

## Intersections, Reflections, and Transformations in “Fashion as Material Culture”: A Conference Report

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Introduced and hosted as a postgraduate conference in 2012 at Çankaya University, *The International Conference on Language, Literature & Culture* is an annual international conference, organised by a different university each year, to enable senior and emerging scholars to engage in innovative theoretical discussions and scholarly debates. In 2023, when we celebrated the centenary of the Republic of Türkiye, *The 10th International Conference on Language, Literature & Culture* was co-hosted by Gümüşhane University (Türkiye) Ankara Science University (Türkiye), and University of Évora (Portugal). *The 10th LLC* was held as an online conference on 15-16 September 2023. The international conference was a peer-reviewed academic forum for the exchange and communication of scholarship in the fields of language, literary studies, translation and cultural studies, aiming to provide a venue for scholars and graduate students working at the boundaries of these disciplines.

The theme of *The 10th LLC* was “Fashion as Material Culture.” The conference examined and explored the impact and role of fashion within material culture. The theme of the conference encompassed various interdisciplinary studies with different cultural materialist stances to expand the concept of fashion to include topics such as fashion and literature, fashion and class codes, fashion and discourse, fashion and Anthropocene, fashion and media/social media, fashion and economics, fashion and politics, fashion and postcolonial studies, fashion and language, fashion and art, fashion and translation, and fashion and cultural, gender and sexual identities. This engaging conference theme was well aligned with the multidisciplinary nature of the event. Studying fashion as material culture, the panellists contributed to the existing literature on the relationship between fashion and material culture and suggested that fashion goes beyond just clothes since it shapes, determines, and reveals our identities and our cultural values. Moreover, the presentations demonstrated that fashion mirrors world history and socio-economic and political developments. Hence, the conference delved into the various dimensions of fashion as material culture by providing a platform for multidisciplinary and intellectual discussions on fashion’s significance in influencing our lives, choices, interactions, behaviours, and identities. Through original and creative ideas and presentations, the conference paved the way for a productive and stimulating exchange of ideas and provided new horizons about fashion’s importance as a component of material culture. It also enhanced our

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*CUJHSS* (ISSN 1309-6761) June 2024, 18/1: pp. 201-206. Received April 30, 2024; Accepted June 4, 2024

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understanding of fashion and the role of fashion in comprehending the discursive and ideological relations formulated and reproduced in societies.

The conference offered several enlightening and interesting studies on fashion as material culture. It hosted 21 sessions under 5 main topics: Fashion and Identity, Fashion and Literature, Fashion and Language, Fashion Culture, and Fashion and Translation. Each panellist provided insightful and compelling arguments on the conference's main theme and topics.

The plenary sessions of the conference highlighted the complex relationship between fashion and identity from diverse scholarly perspectives. Professor Abby Lillethun from Montclair State University (USA) explored the multifaceted nature of fashion as material culture and drew analogies between the spinning of fibers into yarns and the interdisciplinary synthesis of fashion studies as well as touching upon memory, trade, and the human body's interaction with textiles. Associate Professor Dr. Şebnem Düzgün from Ankara Science University (Turkiye) examined the Neo-Palladian architecture in Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* as a reflection of British national identity and emphasized simplicity and classical aesthetics as a response to Baroque excesses. Lastly, Associate Professor Dr. Sümeyra Buran from the University of Florida (USA) focused on posthuman fashion, inspired by posthumanist thinkers, examining how fashion transcends traditional human boundaries through technological and material innovations, as seen in the works of designers like Iris van Herpen and Alexander McQueen. Collectively, plenary speakers underscored fashion's role in shaping and reflecting cultural, national, and posthuman identities through architectural, material, and aesthetic transformations.

