The Affective and Expressive Values of Verb-Complement Compounds in Romance

The term "verb-complement" is not an entirely satisfactory description of the formation to be dealt with here, but has been adopted as a matter of convenience to avoid a more cumbersome designation. Actually, the second element of these compounds, although most often a complement, may equally well be a vocative or another verb. As examples in which the second element is a complement, one may cite: crève-coeur, sacabotas, cut-throat, touche-à-tout, tentempié, battinzecca, hug-me-tight, passe-partout, posapiano, pick-up. Illustrative of forms with the vocative are: pêche-martin, andaniño, saltamartino, go-devil. When the second element is a verb, it may be co-ordinated with the first or simply a reduplication: tourne-vire, vaiven, quitapon (also quitaipon), coupe-coupe, pegapega, hushhush.

The precise grammatical nature of the first element is not particularly material to the present study, but I doubt that there are any scholars in the Romance field who do not concede it to be imperative.
This type of composition is very much alive in all the Romance languages, and is more productive in English than is generally realized. The dictionaries of the various languages contain hundreds of examples, but these represent only a fraction of the number actually in use. The verb-complement compound tends to be either popular in nature or confined to the vocabularies of highly specialized groups; often, consequently, it does not find its way into the literary language or even into writing. While the conclusions reached here are based primarily on French, Spanish, and Italian, sufficient sampling was done to indicate that they hold substantially for Portuguese, Provençal, Rhaeto-romance, and English, too.

With the field of investigation so defined, some precision concerning affectivity is in order. Strictly speaking, affectivity means the conveyance or evocation by a speech form of some emotional reaction—approval, disapproval, pleasure, displeasure, pity, surprise, amusement, indignation, etc. Nevertheless, there are some words which have no apparent emotional content—at least, one is unable to pin any particular emotional label on them—but which still produce marked stylistic effect by their incisive character, by their vividness, by the vigor or boldness of their imagery. As samples of verb-complement formations which appear to me to be precisely of this nature, let me cite some words which designate either technical or very prosaic objects: *emporte-pièce, pare-chocs, boute-feu, vidé-vite; sacaembocados, saltaregla, cascanueces, cortafrio; battifuoco, cacciavite, cavafango*. A priori, one might indeed expect all verb-complement formations to have this character since their first element generally expresses movement and since they are essentially metonymies in which the thing signified is designated by a function or characteristic action. In
any case, we shall not want to ignore expressive quality even though it may not be strictly classifiable as affective.

Affectivity itself is of two orders. We must distinguish between the kind which appears as a constant characteristic of certain speech forms, which is inherent in them, and the kind with which any speech form may be clothed as a result of the situation or special circumstances in which it is used. The first of these may be termed intrinsic affectivity—intrinsic, that is, to the speech form—and the second, extrinsic. Take, for instance, the terms *kitty, cat, feline*. For most people, *kitty* calls forth the same feelings—interest, warmth, tenderness. *Cat*, while neutral for the majority, may affect some individuals pleasantly, others unpleasantly, because of their respective fondness or aversion for the animal. *Feline* used in a scientific environment is neutral, but used in everyday language may provoke mirth because of its inappropriateness. The affectivity of *kitty* is intrinsic; that of the other two words, when they have it, extrinsic. Affectivity achieved through intonation is, of course, extrinsic. While extrinsic affectivity is by no means devoid of interest for the student of stylistics, the nature of our inquiry requires that we be concerned here only with the intrinsic variety.

It is not, however, always easy to determine whether affectivity is intrinsic or extrinsic. What shall be the criterion? Going back to *kitty*, how can we be sure that its affectivity does not stem from the thing designated rather than from the speech form? One way to resolve this problem is to compare the form in question with synonymous expressions. Since *small cat* does not have the connotations of *kitty*, we can rest assured that the latter’s affectivity is intrinsic. Another, perhaps still better, index of intrinsic character is the constancy of
the affectivity in the speech form under consideration. Most people, even those who do not like cats, are conscious of the affective values of kitty.

