

# Chronicling a Global Fetish: A Linguistic Analysis of the Pseudo-Italian Internationalism *Stiletto*

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## Abstract

Mostly based on lexicographic evidence—approximately seventy dictionaries were consulted—this contribution is an attempt to narrate the quincennial transatlantic journey undertaken by the word *stiletto*, now referring to a globally-recognized emblem of femininity, eroticism and fetish. Occasionally, even the analysis of a single lexical item may in fact reveal unforeseen developments in the evolution of looks and styles and their attendant vocabulary: this enquiry indeed shows how in time *stiletto* may be interpreted as a false Italianism, as a reborrowing and as an internationalism. In spite of the fact that fashion lexicon, due to its close bond with the culture of mass consumption, is mostly short-lived, stiletto heels represent one of those rare instances where must-have cult objects, ladies shoes in this case, rightfully become members of the collective cultural and linguistic heritage, thus being permanently associated to the vogue of a certain *époque*.

**Keywords:** false Italianism; fashion; fetish; internationalism; reborrowing.

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## Introduction

According to Catricalà, Segre Reinach and Reilly, the globalisation of fashion which materialized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a heterogeneous process marked by enduring cultural interactions—affecting both individuals and societies on an equal footing—and diversified mutual exchanges within a universal dimension.<sup>1</sup> Due to the very nature of fashion, spread over ever-changing scenarios, creativity is inevitably embedded in its terminology: its lexical inventory indeed represents the artistry typical of this field as well as the evolution of trends over time, hence reflecting their *modus operandi* in the variegated contexts in which they develop. Regardless of the language under scrutiny, the word-stock of global fashion is geared towards reaching an international audience. Because of the multicultural plurality of codes employed therein, fashion jargon is, more often than not, influenced by various languages, all contributing to shaping its identity and reflecting both the visionary experience of influential stylists and designers and the innovative potential of clothing and accessories.

Preceded by an overview on fashion lexis, asserting its multilingual dimension, and an encyclopedic description of stiletto heels, which features their characteristics and explains why they eventually became an object of fetish and not just an item of fashion, this study aims at exploring and comparing the not always univocal definitions of *stiletto* provided in the current lexicographic landscape. By resorting to general monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias of fashion available in English, Italian and French, the pseudo-Italian status of *stiletto* is corroborated, its etymology is reconstructed and its date of first attestation is determined. Focusing on the false Italianism *stiletto*, this article tries to unveil the structural and socio-cultural features underneath its semblance of authenticity and seeks to determine its historical development from English, back to Italian and possibly into French. Moreover, typological issues will not be disregarded: *stiletto* may indeed be classified *ab origine* as a false Italianism, then as a reborrowing and eventually as an internationalism.

## Words of Fashion: The Multilingual Dimension

Fashion is—or at least should be—of paramount interest for linguists and lexicologists in particular because its vocabulary is restless and volatile exactly like the glittering reality to which it belongs, always open to great inventiveness, highly permeable to foreign influences—thus inclined to a certain xenophilia—and sensitive to continual renewal. The specialized vocabulary of fashion has a complex inner stratification, whose essence is popularized by *ad hoc* media, namely magazines, catalogs, TV channels, websites and social networks.

In fact, catwalk talk features a remarkably diversified jargon by mixing proper terms with less specific, more general words.<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps its ability to penetrate everyday speech and, in turn, to be continuously pervaded by it that seldom renders the lexicon of fashion highly technical, monoreferential, exact and denotative, as would be expected from specialized terminology *per se*.<sup>3</sup> When dealing with looks and styles, the denotative essence of lexis becomes subsidiary to its connotative intent. Therefore, the function of vocabulary in fashion media is mostly conative, phatic and emotive as its main purpose is

1. Maria Catricalà, “Global fashion e nuovi spazi linguistici,” *Lingua Italiana*, (April 25, 2015), [http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua\\_italiana/speciali/modaz/Catricala.html](http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/speciali/modaz/Catricala.html); Simona Segre Reinach, *Un mondo di mode. Il vestire globalizzato* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 2011), 23–34; Simona Segre Reinach, “Moda e globalizzazione: i nuovi scenari internazionali,” *Memoria e Ricerca*, vol. 50 (September–December 2015): 65; Andrew Reilly, “Fashion as a Dynamic Process,” in *The Meanings of Dress*, eds. Kimberly A. Miller-Spillman and Andrew Reilly (New York: Fairchild Books, 2019), 31.

2. Lucilla Lopriore and Cristiano Furiassi, “The Influence of English and French on the Italian Language of Fashion: Focus on False Anglicisms and False Gallicisms,” in *Pseudo-English: Studies on False Anglicisms in Europe*, eds. Cristiano Furiassi and Henrik Gottlieb (Boston, MA/Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015), 200; Gloria Corbucci, “La lingua della moda,” *Studi di Glottodidattica*, vol. 2, no. 2 (May 2008): 48–9.

3. Lucilla Lopriore, “Fashion in city magazines: The global and the local in *Time Out*,” in *Cityscapes: Islands of the Self. Proceedings of the 22<sup>nd</sup> AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica) Conference, Cagliari, 15–17 September 2005*, vol. 2, eds. Laura Jottini, Gabriella Del Lungo and John Douthwaite (Cagliari: CUEC, 2007), 376.

to persuade and encourage their users, that is buyers-to-be, to adjust to the latest trends by becoming actual consumers.<sup>4</sup>

Through multiple cross-linguistic contacts, contemporary fashion jargon is shared and enriched at an international level: traditional terms are recycled and slightly or substantially changed into proper neologisms, so that they can best highlight novelties and represent the continuous changes fashion undergoes.<sup>5</sup> Because of its long reach, when compared to other specialized domains, the inherently multilingual lexicon of fashion is distinctly marked by a variety of genuine and pseudo-borrowings, hybrids and calques mainly from French and English, traditionally conceived as donor languages for “fashionese.”<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at least until the 1950s, the language of fashion was relentlessly permeated by French terms, namely Gallicisms, traditionally associated with the allure of Parisian quirks.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays, thanks to the worldwide spread of English, which has acquired legitimate prestige as the global lingua franca *par excellence*, Londoners and New Yorkers imbue the fashion lingo with Anglicisms (and Americanisms).<sup>8</sup> *Inter alia*, the Gallicism *haute couture* and the Anglicism *leggings* are cases of lexical borrowings that donor languages are most likely to lend to fashion. On the one hand, English may be viewed as a ‘fashionable language,’ associated with modernity and vitality, both aimed at capturing the audience and targeted at a mass market; on the other hand, French may be seen as the proper ‘language of fashion,’ linked to terminological specificity, accuracy and the exclusiveness craved for by elite segments of society.<sup>9</sup>

