Neo-classical combining forms in English loanwords: evidence from Italian

Word-building from Latin and Greek combining forms and affixes has been quite productive throughout the centuries in many European languages. This explains interlinguistic convergence across these languages in technical and scientific terms, which are generally adapted to the morphological systems of each language and are represented by internationalisms such as English television and Italian televisione. Specialized terminologies have assimilated many terms from the English language, the top donor language of the 20th century and beyond. This borrowing process has been facilitated by the presence of neo-classical components in their morphological structure, which is shared with Latin-based languages. In this paper we analyse 76 direct English borrowings integrated into Italian and recorded in the Italian general dictionary lo Zingarelli 2017 (2016), which contains 19 types of neo-classical initial combining forms attached to an English element (e.g. multi- in multitasking and micro- in microblog). In spite of the presence of neo-classical initial combining forms, the English head elements of these compounds have resisted adaptation to Italian. The aim of this paper is to discuss the characteristics of these compounds, analysing the productivity of the combining forms that make them up, their Italian equivalents, usage fields and semantic profile. Evidence from Italian shows that the number of direct Anglicisms containing neo-classical elements is relatively small with respect to the high level of productivity of the same combining forms in Italian. On the basis of these results, we argue that this is an area of language contact in which interlinguistic similarity leads to composition with domestic elements rather than to borrowing.