If we go now a little further with kitty, we may note that its affective values are shared by virtually all English diminutive formations in -y and its alternative -ie. Intrinsic values, then, may be characteristic of particular types of formation. For these values to be associated with a certain type of formation, however, it is not necessary that all representatives of the type possess them. The existence of non-pejorative forms like vieillard and montagnard does not alter the fact that French formations in -ard generally have the depreciatory value found in fuyard, braillard, dreyfusard, etc.

A preliminary survey of the whole field of verb-complement compounds, however, yields no immediately apparent regularity of affective content. Some forms are affective, others are merely expressive, still others are not even that. Of those that are affective, the values are not all of the same order: a good many are depreciative, but some are laudative; again, many are ironical or whimsical; and there are still to be found scattered representatives of varied other affective content. At first sight, then, it might seem doubtful that there are any particular affective values intrinsic to the verb-complement pattern. However, since the verb-complement formations comprise a field vastly more extensive than the suffix formations mentioned above, they can be expected to present a more complex problem. Closer analysis and segmentation of the field may result in the emergence of some order.

But before proceeding with our segmentation, let us make some observations on those forms which have no affectivity and little or no expressiveness. We have already remarked
that, by reason of their verbal element and metonymic character, the verb-complement compounds can be expected to be at least expressive, if not affective. And most of them are. Further, the failure to be so of a good part of those that are not can be explained. Naturally words whose verbal elements are no longer recognizable could not be expected to retain the expressiveness which would ordinarily result from having such an element. Thus: cloporte ("clore"), bacul ("battre"), morpion ("mordre"), tocsin (Pr. tocasenh < tocare + signum). Again, the verbal element—doubtless as a result of the frequency of its appearance in these compounds, coupled with its failure to express physical action or movement—may have ceased to be felt as verbal and have become a mere prefix. The descendants of portare and guardare, which in all the Romance Languages enter into composition much more frequently than any other verbs, are the principal cases in point. Few of their numerous compounds have either affective or expressive value; and when they do, it must be regarded as accidental and not intrinsic to the formation. That Sp. porta- is nothing more than a particle is born out by the fact that portar as an independent verb has long been obsolete in the senses which it has in its compounds. We may mention here also the French formations having para- as their first element. Parasol, parapet, and paravent are loan-words. Forms like parapluiue, parafoudre, paratonnerre, parados, parachute are obviously analogical and tend, consequently, to be less expressive than genuine formations from parer like pare-chocs, pare-boue, pare-étincelles, pare-éclats, etc.

Although at its inception the verb-complement compound appears to have been epithetic and most of its representatives retain something of this character, its current function is
predominantly substantival. In fact, it is only in French that adjective forms appear to any extent, and even there their use is limited. The substantives occur as both proper nouns and common nouns. The common nouns may designate persons, living things, or inanimate objects; they may likewise be abstract. Here, then, is a basis for our segmentation of the field: let us first consider the proper nouns, which constitute the earliest forms on record, and then let us attack the vast mass of common nouns, subdividing them as just indicated.

Among the proper nouns, a high incidence of depreciative and derisive terms becomes immediately apparent. Place names like Pendleu, Pisseleu, Gasteblé, Crièvecuer, Couppegueule, Prends-y-garde, Crièvence, Chantereine, Cantarranas, Rascavielas, Mojabragas, Despeñaperros, Mazagatos were obviously bestowed in contempt. While some place names are just as obviously laudatory or merely descriptive—e.g., Tenegaudia, Portegoie, Mirebel, Chantemerle, Salvatierra, Mirafl ores, Cantalapiedra—the majority are depreciatory.

