

HARDSHELL, SOFTSHELL AND BEYOND

THE INTEGRATION OF FOREIGN WORDS INTO THE VOCABULARY OF OUTDOOR CLOTHING IN ITALY

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of loanwords in the Italian lexicon of outdoor clothing, a sector that emblematically reflects the international dimension of fashion and the global circulation of cultural, productive and communicative models. As the first to adopt loanwords and to experience the dynamics of their integration, specialist languages provide a privileged vantage point for the study of language contact. The outdoor clothing sector, characterised by a high technological density and a marked global dimension, makes these phenomena particularly visible and intense, establishing itself as a significant field of study. Set against the broader backdrop of the evolution of contemporary Italian vocabulary, characterised by an increasing presence of Anglicisms, this study aims to analyse the patterns of diffusion and usage of loanwords within a specialist field closely linked to technological innovation and commercial communication strategies. The analysis examines texts published in the Italian magazines *Outdoor Magazine* and *Snowbusiness Magazine* between 2016 and 2025. Particular attention is paid to certain recurring technical terms used to describe specific materials and garments. By observing the occurrences and contexts of use, the study aims to describe the dynamics of how these loanwords are employed, whilst also considering their relationship with more generic terms or possible Italian equivalents. In this way, the study intends to provide an overview of the linguistic practices that characterise specialist communication in the outdoor clothing sector.

Keywords: *Hardshell; Softshell; Outdoor fashion; Anglicisms; Specialized language.*

INTRODUCTION

The vocabulary of fashion has historically been characterised by a high degree of openness to loanwords, as it reflects the sector's international nature and the global circulation of cultural, production and communication models. Although it possesses a rich native terminological heritage for designating garments and clothing practices, the Italian language frequently resorts to loanwords¹. In recent decades, this trend has intensified further, in parallel with the evolution of Italian vocabulary,

which is increasingly influenced by Anglicisms. As Sergio (2025) observes, terms related to fashion and clothing constitute one of the areas in which the prevalence of loanwords from English is particularly significant, confirming the central role of that language in contemporary discourse on consumption and innovation. Within this general framework, the outdoor clothing sector stands out as a prime example of lexical renewal. It should be noted, first, that outdoor sports are experiencing significant growth in Italy, fuelled both by an increase in participants and by the spread of an image linked to extreme performance and outdoor living that has particularly captivated the urban youth population. What originally characterised an

¹ According to Fusco (2008), a loanword is the result of a process of interference based on the imitation of a linguistic model belonging to the source language but unknown in the target language; this model ultimately becomes an integral part of the target language.

audience of sports enthusiasts and professionals has gradually transformed into a broader cultural phenomenon. Technical clothing also takes on an identity-defining and stylistic significance that goes beyond its functional properties. As Barthes (1967) demonstrates in his analysis of fashion discourse, the language used to describe garments does not merely denote their physical features but constructs a system of cultural meanings around them, transforming clothing into a bearer of social and symbolic values. The outdoor clothing industry is also characterised by the constant evolution of materials, manufacturing technologies and the functional performance of garments. This creates a constant need for new terms, which the Italian lexicon tends to address using loanwords. In this context, English has established itself as the *lingua franca*, reflecting a global market dominated by international brands and structured around technical and commercial communication that transcends national borders.

This analysis focuses on some terms representative of sector-specific language, highlighting the fluctuations in usage that reflect a phase of integration into the Italian linguistic system that remains unstable. Studies on the influence of English on Italian have mainly focused on Anglicisms in everyday language and in large corpora from the general press, such as Gusmani 1981, Furiassi 2010 and Pulcini 2023. This paper, however, turns its attention to a specific specialist sector, that of outdoor clothing, which has so far been scarcely explored by Italian linguistic research. The words under consideration include *hardshell* and *softshell*, which are used to refer to specific types of materials and technical garments. The choice of these two lexical items is linked to the difficulties they pose in terms of translation and to the variations in usage observed in the corpus, which make them a significant case study. Although they are not officially recorded in the main Italian dictionaries nor included in lists of neologisms, these loanwords appear to be widely attested and functional in the specialist communication analysed.

The data examined were drawn from the archive of Italian journals *Outdoor Magazine* and *Snowbusiness Magazine*². The data collection was carried out through a systematic review of all issues published between 2016 and 2025, with the aim

of providing an update on the growing prevalence of Anglicisms in Italian specialist vocabulary over the last decade. For each issue, occurrences of the terms *hardshell* and *softshell* were identified, recording their spelling variations, contexts of use and diachronic distribution.