According to Lopriore and Furiassi, “French seems to affect the English language of fashion more than Italian, whereas Italian fashion language seems to be affected more by English than French.”<sup>10</sup> In greater detail, French took over throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas English dominated Italian and world fashion lexis from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>11</sup>

4. Irene Russo, “Il total black è trendy, lo chemisier è retro-chic. Il linguaggio settoriale della moda,” in *La ricerca nella comunicazione interlinguistica: modelli teorici e metodologici*, eds. Stefania Cavagnoli, Elena Di Giovanni and Raffaella Merlini (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2009), 69; Marina Milella and Nicoletta Montella, “Riflessioni a margine del progetto *Ridire*. L’italiano nel dominio semantico *Moda*,” in *Dal manoscritto al web: canali e modalità di trasmissione dell’italiano. Tecniche, materiali e usi nella storia della lingua. Atti del XII Congresso SILFI (Società Internazionale di Linguistica e Filologia Italiana)*, Helsinki, 18–20 giugno 2012, vol. 2, eds. Enrico Garavelli and Elina Suomela-Härmä (Firenze: Franco Cesati, 2014), 653; Stefano Ondelli, “Da chic a glam: gli anglicismi alla conquista della moda italiana,” *Lingua italiana*, (April 25, 2015), [http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua\\_italiana/speciali/moda2/Ondelli.html](http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/speciali/moda2/Ondelli.html).

5. Maria Catricalà, “Linguaggio della moda,” in *Enciclopedia dell’italiano*, eds. Raffaele Simone, Gaetano Berruto and Paolo D’Achille (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2011), 898.

6. Hadley Freeman, “How to Speak Fashionese,” *The Guardian*, (August 17, 2007), <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/aug/17/fashion.hadleyfreeman>.

7. For an extended list of fashion-related Gallicisms in the English language, see Julia Schultz, *Twentieth Century Borrowings from French to English: Their Reception and Development* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 108–30. For a comprehensive treatment of Gallicisms in the Italian language of fashion, see Elisabeth Rüfer, *Gallizismen in der italienischen Terminologie der Mode* (Königstein: Anton Hain, 1981).

8. For a list of English terms in Italian and French fashion lexis, see the following publications: Anna Laura Messeri, “Voci inglesi della moda accolte in italiano nel XIX secolo,” *Lingua Nostra*, vol. 15, no. 2 (June 1954): 47–50; Anna-Vera Sullam Calimani, “Nuovi esotismi nel linguaggio della moda,” in *Saggi di linguistica e di letteratura in memoria di Paolo Zolli*, eds. Giampaolo Borghello, Manlio Cortelazzo and Giorgio Padoan (Padova: Antenore, 1991), 393–409; Giada Mattarucco, “«Cosi vanno tutti». Le parole della moda italiana,” in *Italiano per il mondo. Banca, commerci, cultura, arti, tradizioni*, ed. Giada Mattarucco (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca, 2012), 109–33.

9. Giovanna Massariello Merzagora, “Diacronia e tipologia degli anglicismi di un lessico settoriale: il linguaggio della moda,” *Atti del Sodalizio Glottologico Milanese*, vol. 33 (November 1991): 77; Lucia Sollazzo, “Aspetti del linguaggio della moda nei giornali,” in *Il linguaggio del giornalismo*, eds. Mario Medici and Domenico Proietti (Milano: Montblanc/Mursia, 1992), 192; Giulia Calligaro, “La lingua della moda contemporanea e i suoi forestierismi,” *Lingua Nostra*, vol. 60, nn. 1–2 (March-June 1999): 55, 59.

10. Lopriore and Furiassi, “The Influence of English and French on the Italian Language of Fashion: Focus on False Anglicisms and False Gallicisms,” 223.

11. Further details on the diachronic shift in balance between French and English as donor languages affecting Italian fashion lexis are present in the analyses carried out by the following scholars, quoted in chronological order: Federica Fiori, “Parole di moda,” *Italiano e oltre*, vol. 5, no. 4 (September–October 1990): 154; Massariello Merzagora, “Diacronia e tipologia degli anglicismi di un lessico settoriale: il linguaggio della moda,” 77–8; Calligaro, “La lingua della moda contemporanea e i suoi

Moreover, notwithstanding the considerable effort made by the Fascist regime between the 1920s and the 1940s in limiting the circulation of foreign words also in the Italian lexis of fashion, several Gallicisms and Anglicisms survived.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Milan ranking among the four contemporary fashion capitals,<sup>13</sup> the presence of Italianisms in fashion terminology is not at all widespread.<sup>14</sup> Italian, prototypically identified as a recipient language in this niche sector, does not seem to hold center stage, and only a limited number of Italianisms made their way into it, classic examples being *ballerina* and *borsalino*—a genericized trademark owned by the Piedmontese, Alessandria-based hat manufacturer *Borsalino*.<sup>15</sup>

It is nevertheless worth mentioning that the linguistic label ‘borrowing’ is hardly ever used appropriately. In fact, borrowed words are seldom returned and, in the rare event in which they are, they tend to acquire additional semantic nuances, connotations and uses in the recipient language, thus originating “false borrowings,”<sup>16</sup> such as, among others, pseudo-Gallicisms, e.g. *sabot*, pseudo-Anglicisms, e.g. *beauty case*, and pseudo-Italianisms, e.g. *stiletto*.<sup>17</sup>

## Stiletto Heels: A Fashion and Fetish Icon

Although not all shoes with high slim heels deserve to be called stilettos, this particular type, characterized by “its infamous bold arch,” is fitted with a needle-thin heel that may vary in length from 8 cm up to 25 cm—provided that a platform is attached to the sole—and usually has a diameter which ranges

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forestierismi,” 51; Irene Danelli, “Lessico della moda,” in *Enciclopedia della moda*, vol. 3, ed. Tullio Gregory (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005), 469–70, 474, 478; Corbucci, “La lingua della moda,” 49; Raffaella Bombi, “«È un mood global hippy, ma con un tocco chic da jetsetter». Qualche riflessione sulla lingua speciale della moda di oggi,” in *Un tremore di foglie. Scritti e studi in ricordo di Anna Panicali*, eds. Andrea Csillaghy, Antonella Riem Natale, Milena Romero Allué, Roberta De Giorgi, Andrea Del Ben and Lisa Gasparotto (Udine: Forum, 2011), 325; Catricalà, “Linguaggio della moda,” 898–901; Maria Catricalà, “Abbigliamento, spazi e codici linguistici,” in *Global fashion. Spazi, linguaggi e comunicazione della moda senza luogo*, eds. Michele Rak and Maria Catricalà (Milano: Mondadori Università, 2013), 61–204; Enrico Matzeu and Stefano Ondelli, “L’italiano della moda tra tecnicismo e pubblicità,” in *La lingua variabile nei testi letterari, artistici e funzionali contemporanei: analisi, interpretazione, traduzione*, ed. Francesco Paolo Macaluso (Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani, 2014), <http://www.csfls.it/silfi2014/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Atti-SILFI-2014-Riassunti.pdf>; Catricalà, “Global fashion e nuovi spazi linguistici”; Ondelli, “Da chic a glam: gli anglicismi alla conquista della moda italiana.”