In respect to person names, the tendency is even more pronounced. Although many of the verb-complement person names have become family names, they originated as sobriquets and these tend naturally, as Albert Dauzat has remarked, to take an uncomplimentary turn. Much like the Latin cognomina, they call attention to some physical or moral trait of the bearer, and almost invariably one unfavorable to him. Typical are Torcul, Engoulevent, Besediable, Couvedenier, Brisepot, Papelart, Gaignenéent, Torne-en-fuie, Foutvielle. Even apparently neutral or laudatory terms were often applied ironically. Thus, the very common Boileau (cf. It. Bevilacqua) appears to have been originally an antiphrasis
for drunkard.\textsuperscript{11} Forms which can be definitely identified as laudatory—e.g., Taillefer,\textsuperscript{12} Fierabras,\textsuperscript{13} Poincheval, Tueleu—exist, but are rare. When they do occur, they seem to have to do with military or cynegetic prowess. Included here, although not the name of a person, should be the name of Gerer’s horse (\textit{Chanson de Roland}, 1380): Passecerf. Some verb-complement names appear to be simple descriptions of the occupation of the bearer, but even in these cases it is frequently difficult to rule out at least the possibility of underlying irony. While appellations like \textit{Fillesoie} and \textit{Portelyaue} could hardly have lent themselves to gibing, can we be sure that even so innocent an appearing name as \textit{Abatbois} was a mere equivalent of \textit{bûcheron}? \textit{Poinbuef} and \textit{Poinlasne} seem even more suspect, particularly since they are found to be borne by persons not likely to have actually performed such menial tasks nor to have descended from persons who performed them. When we find bearing the sobriquet \textit{Chacelievre} a person otherwise qualified as “miles” and “forestarius,” \textsuperscript{14} we may be fairly sure the name was given with jeering intent. Even more obviously is this the case of \textit{Chassepie} and \textit{Pescheveron}. The frequency with which our verb-complement names occur in the works of writers with a sardonic bent is further confirmation, if any more were needed, of their character: they abound in the \textit{fabliaux}, in the animal epics, in Coquillart, and particularly in Rabelais.\textsuperscript{16} Obviously, however, in those sobriquets which have survived as family names, the ironic or depreciatory nuance has been largely lost.

Common-noun forms designating persons show the same preponderance of pejoratives that we have found in the proper nouns. Terms like \textit{fesse-mathieu, grippe-sous, lèche-fesses, vaurien, faitard, rêve-creux, coupe-jarret, gobe-Dieux, pisse-}
froid, tête-au-pot, trouble-fête, aguafiestas, tragaldabas, matasiete, pinchaus, quitapelillos, pisaverde, lameculos, hazmerreir, sputasenno, spazzacontrade, pelapolli, cacazibetto, spaccamonte, scalzagatto, gabbasanti, baciapile comprise the bulk of these words. The majority of the non-pejorative forms are compounds of porter, portar, portare and garder, guardar, guardare, which, as we have already noted, are seldom affective under any circumstances. The non-pejoratives remaining after exclusion of the porte-, porta- and garde-, guarda- compounds are rather rare. As definitely neutral we may cite: serrefreins, chauffe-cire, serrefile, pique-mine, echapellas, batihoja, cuidaniños, sacamanchas, pisauvas, battiloro, battinzecca, battistrada, tiraloro, filaloro, apriporta, conciatetti, cavamacchie, nettapanni, taglialegna, tagliapietre, guidarmenti. Some others—tourne-broche, gagne-pain, ganapán, picamulos, limpiabotas, lavaplatos, lavapiatti, lavascodelle, lustrascarpe—may not always be strictly pejorative, but often seem to be used with depreciative nuances. It will doubtless have been noticed already that all the non-pejorative formations mentioned describe occupational functions. The same thing is true of virtually all the porte-, porta- and garde-, guarda- compounds which designate persons. One might, consequently, be led to conclude that verb-complement formations denoting the performer of an occupational task are generally not affective. Actually, this is far from the fact. The plethora of terms like fesse-cahier, chasse-chiens ("beadle"), hale-boulines ("lubberly seaman"), grattermenton, croque-note, croque-morts, pique-puces ("tailor"), pousse-cailloux ("infantryman"), gâte-sauces, cagatintas ("office drudge"), azotaperros (cf. chasse-chiens), rapabarbas, picapijos (cf. pique-puces), matatías ("pawnbroker"), tapagujeros ("clumsy mason"), pintamonas
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(“hack portrait painter”), sacamertosymetesillas, sacamuelas, sacapotras, matasanos, medicastronzolo, cavadenti, becamorti, lavaceci, tirapièdetti ("hangman’s assistant"), torcileggi leaves no doubt that even in the case of words denoting occupational function, there is a decided association of the injurious and the derisory with the verb-complement compound.

