

## **Semantic equivalences in Romanian medical terminology**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper aims to underline some aspects concerning the presence of synonymy semantic relationship in specialized medical terminology, having as object of study Romanian medical terms. For this study we use a descriptive, conceptual and lexical semantic research method to provide the understanding of different couples, groups or synonymic series where medical terms have several variations: specialized/common terms, syntagms and patronyms of French or different origin. We propose a classification scheme of synonyms of medical lexicon, terms or synonymic syntagms, total and partial, in order to meet the accessibility needs in scientific communication.

**Keywords:** synonymy, Romanian medical terms, synonymic series, typology.

### **1 Introduction**

The use of "specialized denominations" (Lerat 1995: 21) is one of the elements that differentiates common language and specialty languages. Theoretically, each field or domain of activity has its own terminology, but in practice sometimes it proves difficult to claim that a term belongs to a single domain. Taking into account that many words exist simultaneously in the common language and in terminology of one or more specialized languages, the existence of lexical-semantic relationships is an obvious reality in linguistics, as in many scientific disciplines.

Although the concept of specialized language seems from the outset to exclude the idea of synonyms, the semantic similarity is present in terminologies

of different scientific fields, where the postulate of the monoreferentiality, unanimously agreed, the precision and the unequivocal nature of the terms are only an ideal characteristic.

*Objectives of the study*

Our paper aims to highlight the presence of synonymy relationship in medical terminology, namely identify the sources, inventory the typology and highlight different synonymic couples or series of medical terms that have multiple variations as a result of combining different functional-stylistic variants of the communication in medical terminology. The article also aims to clarify certain specific features of medical terms, to present and characterize their "potential" of meaning out of context, as an inventory conducted according to dictionaries.

The analysis of aspects related to the presence of synonymy in medical terminology is part of a relationship between the description of the language and its practical application to the exploration of specialized corpus for educational purposes, as teaching FSP (French for specific purposes) - medical field.

*Method of analysis and corpus*

Our approach uses a descriptive, semantic and conceptual method, in order to provide the features of various synonymic constructions in medical terminology. The phenomenon of synonymy, very common despite the requirement of terminology to work on the principle of unanimity, is presented, in accordance with the dictionaries, as ways of expressing the same linguistic content.

The corpus included medical terms extracted from general and specialty dictionaries, used to determine the meaning of the terms submitted to analysis: *Dictionar Medical (Valeriu Rusu, Editura Medicala, 2010)*; *Dictionarul ortografic, ortoepic si morfologic al limbii romane (Editia a II-a, 2010)*; *Marele dictionar de neologisme (Florin Marcu, Editura Saeculum Vizual, 2008)*; *Mic Dictionar Academic (Bucuresti, Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2010)*.

## **2 The concept of synonymy**

“Are called synonymous, both entities whose values are exactly the same. These two entities have the same meaning and strictly identical terms of use. They are thus substitutable each other” (Gouadec 1993: 69). Also, Otman (1996: 111) argued that “two names are synonymous when they refer to the same notion and

may be described by the same definition”.

To define synonyms, we must follow two directions: a semantic one and structural other. From a semantic point of view, synonyms are two words or groups of words with different form, but having the same meaning (Ducrot et al. 1996: 310). Regarding the definition of synonymy from a structural point of view, the principle of commutability is taken into account.

General linguistics defines the synonyms as lexical units with identical or nearly identical meaning and interchangeable in some contexts, without losing sight of the identity of designated object. According to Dubois et al. (1994) in the *Dictionary of linguistics and Language Sciences*, the synonyms are different lexical units having the same signified and that can be used in place each other. We consider this statement the most appropriate to define the synonyms as rationally as possible.

### **3 Synonymy sources**

The presence of synonyms reflects the lexical richness of the language. To fully understand the various nuances expressed by the terms of a series of synonyms, the wide variety sources of synonymy must be considered:

1) multilingual or bilingual dictionaries (Pavel-Rucăreanu 2001: 77), as terms enter into the terminology system of a language through the translations of "dictionary";

2) the invention of new terms; we come to designate a single concept with two or even several terms which is a quite serious drawback if the use of new terms makes text comprehension more difficult;

3) the borrowings from other languages;

4) the layers;

5) low standardization;

6) ad-hoc inventions owed to translators.

### **4 Synonyms types**

Starting from the definition of synonyms mentioned above, there are therefore different degrees of synonymy and also several types of synonyms. Synonyms perform generally two functions: clarifying the concepts, uses and nuances; expressive enrichment of communication.

According to these criteria and sources of synonymy, the causes and factors contributing to their appearance, we present a classification of synonyms

of medical language, following:

- full (total) or perfect synonyms;
- partial synonyms (quasi-synonyms);
- synonymic syntagms.

***Total synonyms:***

That is the case of the synonymic doublets. Those are usually neologisms with exact meaning, their use being limited in certain contexts. The following pairs (acronyms –terminological syntagms) are considered synonyms of “necessity”:

NMR - Nuclear Magnetic Resonance;  
AV block – Atrioventricular Block;  
DNA - deoxyribonucleic acid.

***Perfect synonyms:***

Examples:

*ultrasonography - echography;*  
*antispasmodic - spasmolytic;*  
*brain - encephalon;*  
*tumor - neoplasm;*  
*uremia - azotemia;*  
*zymogen - proenzyme, etc.*

***Synonymic series (synonymic term or syntagm):***

*frontal lobe – forebrain;*  
*hindbrain – rhombencephalon;*  
*subcutaneous tissue – hypodermis;*  
*glial cells – neuroglia – glia;*  
*beta-blocker – adrenergic antagonist, etc.*

***Synonymic syntagms:***

These are syntactic units very numerous in medical terminology, sometimes highly specialized, some of them untranslatable or difficult to translate by non-specialists.

*cardionector structures – cardionector system;*  
*anastomotic ulcer - peptic ulcer;*  
*leg ulcer - varicose ulcer;*  
*outer ear – auricle – external ear;*  
*Marie - Strümpell arthritis/disease - ankylosing spondylitis*  
*Lagrange’s operation - sclérecto-iridectomy;*

*Vidal's disease - circumscribed neurodermatitis;*  
*Pignet index – body build index etc.*

Synonymy, regardless of type, is an important part of the linguistic notion of equivalence, which includes “any syntactic construction, single (syntagm) or complex (sequence of a sentence, entire sentence or context), making within the surface structure the same notional content of the deep structure” (Zugun 2000: 232). In his “*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*” (1972), Ducrot overlaps the definition of synonymy with that of the linguistic equivalence: “two expressions (words, groups of words, statements) are called synonyms if they have the same meaning, while being materially different” (Ducrot et al. 1972 : 302).

## 5 Conclusions

The medical field represents a privileged field for the synonymy relationship, providing even perfect models. The abundance of synonyms is a characteristic of specialized medical language, their large number being also a characteristic of a dynamic language, with rapidly expanding and continuously developing. The analysis allows us to illustrate the typological connection between the common lexicon and the specialized medical one and confirms the dynamic nature of the medical terminology. The synonymy in medical terminology confirms thereby the interference and the evolution of specialized language closely related to the common language. The study proves useful for the enrichment of linguistic resources with associative resource (similarity, hierarchy, lexical semantic structuring) and also for the “exploration” of specialized corpus, authentic documents, strictly specialized resources for educational purposes.

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