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# EPONYMS IN LATIN, ENGLISH AND BULGARIAN MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY[1]

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**Abstract**
*Eponyms have been an inseparable part of medicine ever since science came into existence. The objective of the present paper is to establish the main principles of formation of eponyms in Latin, English and Bulgarian medical terminology. The main method used is the comparative analysis.*

**Keywords:** *eponym, Latin medical terminology, English medical terminology, Bulgarian medical terminology, term formation*

**Rezumat**
*Eponimele au constituit o parte importantă a terminologiei medicale chiar de la fundarea acestei discipline. În articolul dat, ne propunem să descriem principalele căi de formare a acestor unități în latină, engleză şi bulgară. Facem apel, în acest caz, la metoda comparativă.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *eponim, terminologie medicală latină, terminologie medicală engleză, terminologie medicală bulgară, formarea termenilor*

The human body is still an enigma for human knowledge. For thousands of years people have attempted to study and treat how our organism functions. At the beginning it was very difficult to find the relation between the signs, symptoms, and diseases. As Helen King wrote in "Greek and Roman Medicine", "The ancient doctor was expected to diagnose by studying the external signs in order to determine what was happening inside. (…)

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Everything coming out of the body was examined with interest as a way of finding out what was going on in the mysterious regions inside. (…) There were few instruments to enable the doctor to see inside the body. In the absence of X-rays, scans, and blood tests, diagnoses usually had to rely on the patient's answers to questions and on what everyone could recognize through their senses (King, 2001, p. 12)".

But it soon became clear that only ancient doctors' senses were not sufficient to understand all the necessary information and solve the problems. As a result, new instruments were created, and new methods began to be used in order to help human knowledge reveal the mysteries of the human body. Every change in their general condition, every new disease and every new symptom had to be described by its discoverer and be given a name, too. Which gave rise to another difficulty – this time not in the field of medicine, but in the field of linguistics – how these new instruments and methods were to be called, whom to be named after. The aim of the present article is to identify and describe the methods according to which eponyms are coined and used in present day medical terminology in Latin, English, and Bulgarian. The contrastive study is focused on the similarities and differences between the three above-mentioned languages.

There are several ways for naming new findings in the sphere of medicine and most of them date back to the very beginning of its development as one of the most important sciences nowadays. The biggest part of medical terms is presented by means of words from Greek and Latin origin or through combinations of Greek and Latin terminoelements. In the classical world they were familiar words even to the ordinary people, though, at present, their meaning is not clear for everybody. Today, modern terms based on contemporary words can also be found in the language used by doctors.

Cases where diseases or recently-found changes of the human body are named after their discoverers are more specific. These terms are called eponyms, i.e., a term based on a personal name or a proper name used as a term. The first eponyms ever are linked to the name of Hippocrates – *"digitus hippocraticus"* (Latin medical term); *"Hippocratic fingers" or "clubbed fingers"* (English medical term)) (Arnaudov, 1964, p. 165); they were described by Hippocrates for the first time in his "Hippocratic corpus of text[1]" (King, 2001, p. 9), and because of that these terms are dedicated to him.

Eponyms take an important role in the terminological system of every language. In the sphere of medicine, they emerged for the first time in the 16th and 17th century. Clinical eponyms came into view a little bit later, in the 19th century, but their number is permanently increasing (Tosheva et al., 2000, p. 323).

In the majority of cases, eponyms are connected with the name of a researcher who was the first person to describe a new disease, symptom, method, etc., from a scientific point of view and usually express the meaning

"found by…" or "created by…" (Tosheva, 2004, p. 40). Nevertheless, there are some eponyms, though not as numerous as the previously mentioned ones, that are derived from the name of the place where a new disease appeared, the name of the first patient who became sick, or the name of a character from mythology, history, or world literature that was somehow linked with the symptoms of the illness or the patient's appearance and status.

There is always a logical connection between an eponym and the onym, from which it is derived, and that is of great importance because often is the case when it designates the scientific field of usage. Sometimes the etymological link has faded and some additional extralinguistic information should be added (Petkova, 2010b, p. 298).

Century after century, more and more diseases have appeared, and more and more eponyms have emerged with them. At present, there are more than 20 000 medical eponyms, which makes it difficult for the contemporary physician to know and use them all. As a result, special eponymic textbooks have been written and a compulsory part of the medical education in the USA is the knowledge and ability to use several thousand eponyms (Arnasudova, 2005, pp. 16-18). That is why special attention should be paid to eponyms from a linguistic point of view and the principles of their formation should be figured out, too.