Outdoor Magazine focuses primarily on outdoor activities such as trekking, climbing, trail running and related sports, combining informative and educational content with sections dedicated to the presentation of products, materials and technological innovations. *Snowbusiness Magazine*, launched as a supplement in 2017, focuses specifically on winter outdoor sports and the related market. These magazines were selected because of their prominence within the Italian outdoor publishing sector and their online accessibility, which brings them closer to their target audience, predominantly young and urban readers who are accustomed to navigating digital communication environments and who view English terminology as a marker of identity and belonging to a globalised community. Both magazines use highly specialised language, with commercial products often described using a combination of Italian and English, making them particularly relevant for the lexical analysis conducted in this study.³

HARDSHELL AND SOFTSHELL IN THE VOCABULARY OF OUTDOOR SPORTS ACTIVITIES

THE EARLIEST ATTESTATIONS OF THE TERMS

Before being used in the vocabulary of technical sportswear, the term *hardshell* appeared in English as an attributive adjective in 1670, 'designating a (type of) shellfish, turtle, nut, etc., having a hard shell' (OED, *hardshell*). It is equivalent to the adjective *hard-shelled* in its primary sense and is mainly used in American English⁴. From 1936 onwards, the *Oxford English Dictionary* records a semantic extension of the term, which came to denote 'a man-made object having a rigid, protective exterior' (OED, *hardshell*), thus marking the shift from the zoological to the material and technical sphere. As regards the Italian translation, the Italian- English, English-Italian dictionary

² For further information on the magazines, visit the Sport Press website at: <https://www.sport-press.it/chi-siamo/>

³ The magazines are available on the Sport Press website at: <https://outdoormag.sport-press.it/rivista/>

⁴ For a more detailed account of the meanings of the term *hardshell*, see the Oxford English Dictionary.

Ragazzini 2025 records *hard-shell* with a range of meanings that extend beyond zoological references, including its use in technical and sporting contexts, such as ‘casco da ciclista’ in the expression *hard-shell helmet* (Ragazzini, 2024, *hard-shell*). Similarly, *softshell* has appeared in the English language in 1670 as an attributive adjective meaning ‘of or relating to something that has a soft shell. Chiefly in the names of animals (see softshell clam, softshell crab, softshell turtle’ (OED, *softshell*)⁵.

COMPARISON WITH THE MAIN ITALIAN LANGUAGE DICTIONARIES AND THE MAIN ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS⁶

The terms *softshell* and *hardshell*, which have been attested in the English language in their single-word form for centuries, although with originally different meanings, in the Italian language remain confined to specialist use and are not sufficiently widespread to be considered neologisms⁷ or included in dictionaries⁸.

The term *hardshell* is completely absent from the major Italian newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*), whilst the term *softshell*, related to outdoor clothing, appears sporadically in *Corriere della Sera* from 2010 onwards and in *La Repubblica* only from 2021. Although these terms are used in a specialist context, they are part of what can be defined as outdoor fashion. It shares with the fashion phenomenon profound dynamics of identity and social positioning. In this sense, outdoor fashion allows individuals to position themselves in the social space of the world of outdoor enthusiasts.

⁵ For a more detailed account of the meanings of the term *softshell*, see the Oxford English Dictionary.

⁶ ‘Il più rilevante e specifico contributo dato alla lingua dalla stampa è la diffusione delle parole straniere, la loro fissazione nel patrimonio collettivo delle classi più istruite’ [‘The most significant and specific contribution made to the language by the press is the spread of foreign words and their establishment in the collective vocabulary of the more educated classes’] (De Mauro, 1976, p. 499).

⁷ According to Biffi (2018), it is difficult to define a neologism precisely, as well as to distinguish it from ephemeral linguistic forms linked to a specific moment or created spontaneously, sometimes justified by the historical or cultural context. These forms may derive from the rules of the language’s derivational morphology, which allow us to coin transparent words using prefixes and suffixes, without necessarily implying their stabilisation in the lexical repertoire or their inclusion in a dictionary.

⁸ To verify the presence of the terms *hardshell* and *softshell* among neologisms the reference is Adamo et al. (2018). To investigate their prevalence in the Italian language, the main dictionaries were consulted: Battaglia (1961-2002); De Mauro (1999-2000); Sabatini & Coletti (1997-2024); Treccani (n.d.); Zingarelli (2025).

‘The way we use fashion – therefore both the way we follow or do not follow it – is evidence of how we situate ourselves in the social world that we inhabit’ (González 2007, p. 66). The use of terms such as *hardshell* and *softshell*, as well as the conscious choice of garments, signals competence and belonging.

