MEDICAL JARGON: COLLOCATIONS, TYPOLOGIES, DISTRIBUTION

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Abstract

Our research paper is focused on a terminological analysis motivated by several points of view that we take into account when elaborating the syntagmatic description of polysemantic lexemes within medical terms in the fields of reference. With our approach we have tried to emphasize the systematic nature of the medical vocabulary relationships, special constructions in which constituent terms of this terminological unit update their meanings, medical terminological phrases/ collocations with lexical items of jargon that cannot be understood by non-specialists in the field. Our purpose was to illustrate how we can contribute to disambiguate these specific terms with broader values and functions in several areas, specifying the morpho-syntactic formulas where medical terms are outlined with all major varieties of combinations.

Key words: *medical jargon, word combinations, terms, collocations, terminological analysis*

Résumé

Notre travail de recherche se concentre sur une analyse terminologique motivée par plusieurs points de vue que nous prenons en compte lors de l'élaboration de la description syntagmatique des lexèmes polysémantiques dans le cadre des termes médicaux dans les domaines de référence. Par notre approche nous avons essayé de souligner la nature systématique des relations du vocabulaire médical, des constructions spéciales dans lesquelles les termes constitutifs de cette unité terminologique mettent à jour leurs significations, des expressions/collocations terminologiques médicales avec des articles lexicaux de jargon qui ne peuvent pas être compris par des non-spécialistes du domaine. Notre but était d'illustrer comment pouvons-nous contribuer à désambiguïser ces termes spécifiques avec des valeurs et des fonctions plus larges dans plusieurs domaines, spécifiant les formules morphosyntaxiques dans lesquelles des termes médicaux sont décrits avec toutes les variétés majeures de combinaisons.

Mots clés: *jargon médical, combinaisons de mots, termes, collocations, analyse terminologique*

Introduction

Medical terminology research should be regarded from two fundamental perspectives, paradigmatic and syntagmatic, the latter being the topic of our further analysis. Certainly, a simple paradigmatic approach to medical terms is not enough for two reasons, firstly because the terms do not work isolated in language and secondly, because specific combinatorial features may appear. Exemplifying all possible combinations of a single medical term is nothing more than setting some paradigms of

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syntagmatic partner terms. As such, examining syntagmatic relationships of a word means establishing the phrase partners; these terms being part of other paradigms as well (word combinations)[1].

Any term entourage is defined in order to describe with accurate precision the behaviour of that lexeme in context, more specifically, within medical language. Despite acting as a closed code manifested univocally, mono-referential or non-ambiguous, the context plays a major part as far as medical terms are concerned[2].

Our research will focus on a few typological issues of medical terms, phrases with examples taken from different medical sub-domains (rheumatology, obstetrics, neurology, physiotherapy, dental medicine), which are able to highlight specific combinations of terms in updated contextual medical discourse.

Therefore, in order to emphasize combinatorial patterns of medical terms we have constructed our analysis on SYSTEM (selected data from lexicographic sources) to TEXT (contextual occurrences of selected terms) direction. Such a targeting analysis allows an exclusive illustration of the terminological meanings of the examined lexemes, which is consistent with the objective of the present research.

We motivate the research by several points of view that we take into account when we elaborate a syntagmatic description of medical terms in the fields of reference and which we focus on during our analysis. We will keep under review, first of all, strictly medical terminological phrases/ collocations with lexical items of jargon that cannot be understood by non-specialists in the field, and afterwards, we will illustrate how we can contribute to the disambiguation of terms with broader values and functions in several areas. We refer here to the meanings having terminological values in the structure of polysemantic lexemes.

A syntagmatic description of terminological units as well as other lexical units of common use, involves specifying the morpho-syntactic formulas where medical terms are outlined with all major varieties of combinations: noun + adjective, noun + noun (in Acc. with or without preposition or in the G. case), verb + noun (in Acc. or D./G. with or without preposition).

These combinatorial syntactic formulas of words with terminological value are common, in general, to other lexical units as well. What is radically different between syntagmatic combinations of words within common registry use and the terminological one does not necessarily lie in morpho-syntactic combinatorial formulas, but in the lexical-semantic ones, specific to terminological words in relation to others.

1. Hermetic collocations, specific to medical jargon

Most frequently encountered bi- or multi-member collocations in medical terminology characterized through well defined hermetic features, are the ones having a noun + adjective formula, some being selected from obstetrics: *prezentaţie craniană*, *prezentaţie pelviană*, *manevră obstetricală*, *parturientă multipară*, *parturientă primipară*, *contractilitate miocardică*[3]. Neurology and rheumatology areas are also rich

[1] Richard Sârbu, *Descrierea sintagmatică a sensului lexical,* in Buletin informativ metodico-ştiinţific, no. III-IV, Timişoara, 1986, p. 100.

[2] Angela Bidu-Vrănceanu (coord.), *Lexic comun, lexic specializat*, Bucureşti, Universitatea din Bucureşti, 2000, p. 9.

