

ASPECTS OF THE ROMANIAN MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY AFTER 1990 (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ENGLISH INFLUENCE)

- ABSTRACT -

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The present thesis, entitled “*Aspects of the Romanian Medical Terminology after 1990 (with Special Reference to the English Influence)*”, focuses mainly on the cross-linguistic influence of English on Romanian, at the lexico-semantic level, in the scientific field of medicine, after 1990. We have highlighted both the positive aspects of language contact (such as the coining of new terms) and the negative effects (the occurrence of ambiguities, improper structures or even errors), the latter being the result of the interference between English and Romanian. The present study also surveys the specialized translation, as it makes use of translations of medical literature, and of our own translations of terms, phrases and medical texts, suggested throughout the analysis.

The medical terminology, the subject matter of this study, is relatively uniform as far as the content is concerned, and represents a special strand of terminological research, due to the fact that medicine is a domain in which concepts are in continuous change, thus bringing about a permanent renewal of specialized terms. The period after 1990, mainly surveyed in the study, a time span in which English influence has grown steadily and more powerful, is not less important than other periods of time in the evolution of the Romanian medical terminology, outlined in the introduction of the study.

We draw the line between the technical medical terminology, the focus of our research, and the popular medical terminology, not included in this study, a highly significant and important lexico-stylistic dichotomy we want to clarify first and foremost.

As new notions precede their corresponding denominations, we have tried to evince the way in which the Romanian medical terminology after 1990 has tried to work out the lagging behind of lexical forms. We have found particular interest in the “collision” between the old terms and the new ones (many of Anglo-Saxon origin), we have pursued the polysemantic

terms, therefore with different meanings, as well as the process of appropriation of new terms. The study grasps the orientation of the Romanian language towards other European languages (especially English, but also French) in the medical field as well.

We have centred round semantic relations, both external, between different medical terms: synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, hyponymy, and internal, such as the different meanings of linguistic units: monosemy and polysemy, proper and figurative senses. We have first and foremost probed the semantic relations between the Romanian terms influenced or even adopted from English and the English term involved.

Our semantic approach has been, as far as possible, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic, synchronic and diachronic. Synchrony and diachrony are known to be complementary in linguistic analysis, interrelated by a dialectical relation.

The diachronical survey of the lexical units under analysis has helped us explain the changes of meaning, occurred in time, the specialization and over-specialization of words (in the case of common lexemes, prevalent in our study, having turned into medical terms), and the coining of medical terms. On the other hand, we have made use of the diachronic approach as an objective and linguistic method to probe the confusions, ambiguities and inadequate structures, existing in the Romanian medical terminology, due, more often than not, to the English influence. The etymological perspective has revealed not only the salient apparent direct source, English, but also other linguistic influences, namely the intermediaries of the terms, genuine lexico-semantic filters and socio-cultural mediators.

Brought to present-days (by *present-days* we understand the end of the XXth century, the beginning of the XXIst century), the terms have been subjected to a synchronical analysis, monolingual (Romanian) and/or bilingual (Romanian/English), taking into consideration the textual context, in a broader sense, able to account for the functioning of the terms, for their correct or incorrect adjustment to the Romanian medical language, as well as for their disambiguation. Terminological suggestions to help avoid ambiguities and correct errors end the study of each lexico-semantic unit.

We deem that today's Romanian language continues to have, just as it had in the past, when scientific terminologies were set up, the possibility to express in a clear and precise way any scientific notion. However, the path it needs to go on is not smooth, especially for medical terminology, and implies greater responsibility.

The present research is based on a lexical corpus made up of 125 medical writings (we particularly refer to the written medical discourse), medical treatises, dictionaries, journals, either translations or original scientific work, published or in electronic form. The medical

literature used in our research is from the '90s till now, but also older, for a bird's eye view on the evolution of medical terminology.

This thesis is made up of five chapters, which illustrate different aspects of Romanian medical terminology: chapter one passes into review the general and theoretical aspects of medical language, chapter two analyses some samples of lexical neological borrowings from English, chapter 3 studies "the false friends" of present-day Romanian medical terminology, chapter four glances at the intricate ways of coining medical technical terms, and chapter five forwards a model of terminological disambiguation.

I. Introductory Notions

We have passed into review the general aspects of the medical language, seen as a particular form of specialized language, the common code of health care professionals, which ensures communication and information transfer in one of the most competitive international domains of research and practice. To analyse medical language, we have to take as a head start the general language. The dichotomy between the general language, which entails a certain uniformity, and specialized vocabularies, the latter subsuming medical lexicon, is not, however, a rigid opposition, on the contrary, it allows for a permanent transfer of lexical items from a compartment to the other, through terminologization and de-terminologization.