Common nouns indicating place or location are few and tend to be pejorative: brise-cou, casse-cou, casse-gueule, coupe-gorge, pince-cul ("cheap dance hall," also pince-fesses), claques-dents ("low dive"), fourre-tout, spazzavento. However, Sp. parteaguas is neutral, while vide-bouteilles and tourne-bride are on the good-natured side.

The common or familiar names of many biological—particularly ornithological and botanical—species are verb-complement formations. These words are frequently affective, but the regularity which prevails in the nouns indicating persons is lacking. Depreciation is common, but cannot, in this case, be associated so definitely with the formation. While some words ascribe to the thing signified noxious or ridiculous qualities—e.g., enfle-boeuf ("golden carabid"), gâte-bois ("wood borer"), crèvec-chien ("black nightshade"), tue-brebis ("butterwort"), fouille-merde ("dung chafer"), matalhombres ("blister beetle"), mataojo (South American tree which gives off an eye irritating vapor), detienebuey ("rest harrow"), cavalocchio (kind of wasp)—there are almost as many which connote approval: dompte-vénin ("asclepias" or "swallowwort"), chasse-bosse ("loose-strife"), passe-rage ("pepperwort"), casse-lunettes ("euphrasy"), passe-fleur ("anemone"; the name implies that it surpasses the ordinary flower), passe-pomme (variety of apple supposed to be superior), passe-cressane (variety of pear supposed to be even better than
the cressane). But most of these species names seem to have been created with no idea of approval or disapproval; the intent seems rather to have been to produce a vivid or picturesque characterization of the thing signified: lèche-pattes ("sloth"), fouette-queue ("wagtail"), torcol ("wryneck"), gobe-mouches ("flycatcher," "gnatsnatcher," "Venus fly-trap"), girasol, rompesacos ("spiked hardgrass"), quebrantapiedras, trepatroncos ("woodpecker"), saltimpalo ("stone chat"), abracciaboschi ("honeysuckle"), cazzavela ("seagull"). Often humor shows itself in the form of exaggeration, whimsicality, or simply coarseness: engoulevent ("goat-sucker"), monte-au-ciel ("fumatory"), pissee-chien (variety of mushroom), pissee-en-lit, pissee-sang ("chokeweed"), pousse-pied (variety of barnacle), saltamontes ("grasshopper"), saltaojos ("peon"), picarrelincho (variety of woodpecker), cagaaceite ("missel thrush"), cagarropa (a small fly), tenergüenza ("sensitive plant"), quitameriendas ("autumn saffron"), espantalobos ("bladder senna"), tentenlaire ("hummingbird" in Argentina), ahogaviejas ("Venus' comb"), matagallegos ("milk thistle"), quitacalzon ("wasp"), rompezarragiellos ("reedgrass"), pisciacane ("chokeweed"). Humor is to be found too in certain forms involving a vocative: bêche-lisette ("vine grub"), pêche-bernard ("kingfisher"), saltaperico ("grasshopper").