12. A detailed account of the language policy implemented by the Fascist regime, with special reference to foreign fashion-related words, is provided in the following works: Giuseppe Sergio, “L’ibrido gergo della moda’ nei dizionari italiani della prima metà del Novecento,” in *Observing Norm, Observing Usage: Lexis in Dictionaries and in the Media*, eds. Alessandra Molino and Serenella Zanotti (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 178; Stefano Ondelli, “L’italianizzazione del lessico della moda nel Ventennio: sondaggi preliminari sulle riviste della *Fashion Library* di Milano,” *Nuova Corvina*, vol. 30 (December 2017): 86.

13. Julie Bradford, *Fashion Journalism* (London/New York: Routledge, 2015), 129.

14. Lopriore and Furiassi, “The Influence of English and French on the Italian Language of Fashion: Focus on False Anglicisms and False Gallicisms,” 202.

15. Maria Catricalà, “Il linguaggio della moda,” in *Lingua e identità. Una storia sociale dell’italiano*, ed. Pietro Trifone (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 82; Catricalà, “Linguaggio della moda,” 900; Giuseppe Sergio, “Mediatori e mediati: riflessioni sugli italianismi di moda in francese, inglese e tedesco,” *Lingue Culture Mediazioni – Languages Cultures Mediation*, vol. 1, nn. 1–2 (2014): 176, <https://www.ledonline.it/index.php/LCM-Journal/article/view/743/651>.

16. Cristiano Furiassi, “False Italianisms in English Dictionaries and Corpora,” in *Language Contact around the Globe*, eds. Amei Koll-Stobbe and Sebastian Knospe (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 47.

17. Cristiano Furiassi, “Italianisms in Non-Native Varieties of English: A Corpus-Driven Approach,” in *Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Dilemmas, Ambiguities, Directions. Papers from the 24<sup>th</sup> AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica) Conference. Rome, 1–3 October 2009*, vol. 2, eds. Gabriella Di Martino, Linda Lombardo and Stefania Nuccorini (Roma: Edizioni Q, 2011), 455; Cristiano Furiassi, “False Italianisms in British and American English: A Meta-Lexicographic Analysis,” in *Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> EURALEX International Congress, Oslo, 7–11 August 2012*, eds. Ruth Vatvedt Fjeld and Julie Matilde Torjusen (Oslo: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies/University of Oslo, 2012), 775. For a discussion of the various labels alternatively assigned over time to “false Anglicisms,” “false Gallicisms” and “false Italianisms” in the multilingual linguistic literature on the topic, see Cristiano Furiassi, “False Borrowings and False Anglicisms: Issues in Terminology,” in *Pseudo-English: Studies on False Anglicisms in Europe*, eds. Cristiano Furiassi and Henrik Gottlieb (Boston, MA/Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015), 257–60.

from 5 mm to 1 cm at ground level, though “sometimes flared out a little at the tip.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, “named for a type of dagger with a slender blade, the stiletto initially took its name from the narrow girth, rather than the height, of the heel.”<sup>19</sup>

The origin of stiletto heels and the name of the inventor have long been object of debate. For example, Kelly holds that “some say Salvatore Ferragamo is the mastermind behind the iconic heel”;<sup>20</sup> conversely, Semmelhack considers that “the earliest narrow all-steel heel, the precursor to the invention of the stiletto, was designed by André Perugia in 1951.”<sup>21</sup> On the whole, while their predecessors peeked out on the Western world of fashion in the early 1930s,<sup>22</sup> stiletto heels took proper shape in 1953 thanks to the inventive effort of French shoemaker Roger Vivier, “the Fabergé of Footwear”<sup>23</sup> and “father to the Aiguille stiletto,” who “allowed women all over the world to achieve new heights.”<sup>24</sup> As a result of post-war technology, “that allowed designers to use metal-reinforced shafts that would support a thinner heel,”<sup>25</sup> stilettos, first launched on catwalks in the fall of 1954, were commercialized by the house of Christian Dior.<sup>26</sup>

Both a blessing and a curse for women, the “dangerous” but “deliciously smug” stilettos marked the “return to frivolity” associated with “postwar style.”<sup>27</sup> As trends come and go, especially on the fashion scene, even stiletto heels, very popular in the late 1950s, especially in Italy,<sup>28</sup> “went out of fashion for a while, but have made a comeback on the ramps since the turn of the new century,”<sup>29</sup> with early revivals in the 1970s and 1990s.<sup>30</sup> Actually, stiletto heels are now also known as “needle heels,”<sup>31</sup> possibly after Manolo Blahnik introduced the stiletto-like “Needle” in 1974.<sup>32</sup>

The unrivalled success of stiletto heels is probably ascribable to their being able to satisfy women’s ancestral appetite for uniqueness and sameness simultaneously, or, in Simmel’s words, “the desire for change and contrast” and, at the same time, “the demand for social adaptation.”<sup>33</sup> From the onset, stiletto heels were seen as “the epitome of style”<sup>34</sup> and immediately became a symbol of “sex appeal,” “status,” “lux-

18. Meredith Paslawsky, “Italian Fashion: The History of High Heels,” *Life in Italy*, (June 27, 2018), <https://www.lifeinitaly.com/fashion/high-heels>.

19. Rachelle Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 67.

20. Tara Kelly, “‘Roger Vivier: Process to Perfection’: Bata Shoe Museum Exhibit Sheds Light on History of the Stiletto,” *HuffPost*, (May 14, 2012), <https://www.huffpost.com>.