In the sessions on "Fashion and Literature," numerous scholars explored the intersections between fashion and literary texts, and how sartorial choices in literary works reflected broader socio-cultural dynamics was the major concern. Başak Demirhan (Boğaziçi University, Turkiye) investigated the interplay between fashion and abolitionist politics in Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Equiano's use of fashion as cultural capital underscored his transition from slavery to intellectual abolitionist and exemplified how European clothing and grooming practices enabled him to navigate and manipulate societal structures to assert black agency and subjectivity. Similarly, Emma C. Johnson (Michigan Technological University, USA) examined fashion descriptions in long 18th-century literature to highlight the shifting class and racial dynamics during revolutionary periods. Focusing on works like Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* and Belisario's *Character Sketches*, Johnson elucidated how fashion within literature served as a reflection of societal anxieties and aspirations, particularly among Creole women in the West Indies.

Dilek Kantar (Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkiye) analyzed Daniel Defoe's *Roxana*, and focused on how the protagonist used fashion and clothing to navigate and survive the socio-economic constraints of 18th-century England. Roxana's strategic use of different garments and accessories, such as Turkish and Quaker dresses, illustrated her manipulation of identity and status to challenge patriarchal limitations and achieve autonomy. In a similar vein, Yağmur Sönmez Demir (Heidelberg University, Germany and Çankaya University, Turkiye) investigated the use of garments and ornaments as a means of identity creation in Defoe's *Roxana* and Fielding's *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*. Demir posited these protagonists as employing fashion to transgress social boundaries and asserting their autonomy in a patriarchal society.

Nisa Harika Güzel Köşker (Ankara University, Türkiye) explored the role of fashion and fabrics as a form of agency in early 20th-century America. This study highlighted how women utilized textiles and clothing not merely as adornment but as a means to assert their identities and navigate societal expectations during a time of significant cultural and economic changes. Krisztina Kitti Tóth (Budapest Metropolitan University, Hungary) analyzed Virginia Woolf’s representation of clothing as active agents in her literary works. Through concepts like “frock consciousness” and “distributed personhood,” Tóth argued that Woolf’s characters used fashion to express their agency and negotiate social relations, thereby revealing the intricate connection between attire and personal identity in Woolf’s narratives.

Nesrin Koç (Mudanya University, Türkiye) examined Jean Rhys’s preoccupation with fashion as a means of self-fashioning. In *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys’s protagonists used fashionable clothing to navigate the social and emotional landscapes of early 20th-century urban spaces and such themes of material culture as colonialism, and patriarchy. Elif Güvendi Yalçın (Gümüşhane University, Türkiye) discussed the role of fashion in expressing postcolonial identities in V. S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*. Yalçın’s analysis highlighted how characters used fashion to assert their cultural identity and resist or continue colonial legacies via transforming fashion into a tool for empowerment and self-representation in postcolonial contexts. Esra Ünlü Çimen (Çankırı Karatekin University, Türkiye) critiqued ageism in Noël Coward’s play *The Vortex*, and she underscored how fashion reflected and challenged societal attitudes towards aging. Through the characters’ perceptions on such concepts as beautiful, the ideal beauty, personal choices related to the physical appearance, Çimen demonstrated the intersection of fashion, identity, and societal expectations in the context of age and aging.

Ahmet Uruk (Gümüşhane University, Türkiye) explored the commodification of food and its intersection with fashion trends in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. Uruk argued that food served as a material and cultural signifier that reflects the diasporic identity and the influence of capitalist consumerism on personal and social identity formation. Elif Derya Şenduran (Ufuk University, Türkiye) examined the economic implications of fashion in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*. Şenduran highlighted how characters like Becky Sharp used fashion to navigate social hierarchies and economic challenges, illustrating the interplay between fashion choices and economic strategies in the novel.

Sema Canlı (Başkent University, Türkiye) analyzed the role of attire and color codes in dystopian narratives, *Brave New World* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Canlı explored how these novels used fashion to symbolize social control and oppression and underlined the function of clothing and colors as tools for enforcing conformity and erasing individuality. Seher Özsert (İstanbul Nişantaşı University, Türkiye) also compared the use of fashion as a surveillance mechanism in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Hunger Games* series. Özsert’s study drew on postmodern surveillance theories to analyze how clothing and colors in these dystopian worlds enforced control and manipulation, reflecting broader themes of power and identity.