A very large proportion of our formations denote non-living things. They are to be found as technical terms for tools, instruments, devices, machines used in virtually every industry and profession; they designate, as well, a wide variety of homely objects encountered in everyday life. We have already met some examples in our opening paragraphs; to these may be added: compte-fils, tourne-à-gauche, presse-étoffe (pressure
foot of a sewing machine), **chasse-goupille** (tool used by gunsmiths), **rogne-pied** (farrier’s hoof scraper), **serre-fine** (a surgical instrument), **essuie-glace**, **tire-cartouche**, **coupécircuit**, **presse-étoupes** (packing ring on shafts and piston rods), **tirailleuses** (“drafting pen”), **tientaguja** (“sounding rod”), **abrebocas** (“surgeon’s speculum”), **pesalicores, cubreengranaje, alzaválvulas, cortarrenglón** (marginal stop on typewriter), **apagachispas, arrancaclavos, buscahuella** (“spotlight”), **rompedtomás, lisciapiante** (“shoemaker’s polisher”), **cavastracci** (“gun worm”), **sbrattaneve, rompighiaccio, curaporti** (“dredge”), **tagliamare** (“cutwater”), **mazzafrusto** (“balista”), **passacorde** (“bodkin”), **foraterra** (“dibble”), **grattacacio, infornapane**.

These words, it can readily be seen from the examples given, generally do not have affectivity proper, but—excepting always the abundant **porte-, porta- and garde-, guardia-compounds**—they are usually expressive. Truly affective forms are by no means lacking, however. Humor in the form of hyperbole, irony, and whimsy is to be found, particularly in the words that belong to familiar, rather than technical, speech: **brûle-gueule, tape-cul** (“balance,” “light two-wheeled cart,” any jolting vehicle), **guide-âne, vide-poches** (“small stand with drawers”), **ahorcaperros** (“slipknot”), **tentemozo** (“prop,” “brace”), **excusabaraja** (type of covered basket), **tragaluz** (“skylight”), **tragaperras** (“slot machine”), **tragavino** (“funnel”), **hurtadineros** (“child’s bank”), **castraporci** (“knife of poor quality”), **gastigamatti** (“whip”), **saltafossi** (“rattletrap”).

In soldier’s and sailor’s language and in slang, words with these qualities are, as might be expected, more frequent: **secoue-paletôt** (“machine gun”), **monte-à-regret** (“scaffold,”
“guillotine”), coupe-vent (“nose”), bouche-l’œil (gold or silver coin), coupe-choux (“broadsword”), tire-jus (“handkerchief”), descuernapadrastras (kind of cutlass), sacanabos (hook for extracting bombs from mortars), matasoldados (“mizzen staysail”), baticulo (part of top mast rigging). We might include here mention of the use of ordinarily non-affective verb-complement compounds in grotesque metaphors: cure-dents and tournebroche for baïonnette, abat-jour for casque colonial, lance-pierres for fusil, lance-bombes for cuisine roulante, pousse-pousse for chemin de fer à voie étroite, torche-cul for circulaire.¹⁸

Formations designating articles of clothing and personal adornment show a marked tendency towards affectivity, humor of the same type as that just mentioned above still being involved: claqué-oreille (“floppy brimmed hat”), cache-nez, passe-montagne, rase-pet (“short jacket”), happelourde (“fake jewel”), accroche-coeur (curl of hair worn on forehead), cache-misère (overgarment worn to hide shabby clothing beneath it), décrochez-moi-ça (“secondhand hat”), grattez-moi-dans-le-dos (kind of corset), suivez-moi-jeune-homme (long double ribbon worn trailing behind), pincez-moi-ça (ribbon worn in a bow on the back of a dress), taparrabo (“loin cloth,” “trunks”), rascamono (“fancy hair pin”), tapabocos (cf. cache-nez), alzacuello (“stock”; cf. Fr. hausse-col), espantavillanos (“cheap flashy jewelry”; cf. happelourde), batticulo (“breeches”), saltamindosso (“scant, shabby garment”), picchiapetto (jewelled cross worn on bosom), scopamare (“sailor cap”).