21. Elizabeth Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 60.

22. Debra N. Mancoff and Lindsay J. Bosch, *Icons of Beauty: Art, Culture, and the Image of Women*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2010), 242; Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style*, 60, 198, 212; Camille Paglia, “Feminist Camille Paglia on the Allure of the Stiletto Heel,” *The Australian Financial Review Magazine*, (May 4, 2018), <https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/fashion-and-style/camille-paglia-on-the-allure-of-the-stiletto-heel-20180403-hoyaeb>.

23. Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 76.

24. *Roger Vivier* (2019), <https://www.rogervivier.com>.

25. Camilla Morton, *Fashion A-Z* (London: The Business of Fashion, 2019), <https://www.businessoffashion.com/education/fashion-az>.

26. Anna Canonica-Sawina, *Le parole della moda – Piccolo dizionario dell’eleganza* (Firenze: Franco Cesati, 2016), 172.

27. Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 64–70.

28. Georgina O’Hara, *The Encyclopaedia of Fashion* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 234.

29. Paslawsky, “Italian Fashion: The History of High Heels.”

30. Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style*, 206, 212.

31. Kelly, “‘Roger Vivier: Process to Perfection’: Bata Shoe Museum Exhibit Sheds Light on History of the Stiletto”; Catricalà, “Global fashion e nuovi spazi linguistici.”

32. Mancoff and Bosch, *Icons of Beauty: Art, Culture, and the Image of Women*, 242.

33. Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *International Quarterly*, vol. 10 (October 1904): 133.

34. Alex Games, *Balderdash & Piffle: One Sandwich Short of a Dog’s Dinner. The Stories behind our most Intriguing Words and Phrases* (London: BBC Books, 2007), 49.

ury,” “caprice” and “a certain class.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, they have also been defined by Steele as “the classic ‘bitchy’ shoe,”<sup>36</sup> by Paglia as “modern woman’s most lethal social weapon”<sup>37</sup> and by Semmelhack as “hypersexualized items of dress that specifically reference fetish and the sex trade.”<sup>38</sup> Being seductive to the extreme, hence a fetish “meant for admiring, *not* walking,”<sup>39</sup> stilettos have been—and still are—often linked to the archetype of the “femme fatale”<sup>40</sup> and the iconicity of the “dominatrix.”<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, fetish, as a concept, should be conceived both as “a force, a supernatural property” and as “a *fabrication*, an artifact, a labor of appearances and signs.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the connection with domination is explained by Paglia, who refers back to the stiletto as a weapon employed by bloodthirsty assassins in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance:

The stiletto’s historic association with deception and treachery thus gives an aura of sadistic glamour to the modern high heel, whose stem contains a concealed shaft of steel. Woman as seducer or seduced can also lance and castrate.<sup>43</sup>

A different perspective on the relationship between weaponry and stiletto heels is adopted by Semmelhack, who suggests that the word *stiletto*, which appeared in a caption on a 1952 American issue of *Vogue*, did not specifically denote the stiletto heel but generally referred to the “sleek, modern, elegant design in the early 1950s” inspired by the name of a US Air Force experimental jet aircraft, indeed called Douglas X-3 Stiletto, whose first flight took place on October 15, 1952.<sup>44</sup>

Undeniably, not only are stilettos objects of fashion but they are also items of fetish deeply pleasurable for both sexes, this apparent interrelation being illustrated by Steele, who states that “[t]he shoe combines masculine and feminine imagery on many levels, from the stiletto heel penetrating the fetishist’s body to the foot sliding into an open shoe.”<sup>45</sup> On a final note, it is worth considering that at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century stiletto heels, “a supremely eroticized form of footwear” deserving a “place in men’s pornography,” came to be identified also with transsexuality and cross-dressing.<sup>46</sup>

## A Lexicographic Analysis of *Stiletto*

The approach adopted to study *stiletto* is almost exclusively lexicographic. Primarily in order to trace the semantic transformation of *stiletto*, from *dagger* to *heel*, hence to a unique type of female shoes, which is supposedly ascribable to English, monolingual dictionaries of the English language were initially consulted. Besides contributing to ascertaining its etymology, English monolingual dictionaries proved helpful in providing synonyms or, more appropriately, quasi-synonyms, of *stiletto*, alongside showing orthographic variants. Then, with the purpose of verifying whether *stiletto* reentered Italian with a new meaning assigned to it in English, monolingual dictionaries of the Italian language were investigated.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, keeping in mind that stiletto heels are widely recognized as a French invention,

35. Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 68–70.

36. Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 113.

37. Paglia, “Feminist Camille Paglia on the Allure of the Stiletto Heel.”

38. Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style*, 151.

39. Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 76.

40. Elizabeth Semmelhack, *Heights of Fashion: A History of the Elevated Shoe* (Reading: Periscope, 2008), 48; Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 55.

41. Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power*, 113.

42. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 91.

43. Paglia, “Feminist Camille Paglia on the Allure of the Stiletto Heel.”

44. Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style*, 197.

45. Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power*, 113.

46. Semmelhack, *Shoes: The Meaning of Style*, 201, 220.

47. I would like to express my gratitude to Carla Marelo for her precious suggestions on invaluable lexicographic material.

monolingual dictionaries of the French language were analyzed. Lastly, a comparison between monolingual and specialized dictionaries, inclusive of fashion encyclopedias, in all the languages considered was carried out to prove that *stiletto* is not relegated to domain-specific lexis but has *de facto* enjoyed larger circulation in the general language; Italian-English, French-English and Italian-French bilingual dictionaries were also examined in pursuance of plausible translation equivalents of *stiletto*.<sup>48</sup>

## Monolingual Dictionaries

Here follows a list of the English monolingual dictionaries considered: *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHD)*, *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (CALD)*, *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary (COBUILD)*, *Collins English Dictionary (CED)*, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)*, *Macmillan Dictionary Online (MDO)*, *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (WNCD)*, *Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (WNWCD<sub>4</sub>)*, *Webster's New World College Dictionary, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (WNWCD<sub>5</sub>)*, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged (WTNID)* and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged (Merriam-Webster)*; *The Oxford Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases (ODFWP)* and *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Foreign Words in English (WDFWE)* were also looked up. As for Italian monolingual dictionaries, the following were analyzed: *Dizionario della lingua italiana (Palazzi-Folena)*, *Dizionario della lingua italiana (Tommaseo-Bellini)*, *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana (DELI)*, *Dizionario italiano Sabatini Coletti (DISC)*, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana (GDLI)*, *Grande dizionario di italiano (GDI)*, *Grande dizionario Hoepli italiano (Gabrielli)*, *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso (GDU)*, *Nuovo Devoto-Oli 2020 — Il vocabolario dell'italiano contemporaneo (Devoto-Oli)*, *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini (TLIO)*, *Il Vocabolario Treccani (Treccani)* and *Lo Zingarelli 2020 — Vocabolario della lingua italiana (Zingarelli)*; in addition, *Dizionario di italianismi in francese, inglese, tedesco (DIFIT)* was also taken into account. The French monolingual dictionaries consulted are *Dictionnaire de français Larousse en ligne (Larousse)*, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française (DAF)*, *Dictionnaire français lintern@ute (lintern@ute)*, *Dictionnaire Hachette édition 2020 (Hachette)*, *Le petit Larousse illustré (Petit Larousse)*, *Le petit Robert (Petit Robert)* and *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé (TLFi)*.