HARDSHELL E SOFTSHELL IN THE ANALYSED CORPUS

Since 2016, the specialist magazines *Outdoor Magazine* and *Snowbusiness Magazine* have documented significant use of the terms *hardshell* and *softshell*. The semantic origin of these terms can be traced to botany and zoology, where they refer to nuts and animals with hard or soft shells, respectively. However, in the outdoor sector, *hardshell* has taken on the meaning of waterproof and windproof fabric, while *softshell* refers to a fabric designed to provide thermal insulation and keep the body dry. Sometimes these terms are translated into Italian with the word *guscio* (shell). However, this is inadequate to distinguish the precise semantic and functional meaning of the two terms. In the analysed corpus the terms *hardshell* and *softshell* are frequently accompanied by images of the garments. In line with Olivero’s (2024) observations in his analysis of fashion editorials, the interaction between words and images contributes to the construction of visual and discursive narratives that transcend the simple functional description of the products. In the present context, this combination leads to the gradual familiarisation of foreign words within the sector’s lexicon. In this way, *hardshell* and *softshell* become recognisable and widely accepted elements within the outdoor sports community, promoting a common terminological competence, even in the absence of a full lexicographical recording of these terms in standard Italian.

THE PRESENCE OF HARDSHELL

The term *hardshell* appears in many graphic and stylistic forms in the texts of the outdoor magazines examined, each with a specific number of occurrences and context of use. The single-word form with a lowercase letter, *hardshell*, is the most widespread and recurrent. The term is used both as a noun, to refer to a product category in its entirety, and as an adjective, to describe the technical characteristics of a garment or material. (Fig.01)

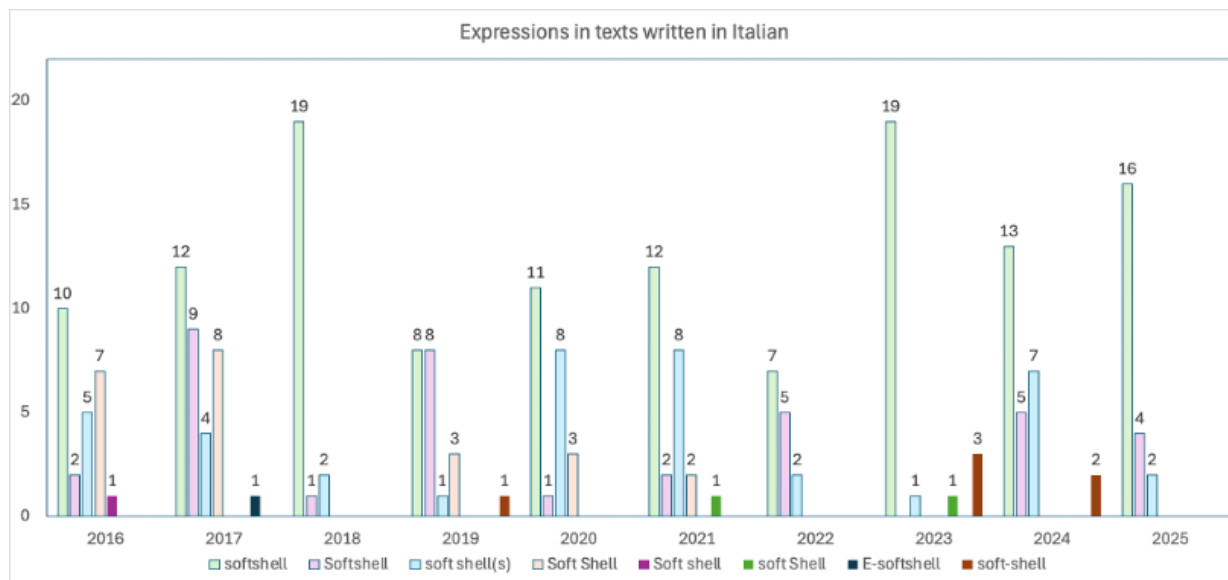


Fig. 01

‘[...] Polartec Neoshell (hardshell/stirato esterno)’ [‘[...] Polartec Neoshell (hardshell/stretch outer fabric)’]⁹ (*Outdoor Magazine*, December 2016, p. 36).

However, there is also *Hardshell* with a capital letter, which appears sporadically with a limited number of occurrences and still retains the same meaning as the version with a lowercase letter.

The term generally refers to the rigid structure of garments and technical items.

‘Solida struttura Hardshell e imbottitura interna rimovibile e lavabile’ [‘Sturdy Hardshell construction with a removable and washable inner lining’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, April 2019, p. 48).

Hard shell, which, although less common than *hardshell*, is used with the same meaning. In the example given, it refers to an adjective denoting a type of jacket; however, it should be noted that ‘hard shell’ is also used as a noun, in the same way as the compound term.

‘La stampa riflettente all-over, abbinata alla funzionalità e affidabilità di una giacca hard shell triplo stratoc’ [‘All-over reflective print, combined with the functionality and reliability of a triple-layer hard shell jacket’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, report, February 2019, p. 14) (Fig.02).

Finally, *hard-shell* does not appear until 2022. In this case, the term is accompanied by an additional

definition that clarifies the concept, referring to the garment’s rigid outer shell.