Terms indicating items of food or drink follow the same pattern: amuse-gueule, croque-monsieur, vol-au-vent, casse-museau or cache-museau (kind of pastry), abat-faim, casse-
croûte, croquembouche (kind of pastry), hocchepot, tourne-
dos, tire-fiacre ("horse meat," "tough beef"), chasse-cousin
("poor wine"), chasse-ennui ("cup that cheers"), casse-
poitrine ("rotgut"; also called tord-boyaux, casse-pattes,
arrache-bide), pousse-café, saute-barrières ("wine"; also called
brouille-ménage), pousse-au-crime ("brandy"; also called
remonte-moi-le-moral, traine-par-terre), tentempié ("snack"),
matabambre (kind of marzipan in Cuba), aguapié ("weak
wine"), matarratas ("rotgut"), sciaquadenti ("light meal"),
tornagusto ("appetizer"), cacciacrosto ("bad wine").

As abstracts, verb-complement nouns are generally expres-
sive and frequently affective, the affectivity taking various
forms, but with humor predominating: crève-coeur, chasse-
ennui, sauve-l’honneur, rabat-joie, trompe-l’oeil, trompe-
conscience, passe-droit, tape-à-l’oeil, casse-tête, attrape-parterre
("ham acting"), casse-bras ("setback," "mishap"), quitape-
sares, quitamiedo, quitasueño, hurtacuerpo ("slight," "cold
shoulder"), rapapolvo ("reprimand"), soplamocos ("punch
in the nose"), passagonzalo ("flick"), zurrapelo ("sharp dress-
ing down"), mazagatos ("row"), trabelenguas, trabacuenta,
buscapié, trocatinta (exchange made by error), batticuore,
battisoffia, grattacapo ("worry"), cantafavola ("nonsense"),
cacciaffani (cf. chasse-ennui and quitapesares), rompicapo
(cf. casse-tête and rompecabezas), bacciabasso ("bow," "rever-
ence"), rompicollo ("rash undertaking"), battibecco ("ar-
gument"), lavacapo ("rebuke"), scavezzacollo ("dangerous
fall"), tornaconto ("profit"), giracapo ("vertigo"), crepa-
cuore.

Our compounds are frequently used as names of games and
as gaming terms. Virtually all of these are highly expressive,
and the majority have an element of humor: cache-cache,
cligne-musette (same as cache-cache), frappe-main ("hot cockles"), tourne-case (game on the order of backgammon), attrape-pognon, tape-cul ("seesaw"), passe-boule (game in which balls are thrown into a hole representing the open mouth of a figure), coupe-tête (same as saute-mouton), passe-dix (game played with three dice), coupe-cul (term used in lansquenet), ganapierde ("giveaway"), escondecucas ("hide and seek"), tragabolas (same game as passe-balles), matarrata (a card game), scaldamano ("hot cockles"; also called beccalaglio), salincherbio ("leap frog"), scaricalasino (a game with checkers), scaricabarili ("tiptop castle").

Verb-complement forms have been used to designate diseases. Naturally these are pejorative: trousse-galant ("cholera morbus"), pisse-sang (a disease of cattle), pasa-campana (tumor which forms on the hocks of equines), cacasangue ("dysentery").

Spanish uses a number of our formations, usually humorously, to describe weather phenomena: rabiazorras ("east wind"), matacabras ("harsh north wind"), calabobos ("penetrating drizzle"), matapolvo ("light rain"), descuernacabras ("severe north wind"). Related, although not abstract, are calamoco ("icicle") and aguapié ("slush").