Özlem Ulucan (Bingöl University, Türkiye) examined the role of material culture in the transformation from cultural heritage to a fashionable version in Alice Walker’s *Everyday Use* and drew attention to the role of material culture in identity formation. Ulucan’s foci highlighted how fashion and material objects functioned as carriers of cultural memory and identity within the African American community. Selena Özbaş (Yeni Yüzyıl University, Türkiye) explored the use of sumptuary laws and discursive practices in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

Özbaş argued that clothing in the play functioned as a tool for social commentary and identity construction, exceptionality, and performance.

Erkin Kıryaman (Mustafa Kemal University, Türkiye) addressed the fashion and identity of the “New Woman” in the late Victorian era. Kıryaman examined how the New Woman’s clothing choices challenged traditional gender roles and social norms, which overall contributed to the redefinition of female identity in Victorian society. Rabia Nesrin Er Kıran (Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Türkiye) analyzed Oscar Wilde’s critique of fashion in his short fiction, highlighting the detrimental effects of superficial fashion values on human relationships. Er Kıran’s study revealed Wilde’s condemnation of fashion’s obsession through characters who prioritized appearance over genuine human connection.

Ecevit Bekler (Dicle University, Türkiye) examined the embodiment of Victorian fashion in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Bekler’s analysis emphasized the novel’s reflection of Victorian aesthetics, beauty standards, and the interplay between appearance and identity during the late 19th century. Saidah Namayanja (Karadeniz Technical University, Türkiye) investigated the use of fashion to signify racial and class identities in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Forster’s *A Passage to India*. Namayanja’s study highlighted how clothing served as a tool for objectification and othering and emphasized its significance in colonial power dynamics.

Onur Ekler (Mustafa Kemal University, Türkiye) presented a critical debate on the play *Live Monkey Restaurant* by Güngör Dilmen. Ekler’s analysis explored the thematic and symbolic use of fashion and material culture in the play, and how all these reflected broader socio-political issues, such as the commodification of the human relations in line with Marx’s notion of fetishism. Fikret Güven and İlknur İşler (İbrahim Çeçen University, Türkiye) provided an ecocritical analysis of George Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air*, focusing on the intersection of fashion, material culture, and environmental concerns. Their study examined how Orwell critiqued consumerism and its impact on nature and human identity, and they underlined the interconnectedness of living and non-living things and the relationship between man and biosphere. Derya Biderci Dinç (İstanbul Topkapı University, Türkiye) explored the representation of the New Woman in Halide Edip Adıvar’s *Handan* and Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*. Dinç’s comparative study highlighted how fashion and personal style reflected the evolving gender dynamics and feminist themes in these literary works.

In the sessions about “Fashion and Language,” the presenters examined the intricate ways in which linguistic expressions and fashion intersect, influencing societal perceptions and cultural discourses. Edona Jahiu (University of Prishtina, Kosovo) explored the persuasive linguistic expressions used by fashion designers on the entertainment show “Fashionista,” analyzing 56 episodes to reveal how designers employ specific linguistic features like adjectives, analogies, and metaphors to enhance the appeal of their clothing items and influence consumer decisions. The study found that designers strategically use epistemic modals and evidentials to appear more convincing, thus playing a crucial role in shaping audience perceptions and driving fashion trends. Irina-Ana Drobot (Technical University of Civil Engineering, Romania) discussed fashion as an artistic expression on Lookbook.nu, a digital platform where users share their fashion styles. Drobot highlighted how the platform serves as a space for creative expression and social interaction, allowing users to construct and communicate their identities through visual and textual elements. This digital fashion discourse might exemplify how online platforms can democratize fashion, enabling diverse voices and styles to emerge.