‘Cambia i vantaggi di questa tecnologia con quella hard-shell: guscio esterno in materiale plastico’ [‘Replaces the benefits of this technology with those of the hard-shell design: an outer shell made of plastic’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, preview fw 22/23, 2022, p. 14).

In most cases, the English texts contain terms that have been retained as non-adapted loanwords in the Italian texts. In two cases, *hardshell* and *hard shell* found in the English text have not been proposed in the Italian text. In 2020, the English text contains an instance of *Hard Shell*, consisting of two separate units, each with a capital initial letter, translated in the Italian text using the term *guscio*.

‘[...] the Ortlers Hybrid TWC Jacket fits under every hardshell’. (English)

‘La Ortlers Hybrid TWC Jacket [...] non ingombra sotto il guscio’. (Italian) (*Outdoor Magazine*, product guide, January 2018, p. 44) (Fig. 03).

The data show that the term is still in a phase of unstable integration into the Italian technical lexicon. The retention of the original English form is driven by specific communicative and commercial strategies, in a sector where English terminology serves as a marker of identity and authenticity. As Bombi (2015) observes, citing Arcangeli, the resistance of Anglicisms to translation is often attributable to their greater

⁹ Where the original text does not provide an English version, a translation has been included in square brackets alongside each of the examples given.

In pista con Dynafit: nuova estetica, solite performance

Le novità al femminile della collezione Speedfit 2.0 sono garanzia, di prestazioni e funzionalità, anche dopo il tramonto. Abbinare ad un nuovo look raffinato e cittadino

W's Calcite Jkt

La stampa riflettente all-over, abbinata alla funzionalità e affidabilità di una giacca hard shell triplo strato, rendono la Speed 3L Reflect il capo ideale per lo scialpinismo con condizioni meteo avverse o dopo il tramonto. Con un peso di appena 268 grammi, questa giacca leggera, elastica e comprimibile, realizzata in pregiato Dynashell 3L, protegge in modo affidabile da vento e intemperie, e si distingue per la sua particolare estetica. La stampa mimetica riflettente sulle braccia rende visibili sia di notte che con scarsa visibilità, aumentando la sicurezza in montagna. Il capo dispone di un cappuccio compatibile con il casco, due grandi tasche frontali con zip e cuciture incollate. Il taglio è aderente al corpo e atletico, e consente movimenti molto agili. Grazie all'elasticità del materiale e all'ottima traspirabilità la giacca Speed 3L Reflect è l'ideale anche nelle salite più faticose.



INFO: Oberalp - 0471.242900 - dynafit.it

Speed Jeans Dynastretch Hose

Chi l'ha detto che in pista non si possono mettere i jeans? Con i pantaloni Speed Jeans Dynastretch è possibile portare sulla neve un look urbano, senza rinunciare alla performance. Nonostante l'aspetto inusuale, infatti, questi pantaloni sono tecnici esattamente come si è abituati e come ci si aspetta da un capo Dynafit: antivento e idrorepellenti, garantiscono movimenti agili e comfort, caratteristiche per le quali peso (370 grammi) e ventilazione giocano un ruolo fondamentale. Il materiale è altamente traspirante ed elastico, per affrontare senza problemi anche ascese veloci e dinamiche. Grazie all'interno leggermente felpato, inoltre, questi pantaloni sono molto gradevoli sulla pelle. Il taglio è aderente al corpo e atletico, in modo da trattenere il calore e migliorare la gestione dell'umidità quando si suda molto. Il ginocchio preformato e il girovita elastico regolabile portano ancora più comfort sulla pista. Il fondo della gamba è rinforzato e regolabile in larghezza mediante una zip. Non mancano, infine, numerose taschine per riporre piccoli oggetti.

Fig. 02



FW 2018/19 PRODUCT GUIDE

Salewa pensa "glocal" con TirolWool Celliant

Per l'autunno-inverno 2018/19, Salewa ha esteso l'utilizzo dell'innovativa imbottitura ibrida TirolWool Celliant anche alle proprie collezioni tecniche, reingegnerizzando per l'occasione la iconica Ortles Hybrid TWC Jacket. Grazie alle sue proprietà questa giacca mantiene al caldo più a lungo anche durante le soste al freddo in attività invernali come lo ski mountaineering, l'alpinismo e l'arrampicata su ghiaccio, dove il controllo della temperatura corporea è vitale. Infatti, ai momenti di intensa attività come la salita, durante la salita si alternano periodi statici durante le soste per togliere le pelli dagli sci o per fare sicurezza, durante i quali si corre il rischio di raffreddarsi, a volte fino alla ipotermia.



La reingegnerizzazione della giacca ne ha aumentato la resistenza ai frequenti contatti con le rocce, alle lamine degli sci e allo zaino, utilizzando un tessuto ripstop in nylon a doppia tessitura in combinazione con inserti sotto le braccia in Durastretch Bamboo Light, un tessuto softshell elasticizzato traspirante, quick dry e confortevole al tatto, e che in combinazione con i soffici TirolWool Celliant assicura una ampia libertà di movimento mentre si arrampica. La Ortles Hybrid TWC Jacket occupa inoltre un volume ridotto nello zaino con soli 402g di peso aggiuntivo, e non ingombra sotto il guscio.