The general problems related to terminologies have also been tackled.

After pointing out the diachronic evolution of the international medical terminology, with focus on the advent of the different *lingua francas* of oral and written communication from this scientific field, we have studied the Romanian medical terminology in diachrony and synchrony, with emphasis on linguistic enrichment.

Throughout its history, the Romanian medical terminology has been subjected to various influences from foreign cultures and languages: Greco-Latin, Italian, Russian, and, for more than a century, French. Nowadays it is under the dominance of English. From the latter half of the XXth century, when French was replaced from the position of international vehicle for the transmission of information in most scientific fields, till now, the most prominent influence on the Romanian medical language has been that of English (British and American). Apart from being the primary medium of scientific publication, English, the new *lingua franca* of medical communication, has likewise emerged as the main language of international meetings of specialists and of international and national scientific exchanges. The influence of English on Romanian has grown steadily since 1990, instanced not only in loanwords/lexical borrowings, but also in semantic loans and calques/loan-translations of different types (lexical, grammatical,

and idiomatic). English has also increasingly reached even everyday informal conversations between Romanian physicians.

The terminological “import” from English, an ongoing and intense phenomenon, as medicine implies continuous change, brings up in Romanian, as well as in other languages, problems of linguistic adjustment, at different levels – in the formal register, that of specialized language, used in medical treatises, articles, and scientific communications, translations or manuals, generally characterized by more sustained terminological efforts, in the specialists’ jargon, which subsumes a less supervised terminology as well as a higher degree of language mixing, ambiguities, inadequate structures and errors, and the language for popularization.

However, although Romanian medical terminology was, since the XIXth century till the beginning of the XXth, thoroughly watched and cultivated by its creators and their followers, so that translations should be correct and borrowings from other languages should fit the phonetico-phonologic and morpho-syntactic Romanian environment, the present-day Romanian medical terminology (after 1990, the period of time under analysis), without a close survey from linguists and in a constant effort to keep up with the English medical language, is on the way of becoming more and more heterogeneous and unsupervised, and medical discourse, written and oral, is adopting mechanically/*ad litteram* English texts. That shows a regrettable laziness on the part of its users, as well as a lack of conscious reference to their national language.

Unfortunately, as open linguists and ordinary language users may be towards other specialized languages influenced by English, medical specialized language, having a limited circulation, even esoteric, used only by experts, seems to have been unduly overlooked in the recent years in our country. We have tried to point out that the linguistic material the present-day Romanian medical literature provides us with is at least interesting, and a linguistic study would be extremely helpful in analyzing, completing, and correcting it, yielding not only practical results, as medical literature does, but especially linguistic accuracy. We think that medical terminology, as well as the whole medical language, deserves more insight and a unifying perspective nowadays as it used to have in the past, when the foundation was laid.

Concepts such as cross-linguistic influence and interference in the Romanian medical terminology, language contact, and bilingualism have been passed into review, and the review closes on the aspects related to neologisms and (lexical) borrowing, with special reference to the present-day issue of the presence of Anglicisms in the Romanian medical terminology. The aspects of medical translations have also been dealt with.

II. Neological Lexical English Borrowings

The terms analysed in the second chapter of the thesis present different situations of neological lexical borrowing. The first term under discussion, *prick test*, from the English vocabulary of allergology, borrowed as such in Romanian, sums up several terminological and notional ambiguities that we have thrown light upon in the analysis. Hence, a new perspective on the subject of the Romanian denominations of allergy tests ensued.

The second term studied is *tril*, meaning “a vibration accompanying a cardiac or vascular murmur that can be palpated”. The word is a phonetical, orthographic, and morphological adaptation of the English term *thrill* (‘a subtle nervous tremor caused by intense emotion or excitement/*med.* A vibratory movement, resonance, or murmur, felt or heard in auscultation’). The homonymous collision between the Anglicism *tril* and the common lexeme from the everyday Romanian vocabulary, *tril*, “a musical sound; warbling”, the latter having entered Romanian through Italian intermediary (< it. *trillo*), may pose semantic issues.

The almost usual classification of lexical Anglicisms into necessary and useless or “luxury” borrowings may be subjective and risky at the same time, as necessity varies with the individuals and in time. Anglicisms that are doublets (synonymous variants) of older Romanian terms, therefore adapted orthographically, phonetically, semantically, and morphologically, can be considered useless. The medical term *tril* is a recent doublet of an older and functional term in the medical language, *freamăt*. Even though the neologism *tril* is not to be considered an error, it represents a source of terminological and notional ambiguities.