Although it was not found in *WDFWE*, *WNCD* and *WTNID*, *stiletto*, the shortening of the compound *stiletto heels*, is included in all the remaining English monolingual dictionaries and defined as follows:<sup>49</sup> “[a] shoe or boot with a stiletto heel” (*AHD*), “a woman’s shoe with a narrow, high heel” (*CALD*), “a very high heel on a woman’s shoe, tapering to a very narrow tip” (*CED*), “women’s shoes that have high, very narrow heels” (*COBUILD*), “a woman’s shoe that has a very high thin heel [...] the heel of a stiletto shoe” (*LDOCE*), “a thin high heel on a woman’s shoe [...] a shoe that has a thin high heel” (*MDO*), “a shoe with a stiletto heel [...] a high thin heel on women’s shoes that is narrower than a spike heel” (*Merriam-Webster*), “a woman’s shoe with a very high narrow heel; the heel on such a shoe” (*OALD*), “a very narrow, high heel on women’s shoes, fashionable esp. in the 1950s; a shoe with such a heel” (*OED*), “spike heel” (*WNWCD<sub>4</sub>*) and “a high, very thin heel on a woman’s shoe” (*WNWCD<sub>5</sub>*).

As regards possible English synonyms of *stiletto heels*, English monolingual dictionaries propose *spike heel* (*CED*, *OALD*, *OED*, *WNWCD<sub>4</sub>*), *spike heels* (*COBUILD*) and *spikes* (*AHD*, *Merriam-Webster*). *COBUILD* data also adduce that *spike heels* is typical of American English usage as an alternative to *stiletto heels*, more widespread in British English (*CED*). Additionally, it is important to consider that *COBUILD*, *OALD* and *WNWCD<sub>4</sub>* view *stiletto*, the shortening of *stiletto heels*, as characteristic of British English.

48. For reasons of space, all the dictionaries referred to in this analysis and listed in the following sections are quoted in the main text by means of acronyms or abbreviations widely recognized in the lexicographic literature; their complete details are specified in the reference section.

49. The entry *stiletto*, indicating female shoes, is missing from *WNCD*: this may be due to the fact that this dictionary was published in 1977 and, possibly, by that date *stiletto*, as the elliptical form of *stiletto heel*, had not yet made its way into American English dictionaries. Similarly, *WTNID*, published in 1961, includes neither *stiletto* nor *stiletto heel*, referring to a type of shoes: this might suggest that *stiletto* was still a recent coinage in American English even in the 1960s.

With respect to its earliest written attestation, according to the *OED*, the compound *stiletto heel* was encountered in the *Vidette-Messenger*, based in Valparaiso, Indiana, on April 20, 1931; instead, the form *stilettoes* surfaced in the American press in an advertisement published in the Ohio-based *Newark Advocate* on March 8, 1953. As far as the British press is concerned, Bergstein maintains that *stiletto heel* made its debut in *Picture Post*, a photojournalism magazine based in London, in 1953;<sup>50</sup> nonetheless, Games claims that *stilettoes* made its first appearance in London's magazine *New Statesman* in 1959.<sup>51</sup>

As far as Italian monolingual dictionaries are concerned, *stiletto*, denoting *stiletto heels*, is only recorded in *GDI*, as “tacco a spillo; anche, scarpa con questo tacco,”<sup>52</sup> *GDU*, as “tacco a spillo [...] estens., calzatura con tale tipo di tacco,”<sup>53</sup> and *Zingarelli*, as “(est.) Tacco a spillo.”<sup>54</sup> The remaining dictionaries, with the notable exception of *TLIO* and *Tommaseo-Bellini*, where *stiletto* is not found, only record the original Italian meaning of *stiletto*, that is *dagger*.<sup>55</sup> Considering French monolingual dictionaries, except for *l'intern@ute*, a very recent online lexicographic resource, which defines *stiletto* as “[c]haussure dont le talon est très effilé et dont la hauteur dépasse 10 centimètres,”<sup>56</sup> no other dictionary includes the entry *stiletto* in its wordlist.<sup>57</sup>

Derived from Latin *stilus* and, subsequently, Italian *stilo* with the addition of the diminutive suffix *-etto*,<sup>58</sup> *stiletto* first appeared in written Italian in 1416 to denote a “[s]pecie di pugnale, con ferro a sezione quadra o triangolare, molto aguzzo” (*Zingarelli*);<sup>59</sup> as a genuine Italianism,<sup>60</sup> it then entered British English in 1611 to refer to “[a] short dagger with a blade thick in proportion to its breadth” (*OED*). More than three hundred years later, exactly in 1931, American English witnessed the appearance of *stiletto* as part of the compound *stiletto heel*, meaning, via metonymy, “a very narrow, high heel on women's shoes” (*OED*); two decades down the line, in 1953,<sup>61</sup> the compound *stiletto heel* was shortened and pluralized to *stilettoes* (or *stilettoes*) to identify, via synecdoche, “a shoe with such a heel” (*OED*). In 2004, with a fifty-year delay, *stiletto* was eventually restituted to the Italian language, where it initially belonged, though with this unexpectedly new, English-inspired semantic shade (*Zingarelli*).<sup>62</sup>

## Bilingual Dictionaries

The Italian-English bilingual dictionaries examined are *Cambridge English-Italian Dictionary (CEID)*, *Collins Italian Dictionary (CID)*, *Grande dizionario Hazon di inglese (Hazon)*, *Grande dizionario Hoepli inglese (Picchi)*, *Il nuovo Oxford-Paravia – Il dizionario inglese-italiano italiano inglese (Oxford-Paravia)*, *PASSWORD English-Italian Learner's Dictionary (PASSWORD-IT)*, *Il Ragazzini 2019 – Dizionario inglese-italiano italiano-inglese (Ragazzini)* and *Il Sansoni inglese – Dizionario*

50. Bergstein, *Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us*, 68.

51. Games, *Balderdash & Piffle: One Sandwich Short of a Dog's Dinner. The Stories behind our most Intriguing Words and Phrases*, 50.