Aba-Carina Parlog (West University of Timișoara, Romania) examined the role of language in fashion, focusing on the creation and use of portmanteau words like “jeggings” and “mankini.” Parlog argued that these linguistic innovations reflect the evolving nature of fashion and its impact on language, illustrating how new fashion trends often lead to the creation of new words that enhance language efficiency and cultural relevance. This interplay between fashion and language demonstrates the dynamic and ever-changing nature of both fields. Zuleykha Baghirzadeh (Independent Scholar, Azerbaijan) examined the intersection of linguistic norms and literary language norms as a key factor in language evolution. The discussion highlighted the ongoing debate among linguists about whether norms restrict language freedom or support its development. Ramila Huseynova (Azerbaijan University of Languages, Azerbaijan) investigated the strategies and genres of fashion discourse, emphasizing its role as a complex communicative event between fashion producers and consumers. Huseynova’s study aimed to reveal that fashion discourse is shaped by various linguistic and extralinguistic factors, reflecting culturally significant meanings and ideological content. By examining the pragmatic and cognitive perspectives of fashion discourse, the research underscored the importance of understanding fashion as a multifaceted social institution.

The presentations on “Fashion and Language” collectively showcased the multifaceted relationship between language and fashion, highlighting how linguistic strategies and innovations contribute to the construction and dissemination of fashion discourses across different media and cultural contexts. By examining both traditional and digital platforms, the session provided a comprehensive overview of how fashion and language intersect to shape cultural identities and societal trends.

In the session on “Fashion and Culture,” Aleksandra Niemirycz, (Independent scholar, Poland), examined the use of fashion as a form of resistance during the January Uprising of 1863 in Poland. Polish women wore black dresses and symbolic jewelry to signify national mourning and defiance against Russian repression, later adapting white and violet as alternative symbols when black attire was banned. This strategy in women’s clothing highlighted the powerful role of fashion in national solidarity and resistance efforts. In a similar vein, Nancy V. Martin (University of Minnesota, USA) explored the cultural significance of 1930s Hollywood replication gowns in her study. By analyzing a floor-length evening gown replicated from a design worn by Lupe Vélez, Martin demonstrated how these gowns allowed women of the 1930s to express their identities and participate in the glamour of Hollywood. Martin’s study highlighted how such garments provided a means for self-expression and empowerment, reflecting the broader social and cultural dynamics of the post-Depression era. Furthermore, Akanksha Kharse and Sangita Ghodake (Savitribai Phule Pune University, India) presented their study on how fashion blurs gender boundaries within the LGBTQIA+ community. They proposed a framework to understand fashion as a form of material culture, highlighting how prominent LGBTQIA+ designers like Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen have used fashion as a tool for expression and experimentation. The study emphasized that the “queer aesthetic” is less about defined styles and more about a philosophy of self-presentation that subverts traditional norms. By examining the historical and cultural significance of fashion within the LGBTQIA+ community, the researchers explored how fashion has been used to signal identity and challenge heteronormative attitudes.

In the session on “Fashion and Translation,” Betül Özcan Dost (Ondokuz Mayıs University, Türkiye) explored the translation strategies employed in the context of Netflix fashion

programs. Focusing on shows like “Next in Fashion,” “Styling Hollywood,” and “Glow-up: The Next Makeup Star,” Dost analyzed how episode titles and informative articles are translated from English to Turkish. The study highlighted the importance of effective translation in disseminating fashion trends globally and making fashion-related content accessible to a broader audience. By examining the linguistic nuances and cultural adaptations involved in translating fashion programs, the research underscored the critical role of translation in the global fashion industry.

The conference successfully brought together a diverse range of themes, highlighting the intricate connections between fashion, literature, language, and cultural identity. The presentations demonstrated how sartorial choices in literature reflect socio-cultural dynamics, how language and fashion intersect to shape perceptions and discourses, and how fashion serves as a powerful tool for expressing and challenging identities. Despite being an online event, the conference facilitated rich discussions and provided a platform for scholars from around the world to share their insights and research, and the Book of Abstracts with an ISBN number was issued online following the conference. However, some topics, such as the impact of digital and cyber fashion, environmental sustainability in fashion, and the intersectionality of fashion with various identities, remain underexplored. For future conferences, it would be beneficial to include these areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of fashion’s role in contemporary society. Additionally, incorporating more non-Western perspectives and focusing on the role of fashion in social and political resistance would further enrich the discourse. By expanding the scope and inclusivity of the program, future conferences can continue to foster critical and innovative scholarship in the field of cultural studies.

## **References**

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