Chapter two ends with the analysis of a polysemantic lexeme, which transgresses easily the bounds between the common language and specialized languages, therefore named by a recent Canadian publication “chameleon-like term”: the term *pattern*.

Despite the fact that *pattern* is defined by most dictionaries as an Anglicism, we have shown that the lexeme does not originate in English, moreover, it travelled long journeys to different realms. The Romanian medical language dichotomizes the use of this term: on the one hand, it uses it as such, to prevent the translation difficulties raised by its polysemy, *pattern* being sometimes hard to translate even in a sentence, and on the other hand, it tries to render it into Romanian, because the meanings and the uses of the borrowed Romanian term *pattern* are more limited than those of the English source-word.

We have undertaken to disambiguate the word *pattern* in the Romanian medical language, by suggesting Romanian equivalents that could fit the vocabularies of different medical domains, in which *pattern* is already in use: *afectare*, *aspect*, *caracter*, *curbă*, *deprindere*, *desen*, *distribuție*, *model*, *profil*, *șablon*, *tablou*, *tip*, *traseu* and others. From the point of view of medical translation, *pattern* should be seen as a challenging word, and the effort

to translate it as necessary, as any semantic shade of meaning is important in medical language, and no linguistic ambiguities or errors are allowed, because they could impact in a negative way on the extra-linguistic reality, namely the medical practice.

III. False Friends

“False friends” represent one of the possible manifestations of interference. The similarity between the signifiants of certain English and Romanian terms may lead to a tendency towards an extension of the equivalences to the point of establishing an incorrect semantic correspondence between those items. Transfer of meaning between “false friends”, word pairs from English and Romanian which, in spite of similarities in form, have different, and sometimes opposite, meanings, is a negative one, a source of linguistic obscurity, contrary to semantic precision and notional clarity that medical language aims at. We have subjected to linguistic inquiry two such examples of such semantic traps: the English word *injury* and the Romanian word *injurie* (‘insult, abuse, outrage, vituperation’), the English word *drug* and the Romanian word *drog* (‘narcotic’).

The lexeme *injurie*, the “false friend” of the English term *injury*, entered the Romanian medical language by a negative transfer of meaning. Its use is not, however, occasional or isolated, on the contrary, the term has already been adopted by many specialists in the field and is used systematically in medical texts that actualize different types of discourse; *injurie* is used in the written literature, in medical treatises and journals, as much as it appears in the oral discourse of congresses, in phrases such as: *injurie miocardică*, *injurie hepatică*, *injurie renală*, *injurie celulară*, *injurie cardiacă* etc.

On the one hand, the occurrence of *injurie* in the medical lexicon can be accounted for word-for-word translations, an undeniable source of errors, made under the pressure of the new over-specialized terminology, whose prime vehicle of transmission is English. Another possible explanation of the presence of *injurie* in the medical language could be the urge to change and “update” the language, by the use of linguistic items of English origin. The English items are thereupon adopted mechanically by health care professionals and transformed into linguistic automatisms. Laziness in translation is, however, dangerous, and should be fought.

It is highly advisable to use a well-known term in Romanian medical terminology, in use for more than 50 years: *leziune* (‘lesion’) (word borrowed from French).

We argue in favour of lexical caution, which made it possible for an English concept to have a name of French influence in Romanian (*leziune renală*) more than 50 years ago.

Injurie is a barbarism that should be replaced by correct equivalents, in use in Romanian medical terminology.

Under the influence of English terminology, the Romanian word *drog*, the second term analysed in this chapter, is being used, more often than not lately, in the medical language, as a synonym of the word *medicament*. *Drog* has recently added one of the meanings of the English term *drug*, similar in form. This semantic calque is dangerous, because *drog*, unlike *medicament*, has a clear negative meaning, it is a substance that can be habituating or addictive, physically and/or psychologically, especially a narcotic. Therefore, the semantic disaffinity or better said incompatibility between the two Romanian words *drog* and *medicament* makes the relationship of synonymy abnormal and confusing for both physicians and ordinary Romanian speakers. Thus, whereas in general Romanian language, the relatively common confusion between the English term *library* and the Romanian word *librărie* (“bookshop”) has no long-term or life-threatening effects in real life, the recommendation of a Romanian medical treatise, translated from English, to administer “droguri” (‘narcotics’) instead of “medicamente” (‘medication’) for high blood pressure is at least concerning for physicians and confusing and grave for the patients who seek medical counselling.