N | ORTLES HYBRID TWC JACKET

- Robust, extremely abrasion-resistant, wind-resistant, woven, 4-way stretch ripstop nylon outer fabric
- Stretch underarm and side inserts made of breathable, fast-drying Durastretch Bamboo Light fabric
- INSULATION: 60-gram TirolWool Celliant fill at torso, head and upper arms
- Climbing-specific cut and high-reach construction



- Pleasant, soft, breathable and fast-drying Durastretch Bamboo fabric on inside of back and under the arms
- Close-fitting, adjustable, insulated Durastretch hood with elasticated hem
- Two side pockets, easily accessible when wearing a harness or carrying a backpack
- Stows away into its own inner pocket
- WEIGHT: 402 grams
- COLOURS: Flint stone / Black out / Prince blue / Pumpkin / Lime punch



For winter 2018-2019, Salewa is increasingly using new technology to keep ski mountaineers, climbers and alpinists warm longer. With the Ortles Hybrid TWC Jacket from its ski mountaineering collection, it is launching a warm, breathable, hybrid jacket for high-octane activities in cold conditions. It is made with TirolWool Celliant, a thermo-regulating insulation material. During stop-and-go activities, such as ski mountaineering, alpine mountaineering or climbing, climate control is critical. Periods of intense physical activity are often followed by static periods where mountaineers risk overcooling. This might involve belaying, removing skins or a hydration break. That is why the right mix of insulation performance, breathability and freedom of movement is essential.

Thanks to its highly robust and abrasion-resistant, double woven ripstop nylon, the Ortles Hybrid TWC Jacket withstands regular contact with rock and ice. Underarm inserts in Durastretch Bamboo Light fabric allow perspiration to evaporate, dry fast and are comfortable to wear next to the skin. Together with the high-reach construction, they ensure good freedom of movement when climbing. Two side pockets, which can still be accessed when wearing a harness or carrying a pack, and a chest pocket provide ample storage options for items that need to be kept close to hand. With its small pack size, it stows easily in any pack and weighing just 402 grams, the Ortles Hybrid TWC Jacket fits under every hardshell.

Fig. 03

definitional precision and brevity, characteristics that make it difficult to replace them with indigenous terms capable of covering the same referential areas. In this case, the use of *guscio* does not convey the technical specifics of the corresponding English term, proving semantically insufficient to distinguish the functional properties of the materials in question.

Contrary to what one would expect from a technical item, which tends to establish a one-to-one correspondence between form and concept (Gualdo & Telve, 2011), *hardshell* exhibits fluctuations that reflect tensions between communicative needs, regulatory pressures and commercial strategies, suggesting that the integration of loanwords in this context is not a linear process.

THE PRESENCE OF SOFTSHELL

The standard form, *softshell* (written as a single word with a lower-case initial letter), is the most common in the Italian texts of the journals analysed. With peaks in usage in 2018 and 2023 and a low point in 2022, this version is the most frequently used to describe both technical garments and types of materials.

As the following examples, taken from a single article in *Outdoor Magazine* (July/August 2025, p.

46), show, the term can take on different meanings within the same text.

The first instance, taken from the title of the Lewisia jacket ‘Protezione femminile softshell’ [‘Women’s softshell jacket’], shows an ambiguous use of the term, as it could refer either to the type of jacket or to the material from which it is made. In the description of the same jacket ‘La giacca da donna [...] costruita in softshell leggero a tre strati [...]’ [‘The women’s jacket [...] made from lightweight three-layer softshell [...]’] the term *softshell* is used as a noun that clearly refers to the fabric from which the jacket is made.

In the title of the Foxglove jacket, ‘Il softshell per l’escursionismo maschile’ [‘The men’s hiking softshell jacket’] the term functions as a noun referring to the garment.

Finally, in the description of the same jacket, ‘[...] softshell a tre strati impermeabile 10.000 mm [...]’ [‘[...] 10,000 mm waterproof three-layer softshell [...]’] *softshell* once again refers to the textile material (Fig. 04).

Softshell, written as one word with a capital letter, appears with varying frequency and is mainly used as part of commercial names.

