

HSC CC 410

UNIT - II

Clothing Terminology; Conformity and Individuality

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Clothing Terminology

Clothing terminology comprises the names of individual garments and classes of garments, as well as the specialized vocabularies of the trades that have designed, manufactured, marketed and sold clothing over hundreds of years. Clothing terminology ranges from the arcane and changes over time in response to fashion which in turn reflects social, artistic, and political trends.

Names of new styles or fashions in clothing are frequently the deliberate inventions or fashion designers or clothing manufacturers. Some clothing styles are frequently named after people. For example the **cardigan** is knitted jacket or button-front sweater created to keep British soldiers warm in Russian winters. It is named for **James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan**, who led the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War in 1854. The **Nehru jacket** is a uniform jacket without lapels or collars, popularized by **Jawaharlal Nehru**, the first Prime Minister of independent India. The **Gandhi cap** is a white coloured sidecap made from khadi. It was popularised by **Mahatma Gandhi** during the Indian Independence movement.

Another fertile source for clothing terms is **place names**, which usually reflect the origin of a fashion. Modern terms such as **Bermuda shorts**, Hawaiian shirts etc are the latest which finds their origin in Holland linen. Others include **damask** from Damascus; **basque, jersey** (originally Jersey frock); **Capri pants, mantua and denim** (Serge de Nimes after the city).

Clothing styles may be termed after costume historians, which are taken from the appearances of persons with particular style in their portraits.

Similarly, terms may applied ahistorically to entire categories of garments, so the **corset** is applied to garments that were called stays or a pair of bodies until the introduction of the word corset in the late 18th century. And **dress** is now applied to any women's garment consisting of a bodice and skirt, although for most of its history dress simply meant clothing, or a complete outfit of clothing with its appropriate accessories.

Some definitions of clothing-related terms given by Kaiser (1996) are given below.

Adornment: Any decoration or alteration of the body's appearance

Apparel: A body covering, specifically referring to actual garment constructed from fabric. This is a tem often used by textile industry

- Appearance:** The total, composite image created by the human body and any modification, embellishments, or coverings of the body that are visually perceived; a visual context that includes clothing as well as the body.
- Clothing:** Any tangible or material object connected to the human body. Clothes is a collective term for all items of apparel worn by men, women and children.
- Costume:** A style of clothes belonging to a particular cultural or historical context. It is often used to refer to ethnic or historical clothing, as well as clothing designed for performances or rituals.
- Dress:** the total arrangement of all outwardly detectible modifications of the body itself and all materials added to it.
- Style:** Style in clothing describes the lines that distinguish one form or shape from another. It also means a distinctive characteristic or look in apparel or accessories. Style exists independent of fashion. (Styles of collars, sleeves, hats etc.)
- Fashion:** A dynamic social process by which new styles are created, introduced to a consuming public, and popularly accepted by the public. It also means a style accepted by a large group of people at a particular time. It can be termed as a style or a particular look which is reflection of the social, economical, political and environmental/climatic forces of any given time/period. In other words, fashion represents the popular, accepted, prevailing style at any given time.
- Fad:** It is a kind of miniature fashion, usually more trivial or more fanciful than the normal fashion. Often it reaches fewer people and it sometimes is confined to a subculture. (eg: ;love beads, spriped blazers, message T-shirts etc.)
- Classic:** It is an occasional fashion that is so universally accepted that it gradually crystallizes into a conventional norm of dress. They remain popular for so long that they rest on the borderline between fashion and custom.(eg: T-shirts, jeans, cardigan sweaters, skirt and shirt combinations etc.)
- Mode:** It is a statistical word used to represent the most common form of clothing worn among a given group of people, or in other word, the greatest frequency of a style.
- Wearable Art:** Use of clothing as a medium for artistic communication, to reflect the uniqueness and personal creativity of the artist and designer.

Clothing symbols are used as a kind of silent language at both the conscious and unconscious levels. The symbolic meanings change with time and place, and within the

social milieu. Awareness of clothing symbols and of the self-image mediates the way in which a person performs social acts and social roles.