Moreover, the meaning of “medication”, acquired by the word *drog*, as a result of the interference with the English “false friend” *drug*, is not necessary, because the Romanian language has distinct terms for each of the two notions. Linguistic variation/variety is not a desideratum for the medical language, quite the contrary, synonymy should be reduced. Synonymy is not favoured in specialized languages, as it makes communication difficult and is opposed to the basic principles of terminology, namely clarity and limpidity.

To sum up, as the word *drog* has been used almost exclusively of late with the meaning “narcotic” in ordinary communication and in mass-media (TV, Internet etc.), its newly acquired meaning “medicine” in the medical language, whose terms should be clear and unambiguous, is unnecessary and therefore needs correction. This unrecommended use may play a decisive role in relation with the extra-linguistic reality referred to by the utterances in which the lexeme under analysis appears.

IV. The Intricate Paths of Coining Medical Technical Terms

The terms *siderare miocardică* (‘myocardial stunning’) and *hibernare miocardică* (‘myocardial hibernation’) are being used more and more frequently in the present-day Romanian medical language, especially in the field of cardiology and cardiovascular surgery, but also of internal medicine. They also have entries in specialized dictionaries. The paths followed by these terms (first in English, the source language, and then in other languages), to enter Romanian, are highly important in this particular case, as they throw light upon the process by which medical terminology comes into being. In a field with rapid evolution like medicine,

the ways in which new words can be coined is an aspect worth pursuing, especially as there is an underlying time gap between the need to name concepts, when they appear, and the standardization of denominations.

Moreover, our examples are metaphors, and the aspects related to the figurative meanings of medical terms are not enough studied at present. The “medical metaphor”, as we call it in this study, a special, complex and interesting method of creating a specialized terminology, situated between terminology and stylistics, deserves more attention, as the criteria the medical terms or phrases created in this way have to meet, in order to adapt and function successfully in the medical language, are as strict as those applied to medical terms in general: accuracy, precision, clarity, concision, and semantic correctness.

V. The Disambiguation of Polysemantic Terms

In English, the polysemy of the term *rate* is not confined to one scientific field, but it seems to be controlled by some restrictive combinations on the syntagmatic axis, specific to each terminology. The problems appear when the linguistic boundaries between different languages are transgressed, as it happens with English and Romanian.

Therefore, we have forwarded a model of semantic analysis, on the English noun *rate* and a corpus of English medical texts in which it is used, identifying in the first place the concepts that *rate* expresses. Then, the English phrases in which *rate* is used, grouped on each concept, and inferred from the textual contexts, have been classified in categories of meanings (“signifié”) (*frecvență/ritm, rată, viteză*). In the end, we have suggested the Romanian equivalents for the English phrases, in accordance with the same categories of meanings (“signifié”).

To conclude, the present research, situated between the term and the text, unique at present, as it analyses the medical terminology, little or not at all studied, especially in the present-days, probably a result of the close code characteristic to this terminology, is based mainly on the following aspects:

- Anglicisms (lexical and semantic borrowings) from the medical terminology after 1990, in point of ambiguities and errors resulting from the language contact;
- problems of homonymy, synonymy, polysemy in the Romanian but also English medical terminology;
- disambiguation of the medical discourse by looking for specific, clear, monosemantic terms, able to express, in a distinct manner, concepts proper to this particular field of science and technology;

- finding the Romanian equivalents of foreign terms, by suggesting correct terms instead of the Anglicisms used incorrectly;
- the problem of “false friends”, word pairs in Romanian and English similar in form but with different, and sometimes opposite, meanings;
- corpus analysis, based on Romanian medical literature (translations and original papers) and on English medical literature;
- the problem of neologisms, of coining new words, what are the methods that can be used to create terms and how comprehensive these methods can be.

Our approach resembles that of the clinician who, in the case of a pathological entity difficult to diagnose, proceeds to successive and staged investigations. The present study, hopefully as structured and logical as a medical one should be, is a lexico-semantic analysis of several “problem” terms of the medical language. Alternating linguistic metalanguage with the medical one, to point out the bi-system our analysis refers to, we can state that, starting with the “clinical and paraclinical investigations”, namely the concrete examples, which have helped us build up the abstract model we want to study, we have “diagnosed”, in other words we have analysed the medical terminology, in terms of the problems that may occur when the linguistic boundaries between two languages are transgressed.

Finding the viable solutions in order to solve “the diagnosis errors” of the medical terminology and the setting up of a coherent, clear and standardized medical vocabulary, in agreement with the laws of clarity and language, and up to a point in accordance to the use, so as not to detach from the common use, those are problems that should be the focus of attention of linguists. A domain in which techniques, diagnostic and treatment methods evolve so rapidly, and the types of medicines become more diverse and efficient, deserves a language accordingly.