‘[...] viene abbinata al Dynastretch Softshell [...]’ [‘[...] is paired with the Dynastretch Softshell [...]’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, fw 21-22 Preview 2021,

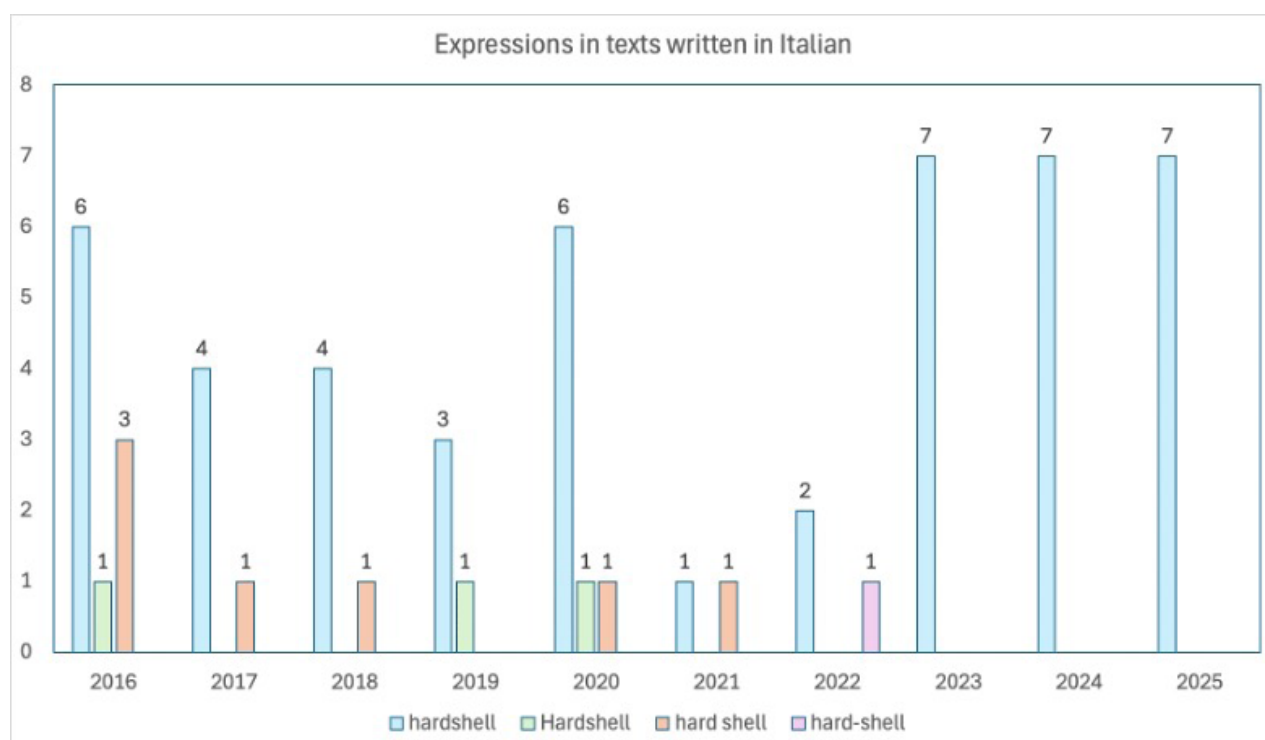


Fig. 04

p. 35). ‘Women’s Softshell Jacket Rutor XCS AIR’ (Outdoor Magazine, December 2024, p. 18) Another form is *soft shell(s)*, consisting of two separate units, which appears variably over time. Although less common than *softshell*, it retains the same meaning. In the example given, it is used as a noun to refer to a type of jacket, but in general it is also used to refer to types of materials.

‘[...] piumini, soft shells, giacche isolanti [...]’ ‘[...] down jackets, softshells, insulated jackets [...]’ (Outdoor Magazine, February 2016, p. 44).

Soft Shell, with both linguistic units separated and initial letters capitalised, is less common and appears mainly in the early years analysed. Its use has declined over time, suggesting a trend towards standardisation into a single word. In some cases, this form identifies specific technologies or fabrics.

‘[...] tessuto Biomorphic Soft Shell Water Dry 360° Adaptive Stretch’ ‘[...] Biomorphic Soft Shell Water Dry 360° Adaptive Stretch fabric’] (Outdoor Magazine, March 2021, p. 54).

The variant *soft Shell*, with the first letter lowercase

and the second uppercase, refers to a type of material. It is extremely rare and appears only once. It is a sign of the significant fluctuation affecting formations that have not yet fully acclimatised.

‘Prodotto in morbido e caldo soft Shell 3 layer con membrana [...]’ ‘[Made from soft, warm 3-layer softshell fabric with a membrane [...]’] (Outdoor Magazine, preview fw 21/22, 2021, p. 33).

A very rare case is *E-softshell*, which appeared exclusively in 2017. It refers to a specific type of *softshell* and is part of the name of a fabric.

‘[...] per il suo innovativo materiale softshell riscaldabile denominato E-soft shell’ ‘[...] for its innovative heated softshell fabric known as E-soft shell’] (Outdoor Magazine, December 2017, p. 11) (Fig. 05).