Conformity and Individuality

All people seek an identity and a sense of belongingness through conforming to a given set of norms, and yet at the same time they strive to achieve some distinction as individual human beings. These **two social tendencies – conformity and individuality – form the basis for all fashion behaviour**. George Simmel emphasized that both are essential to the establishment of fashion and that should one of these be absent, fashion will not be formed, its sway will abruptly end. Either one carried to an extreme, is incompatible with human social existence; complete order and rigidity contradicts the need for new experience, but complete freedom or normlessness may lead to a state of chaos.

A clothing norm represents the typical or accepted manner of dressing shown by a social group. **Conformity** means acceptance of or adherence to a clothing norm, that is, dressing in accordance with the norm of a specified group. With the exception of the term style, all of the terms mentioned earlier – fashion, classic, fad etc.- may be considered as clothing norms and depend on varying degrees of conformity.

Conformity is expressed by the degree to which individuals follow the norm formations of the times. Styles, classics, fads and fashion are all part of the normative formulation of a society. Expressed in specific types of clothing, norms may be differentiated on the basis of their relative endurance and the magnitude of their acceptance in the society.

Conformity is the process by which individuals adapt their behaviour to some pre-existent norms. It is a form of social interaction in which one tries to maintain standards set by a group. Although often subjected to value judgements, excessive or over-conformity tends to evoke negative feelings. Conformity is neither good nor bad. Although nonconformity or individuality contributes interest and change, conformity lends stability to our lives and to society.

There are some areas of activity in which society maintains rather rigid control over human behaviour. In others, conformity to or deviation from the accepted norm is a matter of choice left up to the individual; in still others, non-conformity may even be encouraged and rewarded. Within the broad range of human activity related to dress, adherence to clothing norms is largely voluntary. The desire to conform – consciously or unconsciously – to the established norms of the group appears to be strongly reinforced in human behaviour.

Conformity is an important part of a person's personality structure at all stages of life. It is first learned in childhood in the form of obedience to parents and teachers. Society and schools have tried to force individuals to conform to a single behaviour pattern. Studies have found that excessive conformity is negatively related to creativity. Lucy C. Taylor found that

college women who considered conforming dress behaviour important placed a low value on aesthetics, creativity, and individuality. They were not interested in whether or not the dress was beautiful but only in whether or not it was acceptable and like that of the students around them. Imitating the clothing behaviour of a high-status person gives a feeling of assured success to some. Young teenagers are apt to copy the current idols of the entertainment or athletic worlds. Women and men have a variety of sources to copy, depending on their roles and values.

Pressures toward conformity also are thought to be related to the need for maintaining harmonious relations with others. A number of studies have identified a positive relationship between conformity to group standards of dress and peer acceptance. Conformity appears to have certain positive social values. In the mass society, consumer demand for a style of dress often is enhanced by the fact that others are wearing it. This provides evidence of the degree of conformity that exists, nationally or locally, to a given clothing norm. Conformity in dress appears to be widespread, and the desire to be like others is strongly reinforced in human interaction.

The varieties of **individuality** are numerous, some socially acceptable, desirable and expected. Those who start fashion, fashion leaders, etc belong to this category who express independent creative minds. Fashion leaders are nonconformists in that they constantly seek to be different from those who follow their actions. Their behaviour is based on an awareness of the norm and a desire to set themselves apart from it.

The true individualist is one who can make a decision that is independent of group action. Such behaviour requires an independence of thought and action that stems from a set of strong and internalized standards, and it is "inner-directed". That is characterized by individual conscience and self-imposed goals. The individualist is often regarded as something of an eccentric and consequently must have the strength to withstand the criticism or ridicule brought on by deviations in dress.

Individuality fosters creative expression and facilitates an intelligent, rational, and free choice among the available alternatives in the selection of clothing. Individuality in dress requires a strong sense of personal conviction and psychological security.

Conformity is both necessary and desirable to the extent that it provides for the transmission of functional normative patterns and gives the individual a sense of belonging. Several types of nonconformity may be observed in the clothing behaviour of individuals and groups in society. Fashion leaders themselves are nonconformists in their striving to be different. The individualist is guided by an independence of thought and action that neither relies on group opinion nor deliberately counteracts it. Conformity helps people to fit more easily into their social roles, but individuality is necessary for a completely rational choice among available alternatives.