Review Of "I Composti Nominali Latini" By R. Oniga

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Review

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Oniga writes in Italian with untranslated quotations in Latin, French, and English and the occasional un glossed example in Ancient Greek or Sanskrit. Despite that, this book will probably be relatively accessible to all scholars of Latin and to any linguist with a reading knowledge of a Romance language. The theoretical points made are straightforward and the rule schemas, charts, and appendices speak for themselves.

One of O’s major points is that compounding follows morphological rules that are as regular as familiar phonological rules, though less productive (many well-formed compounds [in terms of adhering to the rules of compound formation] are simply not attested). In fact, O uses this study to affirm the theory of generative morphology. He discusses the issues involved in distinguishing between compounds that were formed at some ancestral stage of Latin and compounds that follow productive rules of Latin itself, giving on pp. 73–74 a discussion of a rule that was probably archaic by the time of Livio. He sets aside compounds involving Greek borrowings, although he notes that they tend to follow the Latin system. He points out examples of compounds made of two juxtaposed words (whether written as a single word or not) where the ordinary compound readjustment rules fail to apply. And he points out that, if we allow only sequential application of rules, the derivation of some compounds will require an intermediate stage that is unattested (peragizzare and ager are attested, but *perager and *agrare are not; p. 108). Still, once these issues are set aside, the regularity in compound formation is clear.

The data base is a thousand nominal compounds attested in the literature from Livio Andronico to Virgil. O arranges these data into appendices which form almost half the entire text. As a resource, then, this book is rich. One appendix lists the compounds alphabetically by first element, indicating where they are attested in the literature. The next lists the compounds by order of frequency of occurrence. Another lists second elements of compounds by frequency of occurrence, and the next one lists each author with the compounds used by that author and a frequency count. There are several other appendices that will be useful to both literary critics and linguists.

In the text O argues for distinctions among rules of compound formation, derivation, inflection, and readjustment. He argues that derivational rules can feed compound rules, and then more derivational rules can apply before we go on to rules of inflection, and, finally, to rules of readjustment (147). The circle-back (or cyclic) part of his model is similar to the levels common to lexical morphology and phonology, although he does not consider the question of whether certain derivational rules are on one level and others on another.

His readjustment rules are discussed in Ch. 4, and there are appendices that list all examples to which each readjustment rule has applied. He discusses the fact that vowel epenthesis and vowel change converge in such a way that -i- looks like the connecting vowel for many compounds (75). He argues that the possible combinations of the three categories of N[noun], A[jective], and V[erb] reflect the syntactic order of words in sentences. Thus no compounds are found in which V is the first element and N or A is the second, because Classical Latin sentence structure favored V-final ordering (160–64). The V+N compounds of Romance, then, e.g. Italian lavapiatti ‘dishwasher’, are an innovation that came about as word order changed. [Donna Jo Napoli, Swarthmore College.]