2021](#); Vacca [Citation2013](#)). The model was then built with the goal to construct a detailed panorama that relates to contemporary craft dimensions and their implications with respect to fashion design-driven cultural sustainability. We wished to focus on charting trajectories and scenarios for cultural sustainability in fashion through design-led actions, practices, and methodologies that could generate positive transformation that alters the status quo. The research design was qualitative because of its ability to offer an unlimited range of inquiry into the cultural dimensions of the research (Denzin and Lincoln [Citation2005](#)). A qualitative approach, while not measurable or quantifiable, is more appropriate to present a broader, more extensive description and allows the researcher to make inductive observations, generate theories, and draw conclusions. However, this approach has three limitations: (1) It is impossible to discuss all of the case studies presented in the article comprehensively; (2) The conclusions cannot be generalized because they are based upon a limited number of observations, and (3) The interpretation of the data is based upon the researchers’ experience and expertise.

Conclusion: In the realm of craftsmanship, the linguistic and cultural characteristics of lexical units form an integral part of the artisanal narrative. From the intricate terminology that

defines techniques to the broader cultural implications embedded in craftsmanship language, this article has explored the rich interplay between language and craftsmanship. In doing so, it sheds light on the profound connection between the art of making and the words that shape its identity.

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