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Verb-Complement Compounds
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Spanish



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To

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Maestro

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most productive patterns of word formation in modern Spanish (as well as in most of the other Romance languages) is exemplified by compounds such as *limpiabotas* 'bootblack', *rompecabezas* 'riddle', *picaflor* 'hummingbird', *andarríos* 'wagtail', *correfaldas* 'woman chaser', *salpafuera* 'uproar, brawl', *miramelindo* 'bystander, onlooker', *hazmerreír* 'laughingstock', etc. These compounds are distinguished by two basic elements: 1) a verb form followed by 2) a complement dependent in some fashion on the verb. In the vast majority of examples the complement is a plural substantive which is the direct object of the verb as in the first two examples. More rarely the object is singular as in the third example. Occasionally the complement is an adverbial phrase which is either elliptical as in the fourth and fifth examples (**anda por ríos*, **corre tras faldas*) or very rarely nonelliptical as in the sixth example. In a few instances there is a pronoun object as in the seventh and eighth examples, while the complement is a vocative (no. 7) or a dependent infinitive (no. 8).

Most studies of verb-complement compounds have dealt with the problem of the origins of this pattern, and especially of the nature of the verbal element. Given the identity in the major Romance languages of the singular imperative and the third person singular of the present indicative of most verbs, it has been difficult to determine which form was the original one. On occasion some scholars have even suggested that the verb may have been simply an abstract verbal theme or a postverbal substantive. The present study investigates not only the problem of the formal origins of this pattern of compounding but also its functional origins and development, and then studies the use of v-c compounds in modern Spanish.¹

¹ The research for this study was supported by a grant from the Committee on Research of the University of Pennsylvania. I also wish to express my thanks to the Department of Romance Languages of the University of Pennsylvania for helping to defray part of the cost of printing this study. The label "verb-complement" and other names for compounds of this type are discussed briefly in my article, *A Possible Structural Factor in the Development of Verb-Complement Compounds in the Romance Languages*, StN XXXVIII, 1966, 257-262, note 1. "Verb-complement" and the abbreviation "v-c" will be used throughout this study.

I. History of the Problem

The first study of v-c compounds appears, not surprisingly, in Friedrich Diez's *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen*, Bonn, 1838, II, 360ff. (3rd ed., II, 438ff.). Diez described their most striking characteristics, pointing out that they are always substantives; are usually masculine (except when natural gender is stressed), and are indeclinable when the complement is in the plural. He perceived that the pattern was foreign to the system of Latin word formation and claimed that the verb form must be, in all likelihood, an imperative since the verbal stem in Italian formations is clearly a second person form, e.g. *bevilacqua*, *rompicapo*, etc. Diez's classification of these compounds emphasized the nature of the complement which could either be a substantive (occasionally preceded by a preposition) which was the object of the verb, an apparent vocative, an infinitive, an adjective or an adverb.

Another study is found in C. Schulze's *Imperativisch gebildete Substantiva* in ASNS XLIII, 1868, 13–40. Schulze's article comprehended compounds not only in Romance, but also in other branches of Indo-European, such as Sanskrit, the Slavic and Germanic families, plus some mention of the Semitic languages. Schulze, like Diez, was convinced that the verb form in its origin is in most cases an imperative.² However, he excluded Germanic compounds of the type *Eßzimmer*, *Schreibfeder*, *Trinkwasser*, etc. in which the substantive following the verb form is not a complement of the verb but rather the dominant member of the compound. Schulze's classification by types is similar to Diez's but his main contribution was to demonstrate that there is a sharp distinction between v-c compounds and Germanic compounds of verb stem plus substantive.

Not long after the publication of Schulze's article there appeared one of the most comprehensive treatments of v-c compounds ever made, Arsène Darmesteter's *Traité de la formation des mots composés dans la langue française comparée aux autres langues romanes et au latin*, Paris, 1874, pp. 146–208. Although Darmesteter used material gathered largely from medieval and modern French as a basis for his study, like Schulze (whom he cites on p. 156), he casts his net far beyond the confines of Gallo-Romance in his search for data bearing on the origins of the pattern, and, since he examines all of the Romance languages, his conclusions are

² He cites Bopp as a supporter of the theory that the verb is a postverbal abstract noun (p. 16).