52. En. “spike heel; also, a shoe with this type of heel.”

53. En. “spike heel [...] ext., footwear with such a heel.”

54. En. “(ext.) Spike heel.”

55. The absence of the entry *stiletto* from *Tommaseo-Bellini* is justified by the fact that the dictionary wordlist itself stops at letter G.

56. En. “a shoe with a very thin heel whose height exceeds 10 centimeters.”

57. The absence of *stiletto* from *DAL* is motivated by its wordlist ending at the entry *Savoir*.

58. Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London/New York: Routledge, 1977), 847.

59. En. “[t]ype of very sharp dagger whose blade has either a square or triangular section.” According to *GDU*, *stiletto*, meaning “arma bianca simile a un pugnale con lama molto sottile e acuminata,” En. “stabbing weapon similar to a dagger with a very thin and sharp blade,” is first encountered in Italian in 1521.

60. Philip Durkin, *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 372.

61. Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2001–2019), <http://www.etymonline.com>.

62. It must be observed that *GDLI*, at the entry *microtunica*, shows an example of *stiletto*, within the phrase *tacchi a stiletto*, appearing in *La Repubblica*, one of the best-selling Italian newspapers, on January 25, 1991.



*English-Italian italiano-inglese (Sansoni)*. The French-English bilingual dictionaries considered are the following: *Collins Robert French Dictionary (Collins-Robert)*, *Dictionnaire français-anglais Larousse en ligne (Larousse-EN)*, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Terminologique (GDT)*, *The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary – Le Grand Dictionnaire Hachette-Oxford (Oxford-Hachette)* and *PASSWORD English-French Learner's Dictionary (PASSWORD-FR)*. Italian-French bilingual dictionaries were also investigated, namely *Il Boch – Dizionario francese-italiano italiano-francese (Boch)*, *Dictionnaire français-italien Larousse en ligne (Larousse-IT)*, *Dizionario Hoepli francese (Bouvier)*, *Grande dizionario di francese (GDF)* and *Il nuovo Hachette-Paravia – Il dizionario francese/italiano italiano/francese (Hachette-Paravia)*.

In the English-Italian section of the bilingual dictionaries interrogated, the lemma *stiletto* is provided with the following translation equivalents, hence reinforcing its standardness in the English language: *tacco a spillo (CEID, CID, Hazon, Oxford-Paravia, PASSWORD-IT, Picchi)*, *tacchi a spillo (CEID, Sansoni)*, *scarpa con tacco a spillo (CID, Hazon, Oxford-Paravia, PASSWORD-IT, Picchi, Ragazzini)* and *scarpe con i tacchi a spillo (Sansoni)*. As a further matter, it is worth mentioning that in the Italian-English section of all the bilingual dictionaries consulted only the original meaning of *stiletto* is maintained, hence English translation equivalents are limited to *dagger*, the 'true' Italianism *stiletto* itself and *stylet*:<sup>63</sup> this finding testifies to the rarity of *stiletto*, designating female shoes, in the Italian language.

The lemma *stiletto*, referring to an item of footwear, is found in the English-French section of all the bilingual dictionaries consulted, thus corroborating its English origin: the suggested translation equivalents are *talon aiguille (Collins-Robert, GDT, Larousse-EN, Oxford-Hachette, PASSWORD-FR)*, *talons aiguilles (Larousse-EN)*, *chaussure à talon (PASSWORD-FR)* and *chaussures à talons (Larousse-EN)*. Vice-versa, *stiletto*, relating to a type of knife, is included only in the English-French section of *Larousse-EN, Oxford-Hachette* and *PASSWORD-FR*, which indicate *stylet* as the French equivalent; the entry *stiletto* is never encountered in the French-English section of the above-mentioned dictionaries.

Among Italian-French bilingual dictionaries, only *Boch, GDF* and *Hachette-Paravia* include the entry *stiletto*, solely meaning *dagger*, in their Italian-French section and provide *stylet* as the French translation equivalent. Moreover, *stiletto* is never listed in the French-Italian section of the dictionaries inspected, validating the hypothesis that *stiletto* does not exist as an Italianism in French.

It must be remembered that English *spike heel, spike heels* and *spikes*, Italian *tacco a spillo, tacchi a spillo, scarpa con tacco a spillo* and *scarpe con i tacchi a spillo* as well as French *talon aiguille, talons aiguilles, chaussure à talon* and *chaussures à talons* are nothing but near-synonyms of *stiletto heels*, unable to fully render their specificity and rather precise characteristics. Only *Merriam-Webster* emphasizes the difference by specifying that a *stiletto heel* is "a high thin heel on women's shoes that is narrower than a spike heel."

Finally, by merging the data retrieved from English monolingual dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries, a few remarks on the orthographic variants of *stiletto* can be made. As for the plural of the noun *stiletto*, originally a modifier in the phrase *stiletto heels*, *AHD, LDOCE, Merriam-Webster, OALD, ODFWP, PASSWORD-FR, PASSWORD-IT, Ragazzini, WNCD, WNWCD<sub>4</sub>* and *WNWCD<sub>5</sub>* attest to the existence of both *stilettoes* and *stilettoes*. Perhaps due to its more normative approach, *OED* exclusively acknowledges the plural *stilettoes*; alternatively, *CALD, CEID, COBUILD* and *Larousse-EN* only provide *stilettoes* as the acceptable English plural.

## Specialized Dictionaries and Encyclopedias of Fashion

The English specialized reference tools explored are *The Dictionary of Fashion History (DFH)*, *The Encyclopaedia of Fashion (EF)*, *Fashion A-Z*, *The Fashion Dictionary (FD)* and *Fashionpedia – The Visual Dictionary of Fashion Design (Fashionpedia)*. As far as Italian technical sources are concerned, *Dizionario della moda (DdM)*, *Enciclopedia della moda (EdM)*, *Modabolario – Parole e immagini*

63. It is curious to note that the entry *stiletto* is not at all included in the Italian-English section of *CEID*.

della moda (*Modabolario*), *Le parole della moda – Piccolo dizionario dell’eleganza* (*PdM*) and *VOGUE-ABOLARIO – Le parole della moda* (*VOGUEABOLARIO*) were surveyed; the following bilingual dictionaries of fashion were also taken into consideration: *Dizionario dell’industria tessile e della moda – Dictionnaire de l’industrie textile et de la mode* (*DITM*), regarding Italian and French, and *Dizionario della moda inglese/italiano italiano/inglese* (*DdM2*), relating to Italian and English. The French specialized works referred to are *DICO MODE – La mode de A à Z* (*DICO MODE*), *Dictionnaire de la mode* (*DdM3*), *Dictionnaire de mode – Fashion Dictionary* (*DMFD*), *Dictionnaire international de la mode* (*DIM*) and *Dictionnaire visuel de la mode* (*DVM*).