In the present research, attention is paid to the general classification of the eponyms in the Latin, English, and Bulgarian medical terminology according to the type of the proper name used as a basis as well as their derivation patterns. "Nova Terminologia Medica Polyglota et Eponymica" ("New Medical and Eponymic Terminology in Seven Languages") by Petya George Arnaudov is used as our main source of information.

**Thematic Classification of Eponyms in Latin, English and Bulgarian Medical Terminology**

Here we distinguish:

(a) eponyms derived from an anthroponym which names:

- the discoverer of the medicament: *Antyllus' morbus; Bechterev' morbus/ Behterev' morbus* (in Latin); *Bechterev's disease, Devergie's disease* (in English); *метод на Антилус, болест на Бехтерев* (in Bulgarian);
- the patient: *Christchurch' chromosoma/chromosoma Christchurchi, Christmas' morbus* (in Latin); *Christmas Disease, McLeod syndrome* (in English); *хромозома на Кристчърч, болест на Кристмас* (in Bulgarian);
- a mythological being: *caput Medusae, cornu Ammonis/Ammonis' cornu, corona Veneris* (in Latin); *Medusa head, Ulysses syndrome, Achilles tendon, crown of Venus/collar of Venus* (English); *глава на Медуза, рог на Амон/ амонов рог, корона на Венера* (Bulgarian);

- a Biblical character: *Adam' ponum* (in Latin); *Adam complex, Delilah syndrome* (in English); *адамов комплекс, евин синдром* (in Bulgarian);
- a saint; *St. Agatha's disease, St. Valentine's disease* (in English);
- a literature character: *Don Juan' syndromum, Pickwick' syndromum* (in Latin); *Munchausen's syndrome, Robin Hood syndrome, Cheshire Cat syndrome* (in English); *синдром на Дон Жуан, пикуик-синдром* (in Bulgarian).

(b) eponyms derived from a toponym: *antigenum Glasgow, coma-scala/ scala Glasgow, Ebola' virus* (in Latin); *Glasgow coma scale, Lyme disease, Ebola virus, Balkan nephropathy* (in English); *Скала на Глазгоу, Лаймска болест, Ебола вирус* (in Bulgarian);

(c) eponyms derived from an ethnonym: *Aztec' auris/Azteci auris* (in Latin); *Australian antigen* (in English); *ацтекско ухо* (in Bulgarian);

(d) eponyms derived from a chrematonym: *Coca-Cola infans* (in Latin); *бебе Кока-Кола* (in Bulgarian).

As it is obvious from the information presented above, there are cases when in one out of the three examined terminological systems a representative of a certain thematic group is missing. This is a proof that even though they are dealing with the same field of knowledge, every single system of specialized lexemes follows its own rules of development.

**Structural Classification of Eponyms in Latin, English and Bulgarian Medical Terminology**

From the structural point of view we distinguish:

- main eponyms: *Basedow' morbus, Ellermann-Erlandsen testum* etc.;
- subordinate eponyms: *degeneratio Wagneri;*
- exceptions: *degeneratio Gombault', degeneratio Abercombie', degeneratio Armanni-Ebstein'*.

Correct spelling is obligatory for every specialist. Eponyms express not only a lexical but a historical meaning, too – they show the honour given to the person after whom a given term is named. In Latin the main eponyms represent the name of one person, written only with an apostrophe (‘), not with its Latin case form. When the authors are more than one, their names are written hyphenated without an apostrophe at the end (*Basedow' morbus*).

In subordinate eponyms the author's name is given in its Genetive singular form after a Latin term (*degeneratio Wagneri*).

There are two exceptions valid for the following two cases: (1) all the proper names, French by origin (*degeneratio Gombault'*), and (2) all the proper names despite their origin ending in a vowel (*degeneratio Abercombie'*). If the rule is followed in such cases, it will cause mispronunciation of anthroponyms so an apostrophe is used instead. An exception from the exception are eponyms that become classic and are well-known, written with a Genetive form (*Eustachii, Fallopii*).

Subordinate eponyms with more than one anthroponym included are also expressed by using an apostrophe (*degeneratio Armanni-Ebstein'*) (Arnaudova, 2005, 2, pp. 15-18).

Several different patterns are observed in Bulgarian. The first one covers eponyms formed by means of conversion (*бебе Кока-Кола, пикуик-синдром*). This is the easiest and usually preferred pattern (Petkova, 2010a, p. 298), (Petkova, 2010b, p. 31) because in that case the etymological link between the proper name and the term formed by it remains clear, visible, and understandable (Petkova, 2014, p. 321).

The next one includes examples where the proper noun is represented in Bulgarian by an adjective formed with the suffix *-ски/ -ска/ -ско* (*ацтекско ухо*) or the suffix *-ов* (*амонов рог*).