The *soft-shell* form, with a hyphen between the two units, appears sporadically starting in 2020, with an increase in 2023 and 2024. It is used to describe specific materials.

‘[...] realizzato in morbido soft-shell’ ‘[...] made from soft softshell fabric’] (Outdoor Magazine,

ESTATE TECNICA

Dai trail di montagna alle escursioni urbane, Nordsen propone una collezione tecnica che mette al centro libertà, traspirabilità e versatilità

L'estate è la stagione della leggerezza: camminate in quota, corse tra i boschi, speed hiking in giornate che sembrano non finire mai. Ma è anche la stagione che mette alla prova l'abbigliamento tecnico: caldo, sudore, vento improvviso, passaggi espo-

sti, piogge non programmate. Per questo Nordsen propone una selezione di capi pensati per chi si muove in ambienti dinamici e cerca il perfetto equilibrio tra funzionalità tecnica e libertà di movimento.



LEWISIA:
protezione femminile softshell

La giacca da donna Lewisia è la risposta Nordsen al meteo estivo instabile. Dotata di membrana da 10.000 mm e costruita in softshell leggero a tre strati: traspirante, antivento e trattato con finitura idrorepellente. Il tessuto esterno è morbido ed elasticizzato per una totale libertà nei movimenti, mentre la membrana interna blocca il vento e la leggera rete migliora la ventilazione, mantenendo il corpo asciutto anche durante l'attività fisica. Il cappuccio staccabile, i polsini elasticati e il fondo regolabile permettono una vestibilità personalizzata. Le tasche frontali e al petto, tutte con zip e fodera in rete, aggiungono praticità e stile tecnico.



FOXGLOVE:
il softshell per l'escursionismo maschile

La controparte maschile è rappresentata dalla giacca Foxglove, perfetta per il trekking e le attività a bassa quota. Realizzata con la stessa struttura tecnica della Lewisia — softshell a tre strati impermeabile 10.000 mm traspirante e antivento con trattamento idrorepellente — la Foxglove garantisce protezione e comfort in ogni condizione. Il taglio è pensato per l'escursionismo attivo: leggero, ergonomico e compatibile con movimenti ampi, grazie all'elasticità del tessuto esterno. Anche qui troviamo cappuccio staccabile, polsini elasticizzati, fondo regolabile e pratiche tasche con zip. Una giacca che si adatta al passo del camminatore, senza compromessi tra funzione e forma.

Fig. 05

preview fw 24/25, 2023, p. 10).

The term *softshell* in English texts is the most common form, in line with international technical terminology. This choice ensures consistency with the global language of the outdoor sector and is easily recognisable by expert readers.

In some cases, both the single-word version and some of the other variants of the term have been replaced by rephrasing the sentence in the Italian texts.

Softshell, *Soft Shell* and *soft shell* are also used, as in Italian texts, to refer to specific textile technologies.

In some cases, there are graphical variations between the English and Italian versions.

‘[...] It’s a soft shell without membrane [...]’ (English) ‘[...] Si tratta di un Soft Shell senza membrana [...]’ (Italian) (*Outdoor Magazine*, product guide, January 2020, p. 26).

Softshell presents an even more complex picture than that of *hardshell*. The proliferation of graphic variations reflects a process of formal stabilisation that is not yet complete, in which no single graphic solution has yet acquired a recognised, stable form. This formal instability is accompanied by a marked semantic instability.

Within the same text, the term can refer to the textile material, the garment in its entirety, or function as an adjective, with instances of

referential ambiguity where the two interpretations are difficult to distinguish. As observed with *hardshell*, also *softshell* contradicts the tendency towards monosemy that characterises specialist technical vocabulary (Fig. 06).

THE USE OF SHELL AS A GENERIC TERM

In the outdoor magazines examined, in addition to the terms *hardshell* and *softshell*, it is also attested the term *shell*¹⁰. Its use shows a significant evolution over time. In the early years investigated, the term is mainly found in English language texts and commercial names, where it is frequently used to refer to a rigid structure or padding for various types of sports products, such as jackets, shoes, helmets, etc.

‘The inner shell is made in Cordura, felt and aluminium film’ (English) ‘La tomaia dello scafo interno è in Cordura accoppiata a feltro e a un film in alluminio’ (Italian) (*Outdoor Magazine* -

¹⁰ Among the main dictionaries of the Italian language, the term *shell* is only recorded in Treccani (*shell*), where it is defined, in the field of quantum physics, as the set of electrons of an atom with the same principal quantum number (translated into Italian as *anello*, *guscio* or *strato elettronico*) and, in the field of computer science, as the part of the operating system that acts as an interface between the machine and the user.