All English fashion-specific publications, except for *FD*, include the entry *stiletto*: *DFH*, under the entry *stiletto heels*, refers to it as “[t]he high, tapered heel of a shoe or sandal, thought to resemble the sharp narrow blade of an Italian dagger known as a ‘stiletto’”; *EF* describes *stiletto* as “[h]igh, narrow heel which originated in Italy during the 1950s. It was made of nylon and plastic, which often covered a steel core.” More detailed definitions are provided in *Fashion A-Z* and *Fashionpedia* respectively:

Stiletto heels are high and slender, tapering to a sharp point on women’s shoes and boots. Their creation was tied to the advent of technology that allowed designers to use metal-reinforced shafts that would support a thinner heel. The phrase was first associated with shoes in the 1930s (they were named after the stiletto dagger), and conjures up an image of the femme fatale, a cocktail of fetish and feminine.<sup>64</sup>

Named after the stiletto dagger, owing to the resemblance in its silhouette, the stiletto heel refers to a type of thin, narrow heel usually found on women’s boots and shoes. Favoured for the optical illusion it gives—longer and more slender legs, tinier feet, greater height and more flattering proportions—the stiletto is often featured in popular culture partly due to its seductive image.<sup>65</sup>

Considering Italian specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias, *stiletto*, which is absent from *DITM*, *DdM1*, *EdM* and *VOGUEABOLARIO*, is in fact recorded in *Modabolario*, under the entry *tacco*, as “[u]n tacco con il soprattacco molto piccolo”<sup>66</sup> and in *PdM* as “1. tacco a spillo, sottilissimo [...]; 2. scarpa femminile décolleté [*sic*] con tacco sottile, appuntito e con un’altezza minima di 5 cm.”<sup>67</sup> The English-Italian section of *DdM2* lists *stiletto heel*—but neither *stiletto* nor *stilettoes/stilettoes*—and provides *tacco a spillo* as its Italian equivalent; in the Italian-English section of *DdM2*, from which the lemma *stiletto* is excluded, the entry *tacco a spillo* is inserted and *stiletto heel*, *spike heel* and *spikes* are suggested as English equivalents.

The French reference works on fashion taken into account do not record *stiletto*, with the due exception of *DICO MODE*, which defines it as follows:

Chaussure de femme dont la caractéristique est le talon fin et assez haut, sur lequel se juchent les belles élégantes. Il peut s’agir d’escarpins ou de bottes, la qualification étant en rapport avec la forme du talon.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, *stiletto*, alongside *stilettoes*, *stilettoes*, *stiletto heel* and *stiletto heels*, seems widely attested in English lexicographic sources, hence confirming that either the British or the American variety is the metaphorical well from which the neologism *stiletto* was drawn by Italian and—only very recently—French. As for the former, Italian dictionaries are reluctant to attest *stiletto* but still show its presence, with *Zingarelli* being the pioneer in recording it for the first time in the 2004 edition. Likewise, in this respect, *GDU* also acted as a trailblazer in the Italian lexicographic tradition: *stiletto*, which is not present

64. Morton, *Fashion A-Z*.

65. *Fashionpedia – The Visual Dictionary of Fashion Design* (Hong Kong: Fashionary International, 2019).

66. En. “[a] heel with a very narrow heelpiece [or heel seat].”

67. En. “1. very thin spike heel [...]; 2. female court shoe [or pump] with a thin pointy heel, whose minimum height is 5 cm.”

68. *DICO MODE – La mode de A à Z*, (2019), <http://www.dico-mode.com>. En. “A type of female footwear featuring slender and rather high heels on which elegant women stand. It could equally be a pair of shoes or boots, as their denomination solely depends on the shape of the heel.”

in the 2000 edition with the meaning “tacco a spillo,” En. “spike heel,” is in fact included—though marked as a low-frequency item and labeled “BU,” i.e. ‘basso uso’—in the 2007 edition. Differently, *GDI* only attests *stiletto* with this nuance in the 2010 edition.

As for the latter, with only few exceptions and in spite of their acclaimed French origin, stiletto heels are hardly ever referred to by the name of *stiletto* in the French lexicographic tradition. In this regard, it is striking that *Aiguille*, with capital *A*, and *Aiguille stiletto* are accounted for in the English version of the official *Roger Vivier* website, even though the French version substitutes them with *Aiguille* and *talon aiguille*.<sup>69</sup> All in all, the juxtaposition of *Aiguille* and *stiletto* on the *Roger Vivier* website, the French definitions provided by *DICO MODE* as well as *lintern@ute* and the existence of a French fashion magazine called *STILETTO*,<sup>70</sup> founded in 2004 by Laurence Benaïm, could be signs that the word itself is beginning to gain ground even in France.

## Classifying *Stiletto* in Linguistic Terms

At the outset an Italian word derived from Latin, *stiletto* emerges on the contemporary international lexicographic scenario as an Italianism in the English language; it then develops into a false Italianism, when the fashion-related meaning is added across the Atlantic, and eventually reappears in Italian—through English—as a reborrowing of quite recent discovery. Finally, again thanks to the intervention of the universally-acknowledged status of English, *stiletto* succeeds in entering other European and world languages as an internationalism.

### False Italianism

False Italianisms are independent lexical units generated by specific word-formation processes, either morpho-syntactic or semantic, created by non-Italian speakers in a non-Italian context.<sup>71</sup> The following definition by Furiassi, initially conceived for false Italianisms in the English language, can therefore be extended to false Italianisms in any (allegedly) recipient language:<sup>72</sup>

[...] false Italianisms, which formally mirror Italian orthographic patterns and do not comply with the orthographic norms of the English language, are Italian-looking words, i.e. words constituted by sequences of graphemes which are typical of the Italian language. From the perspective of morphology, false Italianisms should not be classified as adapted Italianisms since they are not morphologically adapted to the structure of the English language and maintain genuinely Italian features. Finally, from the semantic standpoint, unexpectedly new meanings—not present in Italian—are added to existing Italian words: the extension of meaning acquired inevitably jeopardizes comprehension for an Italian speaker, thus fostering the coinage of false Italianisms.<sup>73</sup>

Although *stiletto* may also be used in English—but apparently not in French—as a proper Italianism referring to “[...] a slender dagger with a blade thick in proportion to its breadth [...]” (*Merriam-Webster*), semantic extension, expansion or widening is at play in turning *stiletto* into a false Italianism.<sup>74</sup> Without doubt, the false Italianism *stiletto* is a word which has a genuine Italian form; however, once borrowed

69. *Roger Vivier*, (2019), <https://www.rogervivier.com>.