The use of the suffix *-ов, -ова, -ово* in Bulgarian expresses possession. Another way to give the same sematic meaning is by the construction personal name + preposition *на* + common noun, i. e. *рог на Амон* (Petkova, 2011, p. 40) that is the most commonly used pattern of eponym derivation in Bulgarian.

Synonymy is another interesting fact about terms in general. There are pairs of synonyms just like *Bornholm' morbus = pleurodynia epidemica, Bulgaria' bacillus = Lactobacillus bulgaricus, febris Haverhilli/Haverhill'febris = erythema arthriticum epidemicum, erythema polymorphum acutum, morbus morsus Muris.*

The majority of English eponyms follow an identical model. In the construction of its compound terms, one and the same model can be recognized, i.e. a possessive form of a proper name (formed by adding "*'s*" to it) and a common noun are used together. However, since 1974, NIH (the National Institutes of Health) have recommended refraining from using possessive eponyms (*Classification and nomenclature*…).

Though it is possible for a term to be created with the possessive preposition "*of*" (like some Bulgarian examples), such samples are not found in English. If the compound term contains two or more names, the English eponym follows one of the next patterns – "*Brill-Symmers' disease*" or "*Besnier-Boeck-Schaumann disease*". When two or more names are included in an eponym, the names are hyphenated to form a complex attribute. Occasionally, the attribute uses the possessive form; however, as we have already mentioned, the possessive form is not advisable.

One of the most significant traits of the terminology is its consistency. Each term may be perceived as an entity with bilateral nature:

(1) a unity of meaning and form;

(2) an entity from the natural language subject to the same phenomena and processes, which are valid for all the language units. Synonymy is a

result of the ambiguous relation between the form and meaning of the term and, unfortunately, cannot be avoided (Petkova, 2019, pp. 145-146).

There can be synonymy between lexemes, between a lexeme and a phraseological unit, and between phraseological units (Zidarova, 1998, p. 66).

The examples given are called absolute synonyms or lexical doublets and their meaning and stylistic usage is completely alike and could be observed only in scientific terminology (Rusinov & Georgiev, 1996, pp. 165-166).

Furthermore, synonymy of terms may become a problem in the act of communication because it obstructs the possibility for a specific and identical nomination in the field of science. On the other hand, however, it facilitates the appearance of new different variants (Zidarova, 1998, p. 113), and these different forms may also express different opinions about one and the same phenomenon (*Теория и методика ономастических…*, 1986, p. 34). Therefore, it is advisable that in the different kinds of specialized literature the relevance of usage of a definite term instead of another one is specified and the main recommended term is highlighted (Petkova & Banasiak, 2019, p. 146).

The creation of the so called "ideal terms" which stand out with unambiguousness, lack of synonymy, shortness of form, derivation, stylistic neutrality, and grammatic correctness is highly recommended but impossible (Popova, 2011, p. 47).

Another thought-provoking research topic that is worth considering is related to the usage of those eponyms in some contemporary languages.

The issue on the use of eponyms has been discussed by various authors. Nieradko-Iwanicka defined an eponym as "a person, place, or thing after whom or after which something is named" (Nieradko-Iwanicka, 2020). However, the definition is quite broad the one that Yale et. al. proposed is more appropriate and specific: they define a medical eponym as "an honorific term bestowed to an individual(s) who identified or discovered a disease, sign, symptom, syndrome, test, finding, anatomical part, or designed a device, procedure, view, treatment, classification, prediction rule, principle, or algorithm. Thus, medical eponyms include those aspects, which involve patient care or applications of care. Since the term connotes respect and honors a person's accomplishment(s) (Yale, 2020).

Nowadays, however, more and more researchers advise that eponyms's usage be avoided because of cases of misunderstanding so scientists start focusing chiefly on their negative influence (Garanin & Garanina, 2019, p. 111).

No matter that the use of the eponyms discussed is avoided in the official scientific sources, they are still extremely popular in the mass media. An example is given by Prof. Oliviu Felecan in his work "Onomastic Considerations on News in the Recent Mass Media with Wuhan/China/Chinese virus and Wuhan/China/Chinese coronavirus instead of COVID-19") (Felecan, 2021, p. 44).

As a conclusion, it can be explained why eponyms are still an interesting linguistic area for scientific investigation. The reason is hidden in their universal usage as terms, which causes the appearance of more and more new units. That is why discussions about the principles of their formation and their classification are of great importance not only for language studies but also for representatives of other scientific fields of knowledge. They are still part of our communication, official or not, and though becoming an avis rara, eponyms are as vivid as ever.

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