Many verb-complement compounds occur in fixed prepositional phrases outside of which they are generally not to be found. All are picturesque and highly expressive: à brûle-pourpoint, à musse-pot (or mucho-pot), à cloche-pied, à écorche-cul ("sliding along on one's backside," hence, doing something unwillingly), à dépêche-compagnon (with se battre, "to the finish"), à étripe-cheval, à rebrousse-poil, à tue-tête, à tire-larigot, à lèche-doigts, d'arrache-pied, en un tourne-main, en rase-mottes, à la va-comme-je-te-pousse, a rodeabrazo, a tente bonete, a regañadientes, a quemarropa, a macha-
martillo, a rapatterón, a volapié, a pasaperro (bookbinding term), a pasatoro, de hurtamanño, a bruciapelo, a crepapanci, a crepapelle, a squarchiagola, a squarchiasaco (with guardare, "look with an evil eye"), a straccabraccia, a strippapelle, a tiratira (with fare, "draw lots"), a strappabrecco ("inconsiderately"), a scaricabarili (with fare, "foist the blame for something on someone else").

We have already remarked that the use of verb-complement formations as adjectives is confined to French and even there is limited. Adjective forms abound in the works of the Pleiade, but the vogue for them—perhaps as a result of their abuse by Du Bartas—was short-lived. There are a few literary survivals: "la gent trotte-menue" (La Fontaine), "l'animal porte-jupe" (Regnard), "l'oiseau porte-foudre" (Diderot), "l'enfant porte-bandeau" (Béranger). Naturally, words created expressly for poetic effect tend to be not only expressive but likewise affective. Turning to more prosaic language, we find fainéant (les rois fainéants), ferre-mule (un servant ferre-mule), and coupe-chounx (un frère coupe-choux), all three pejorative. However, most of the adjectival forms in current use belong to technical or commercial language and are non-affective: un vaisseau serre-file, un canon porte-amarre, un livre classe-feuilles, du papier tue-mouches, du papier chasse-punaises, une charue tourne-oreille, une clef tourne-écrous.

After our survey of the field, I believe the following conclusions to be warranted:

1. Verb-complement compounds are generally expressive and frequently affective.

2. With the whole range of the formation in view, the prevailing affective values—particularly dominant in the proper
nouns and in the common nouns designating persons and places, but cropping up also to greater or lesser degree in the other types—are depreciative and derisory. Outside of the proper-noun, person, and place-name categories, the derision tends to become more good-natured, and frequently weakens to simple chaffing and whimsicality.

3. While other affective values manifest themselves at times, they fail to do so with sufficient regularity to warrant their being associated with the formation.

4. When lacking affectivity proper, as is frequently the case, the verb-complement compounds usually achieve expressiveness through the evocation of vivid and vigorous images. Providing the verbal element does not become obscured through phonetic erosion and does not deteriorate into a mere prefix as in the case of the porte-, porta- and garde-, guarda-formations, the verb-complement compounds seem to retain their original expressiveness regardless of the time elapsed since their creation and contrary to what happens in the case of most stylistic phenomena.

These conclusions are hardly startling. For the most part, either they might have been predicted or they have been anticipated in the course of previous treatments of other aspects of our formations. This is, however, the first study specifically devoted to a systematic review of the affectivity and expressive qualities of these compounds, and the conclusions, even when merely negative or corroborative of what had already been advanced, do put the matter on a firmer basis.

It was not our purpose here to consider the origin and development of the verb-complement compounds. However, a
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few words on the subject may not be amiss. The most recent treatment of the matter is to be found in Spitzer's appendage (Rom., LXXIII, 42 ff.) to his discussion of certain metaphoric uses of the imperative. Spitzer engages in some rambling and, on the whole, idle—since they cannot be substantiated—speculations. His arguments are neither particularly perceptive nor convincing. While he is doubtless correct in affirming—that our formations in their earliest appearances were sobriquets, his tracing of their development from that stage is frequently not only open to dispute but highly improbable, and at times not even in accord with known facts. All that it is safe to assume can, I think, be summed up succinctly as follows: At its inception, the formation seems to have been an apostrophe in which the person apostrophized was defied to do something dishonoring or ridiculous. The scornful challenge is a common human device to dissuade someone from doing something the challenger fears or of which he disapproves (cf. Eng. tattletale). The step from apostrophe to epithet is easy. The figure was subsequently extended to places and to living things, finally to inanimate things and abstractions. In the beginning, the person, place, or thing was urged to do something to excite contempt or laughter, and it was implied that this action was characteristic. Later, the subject was simply called upon to perform some characteristic action, good or bad. The original character of the formation is, then, best reflected in the person names, least in the names of inanimate objects.