70. *STILETTO*, (2004–2019), <https://www.stiletto.fr>.

71. Cristiano Furiassi, *False Anglicisms in Italian* (Monza: Polimetrica, 2010), 67; Furiassi, “Italianisms in Non-Native Varieties of English: A Corpus-Driven Approach,” 454; Furiassi, “False Italianisms in British and American English: A Meta-Lexicographic Analysis,” 771.

72. For a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of false Italianisms in English, see Furiassi, “False Italianisms in English Dictionaries and Corpora.”

73. Furiassi, “False Italianisms in English Dictionaries and Corpora,” 49.

74. Laura Pinnavaia, *The Italian Borrowings in the Oxford English Dictionary: A Lexicographical, Linguistic and Cultural Analysis* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2001), 120.

into English, the fashion-related nuances attached to it make it acquire a new meaning, (conspicuously) distant from the meaning or meanings of its Italian etymon.

## Reborrowing

A reborrowing is a word which migrated from one language into another and eventually returned to the originating language, in which it maintained the original form but acquired a new meaning, different from the initial one.<sup>75</sup> Though not frequently, both authentic and false borrowings may be reinstated in their original donor language, hence giving birth to reborrowings.

The reborrowing of made-in-English false Italianisms into Italian is indeed restricted to few cases, namely *dildo*, *gondola* and *stiletto* itself.<sup>76</sup> The notion of *stiletto* as a reborrowing is also put forward by Sergio:

L'it. *stiletto* 'arma bianca simile a un pugnale' è passato all'inglese *stiletto heel* 'tacco a spillo; scarpa con tale tipo di tacco' (1959) per diffondersi in questo significato in tutto il mondo e anche, come riprestito, in Italia, dove si mostra di considerarlo come anglismo: su alcuni recenti numeri di «Vogue Italia» compare infatti in corsivo e al plurale prende la -s inglese (*stiletto*s, non *stiletto*ti).<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, as a lexical innovation coined in English by exploiting pseudo-Italian and later restored into 'real' Italian, *stiletto* is a quintessential example of reborrowing and, to the author's knowledge, the only one occurring in the semantic field of fashion.

## Internationalism

Although it is mostly Anglophone fashion terms which tend to spread globally, the false Italianism *stiletto* has now become a fully-fledged "internationalism," that is a word which has the same (or a similar) form and the same meaning in various languages of different language families.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, it is through the medium of English that *stiletto* managed to circulate all over the world. For instance, data retrieved from the *DIFIT* confirm that *stiletto*, for ladies shoes, entered German via English. Furthermore, Sergio asserts that, in addition to German, the English language contributed to the proliferation of the internationalism *stiletto* even in so-called 'exotic' languages—at least from a Eurocentric perspective—such as Chinese and Japanese.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

By emphasizing the multilingual dimension of fashion lexis, this piece of research confirmed that the global success of the iconic stiletto heels turned *stiletto* from a specialized term employed by professionals and fashionistas into an internationalism currently known and used also by non-connoisseurs, not only in American English, perhaps its birthplace, but in other languages as well, thus allowing this false Italianism to propagate and cross both linguistic and cultural boundaries.

75. Furiassi, "False Italianisms in English Dictionaries and Corpora," 57.

76. Furiassi, "False Italianisms in English Dictionaries and Corpora," 57–9.

77. Giuseppe Sergio, "Italianismi di moda nelle lingue del mondo," in *L'italiano e la creatività: marchi e costumi, moda e design*, eds. Paolo D'Achille and Giuseppe Patota (Firenze: Accademia della Crusca/goWare, 2016), 62. En. It. *stiletto* 'stabbing weapon similar to a dagger' became *stiletto heel* in English 'spike heel; a shoe with such a heel' (1959), thus spreading with this meaning all over the world and, as a reborrowing, even to Italy, where it is considered an Anglicism: in some recent issues of «Vogue Italia» it indeed appears in italics and takes the English -s in its plural form (*stiletto*s, not *stiletto*ti).

78. Alessio Petralli, "Si dice così in tutta Europa," *Italiano e oltre*, vol. 7, no. 2 (March–April 1992): 74, [http://giscel.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITALIANO-OLTRE-1992\\_2.pdf](http://giscel.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITALIANO-OLTRE-1992_2.pdf); Alessio Petralli, "Tendenze europee nel lessico italiano. Internazionalismi: problemi di metodo e nuove parole d'Europa," in *Linee di tendenza dell'italiano contemporaneo*, eds. Bruno Moretti, Dario Petrini and Sandro Bianconi (Roma: Bulzoni, 1992), 121.

79. Sergio, "Italianismi di moda nelle lingue del mondo," 61.

Due to the overt and covert prestige conferred on the donor language at issue, namely Italian, by speakers of other recipient languages, French and English being a case in point, the false Italianism *stiletto* is perceived as an attractive manifestation of language contact. Bearing witness to the fact that the creative potential of language users is virtually endless, all the more so in the world of fashion, the reinterpretation of a genuine Italian lexical item into a false Italianism is the result of a spontaneous but conscious act performed by designers and stylists who managed to forge foreign lexical material to their liking. Unquestionably, alongside etymologically justified reasons, the taste for the exotic, the charm of the foreign and the glamorous quirk of playing with language are the core motivations for the coinage of new terms in fashion, *stiletto* being a prototypical case.

The uniquely appealing flair of its lexicon is certainly ascribable to the very nature of fashion itself, to its ever-changing trends at vertigo-like speed and to the consistent fluidity of the globalization and glocalization processes it has recently undergone. However, it is also made possible by its permeability to social and linguistic phenomena that fosters constant manipulation of words such as *stiletto*, which, at one point, managed to become recognizable on the world scene. The present findings are hoped to demonstrate the intrinsically hybrid nature of the vocabulary of world fashion, governed by the dynamics which lie underneath unpredictable encounters in a cosmopolitan *milieu*.

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