NEWS

Premi

Il softshell di Schoeller è da award



A novembre, a Langhental, il produttore di tessuti tecnici Schoeller è stato premiato con il Design Preis Schweiz 2017 per il suo innovativo materiale softshell riscaldabile, denominato E-soft shell. L'azienda ha svelato questa innovazione a Techtextil nel maggio 2017. Lo strato retrostante riscaldabile realizzato da Eschler, acquisita da Schoeller nel 2012, incorpora una fibra conduttiva che permette una distribuzione uniforme del calore. L'azienda dichiara che il materiale potrà essere venduto in rotoli e tagliato senza compromettere la tecnologia incorporata. Nato per la realizzazione di capi per l'outdoor e il motociclismo, non si escludono tuttavia applicazioni anche in campo fashion e wellness.

Fig. 06

product guide, 2017, p. 6);

‘The main idea was to build a shoe with a Kevlar outer shell and a wool inner sock’ (English)

‘L’idea di base è stata quella di realizzare una scarpa con un involucro esterno in Kevlar e un calzino interno in lana’ (Italian) (*Outdoor Magazine*, product guide, June 2018, p. 14).

In some cases, *shell* is translated as *guscio* and refers to a type of waterproof jacket.

‘Protection against water and wind without bulk: this packable shell guarantees great water resistance and breathability’. (English)

‘Protezione da acqua e vento senza ingombro: questo guscio packable garantisce impermeabilità e traspirabilità [...]’. (Italian)

(*Outdoor Magazine*, product guide, June 2018, p. 43).

The term *shell* also appears in product descriptions in Italian, where it refers to a covering or padding without a clear technical specification in terms of soft or hard.

‘La collezione Power Shield, una gamma di shell resistenti all’acqua e altamente traspiranti a basso impatto ambientale’ [‘The Power Shield collection: a range of water-resistant, highly breathable shells with a low environmental impact’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, February 2025, p. 29).

At the same time, *shell* continues to be used in commercial names for fabrics.

‘Dryshell Breathe fornisce un alto grado di traspirabilità e trasporta il sudore all’esterno in modo da mantenere la pelle asciutta; Warmshell aiuta a mantenere il calore senza aumentare il peso, fornisce traspirabilità, durata e rapida asciugatura; Microshell è ultraleggero, traspirante e antivento’ [‘Dryshell Breathe offers excellent breathability and wicks sweat away to keep the skin dry; Warmshell helps retain heat without adding weight, whilst providing breathability, durability and quick-drying properties; Microshell is ultra-lightweight, breathable and windproof’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, preview fw 22/23, 2021, p. 35).

Sometimes it is used with a capital letter in trade names.

‘I riflettori passivi RECCO, inseriti in giacche Gore-Tex Pro Shell e negli zaini Ascendor’ [‘RECCO passive transponders, incorporated into Gore-Tex Pro Shell jackets and Ascendor rucksacks’] (*Outdoor Magazine*, October 2025, p. 7).

Shell is a more general term than *hardshell* and *softshell*; initially confined to English-language texts, it has subsequently been adopted in Italian descriptions, where it has established itself as a compromise between technical precision and communicative accessibility.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to render both *shell* and *hardshell* with the same Italian equivalent, *guscio*, a convergence that reduces terms with distinct technical referents to a single form and constitutes a further indicator of the still-unstable stage of acclimatisation of these terms within the Italian lexicon of the outdoor clothing sector.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomena observed point to broader dynamics that characterise the integration of technical loanwords into specialist languages, where global pressures, commercial strategies and resistance from the recipient language interact in complex ways.

As noted by Pulcini (2023), specialist loanwords tend to remain peripheral to everyday language, but their circulation in the media facilitates their gradual legitimisation among a wider audience. In the present context, the profile of the audience targeted by the magazines analysed, predominantly young and engaged in digital communication contexts, allows technical terms to spread progressively beyond strictly specialist vocabulary, contributing to the restructuring of linguistic repertoires (cf. Furiassi et al., 2012).

The dynamics within the language used for outdoor clothing demonstrate how sector-specific languages may not constitute closed systems, but rather represent dynamic spaces for interaction.

The lexicon of outdoor clothing thus emerges as a significant field of observation for the study of contemporary language contact.

In this process, the use of Anglicisms also takes on an identity-defining significance, linked to membership of a community of outdoor sports practitioners and enthusiasts, which is increasingly embedded in globalised dynamics.

CAPTIONS

[Fig.01] The frequency of *hardshell* and its variants (2016–2025).

[Fig.02] Dynafit; advertising page for technical outdoor clothing (*Outdoor Magazine*, February 2019).

[Fig.03] Salewa; advertising page for technical outdoor clothing with bilingual Italian–English text (*Outdoor*

Magazine, Product Guide, January 2018).

[Fig.04] The frequency of *softshell* and its variants (2016–2025).

[Fig.05] Nordsen; advertising page for outdoor clothing (*Outdoor Magazine*, July/August 2025).

[Fig.06] Article on technical outdoor materials (*Outdoor Magazine*, December 2017).

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