French and Provençal Lexicography


2. This is, of course, the measure of affectivity proposed by Charles Bally in his various works on stylistics.

3. The phenomenon is virtually nonexistent in Castilian and in Tuscan, because they have been more stable phonetically than French.

4. There are several formations with an element of humor: porte-maillot ("bit actor"), porte-respect ("firearm"), porte-fainéant ("scat for the teamster on the shaft of a dray-cart"), porte-faflois "billfold"), porte-pipe ("face"), garde-fou, guardainfantes (a kind of crinoline used in eighteenth-century Spain and Italy to conceal pregnancy).

5. See my “Notes on Spanish Word Formation,” Modern Language Notes, LXVIII (1953), 17.

6. See Darmesteter, Traité, p. 225, n. 2; and Meunier, pp. 220-21.


9. Spitzer (Romania, LXXIII, 49) considers that all these names had ironic, hence depreciatory, nuances. While this is possible, though not very probable, for Tenegaudia, Portegoie, and Chantemerle, it becomes extremely doubtful in the cases of Mirebel, Salvatierra, and Cantalapiedra and even more so in the cases of Miramar, Miraflores, etc.

Incidentally, Spitzer misquotes Dauzat on this matter. Dauzat does not say specifically (Les noms de lieux, p. 28) that Chantemerle and Chantelauze are ironical, but that compounds of this type sometimes are.


11. Dauzat, Noms de famille, p. 207.

12. In both Les Noms de famille, p. 209, and in Les Noms de personnes (Paris, 1925), p. 103, as well as in his Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de famille et prénoms (Paris, 1951), Dauzat labels Taillefer “surnom professionnel,” but neglects to say what profession he thinks it describes. Since in its earliest appearances it is used to qualify valiant and noble warriors, and since in the Middle Ages war was the only profession sufficiently characterized by the cleaving of iron for this action to have furnished an epithet, it may be safely assumed that Taillefer originated as a term of praise for knights adept
at penetrating enemy armor. A smith, it should be noted, characteristically beats rather than cuts iron. Moreover, I have been able to find no instance of the term's being associated with smiths or, for that matter, with the members of any other trade. Spitzer's supposition (Romania, LXXIII, 47) that Taillefer was from the beginning used with ironic intent is not only pure supposition but in disaccord with the few facts we possess.

13. While the dictionaries, s. v. fier-à-bras, are virtually unanimous in offering fera brachia as the etymon of Fierabras, this etymology is completely unacceptable on phonological grounds. See Modern Language Notes, LXXI (1956), 356–57.


16. Miss A. G. Hatcher correctly points out (Word, II, 226) that the ordinary speaker of French tends to feel the first element in the garde-compounds as a noun, especially when the compound designates a person. She then attempts to account for this on the grounds that in current French, verb-complement compounds have an inevitable depreciatory nuance and that, consequently, if garde- were interpreted as a verb, words like garde-chasse, garde-barrière, etc. would take on a pejorative cast. This explanation is, of course, not only hopelessly naive, but is untenable on a number of grounds—chief among them, the existence of a fair number of verb-complement compounds whose verbal element is unmistakable and which do not have the slightest pejorative connotation; e.g., porte-parole, serre-file.

17. The meanings of formations will be indicated in the cases of the less familiar terms whose significations are not readily apparent from their components.

18. For many of the examples cited in this paragraph, I am indebted to Dauzat's L'Argot de la guerre (Paris, 1919).


20. See Meunier, pp. 98 ff.; Darmesteter, Traité, pp. 216 ff.

21. See Darmesteter, De la création, pp. 163 ff.