[3] Ioan Munteanu, *Tratat de obstetrică*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, p. 542-546.

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sources of semantically rigid phrases for a non-speaker in the field, from which we quote the ones that were formed following the same construction (noun + adjective): *afazie senzorială*, *afazii transcorticale*, *hematom intraparechimatos*, *embolie anterioarterială*, *hemihipoestezie dreaptă*, *embolie cardioarterială*, *opercul rolandic*, *cortex cerebral*, *hiperemie facială*, *hipertensiune paroxistică*, *foliculi piloşi*, *sciziune sylviană*[4]; *parapareză spastică*, *encefalită periacală*, *encefalomielită diseminală*, *leucoencefalopatie metacromatică*, *reflexe polikinetice*, *hiperreflectivitate osteotenticulară*[5].

If we select the noun *lesion/ injury*, commonly used in all medical fields, we notice its wide distribution in many noun + adjective combinatorial expressions: *leziuni* bacteriene (*bacterial*), ~ fungice (*fungal*), ~ tegumentare (*skin*), ~ mucoase (*mucous*), ~ dureroase (*painful*), ~ veziculare (*vesicular*), ~ neuro-vasculare (*neuro-vascular*), ~ nervoase (*nervous*), ~ intra-craniene (*intra-cranial*), ~ teritoriale (*territorial*), ~ neurologice (*neurological*), ~ osoase (*bone*), ~ ulcerative (*ulcerous*), ~ viscerale (*visceral*), ~ extraarticulare (*extraarticular*), ~ histologice (*histological*), ~ distructive (*destructive*) and so on. It should be noted that *lesion* as a medical term with syntagmatic partners may form paradigms indicating function, as in *leziuni hepatice* (liver lesions), ~ *nervoase* (nervous lesions), ~ *neurologice* (neurological lesions); precise location, *leziuni intra-craniene* (intra-cranial lesions), ~ *extraarticulare* (extraarticular lesions); or certain medical typologies, as in *leziuni bacteriene* (bacterial lesions), ~ *tegumentare* (skin lesions), ~ *dureroase* (painful lesions).

In our medical texts we have come across noun + noun (in G.) combinatorial phrases which include the noun *lesion*, as in: *leziuni* ale scalpului (*skull lesions*), ~ ale membrului (*limb lesions*), ~ ale feţei (*face lesions*), ~ ale coloanei vertebrale (*spine lesions*), etc.

Hermetic collocations have been selected from rheumatology as well, having a noun + adjective structure: *sinovită proliferativă*, *valvulopatii reumatismale*, *poliartrită reumatoidă*, *endocardită infecţioasă*, *artrită reactivă*, *reumatism articular acut*[6].

Dentistry also provides a series of syntagmatic constructions of the same type quite difficult to be completely understood by non-speakers in the field: *tratament endodontic*, *afecţiune pulpară*, *distrucţie coronară*, *rezecţie apicală*.

Another category of syntagmatic constructions may have a bi- and multi-member collocations following the noun + noun (Acc. + prep. or / G.) formula, some being selected from obstetrics: *măsuri de sepsie şi antisepsie*, *lordoza coloanei fetale*, *abducţia trunchiului fetal*, *elongarea coloanei cervicale*, *elongaţii de plex brahial*, *durerile naşterii*[7]; from neurology: *afazie de conducţie*, *tromboflebită de sinus longitudinal*, *edem cu leziune perifocală*, *test de screening*, *lezarea nervilor periferici*[8]; or rheumatology: *eradicarea infecţiei streptococice*, *prevenirea valvulopatiilor*, *cardită cu deteriorări valvulare*, *rebound-ul activităţii reumatismale*[9].

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[4] Alexandru Zolog, *Afaziile, semiologie, neurolingvistică, sindromatologie*, Timişoara, Editura Eurobit, 1997, p. 128, 435.

[5] Ionel Cezar, *Compendium de neurologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Medicală, 1982, p. 134-138.

[6] Eugen Popescu, Ruxandra Ionescu, *Compendium de reumatologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Tehnică, 1998, p. 148-149.

[7] Ioan Munteanu, *Tratat de obstetrică*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, p. 523, 535, 538.

[8] Alexandru Zolog, *Afaziile, semiologie, neurolingvistică, sindromatologie*, Timişoara, Editura Eurobit, 1997, p. 128.

[9] Eugen Popescu, Ruxandra Ionescu, *Compendium de reumatologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Tehnică, 1998, p. 149.

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Medical discourse, like other languages pertaining to the scientific style, may seem very exact, inflexible, sometimes untranslatable, or misinterpreted by those who are not specialists in the field.

2. Common language collocations having specific medical jargon values

In this category, we have tried to analyse phrases containing verbs and nouns selected from common language and which acquire new contextual meanings when used in medical collocations. It is aimed to some extent, to disambiguate the language, because for those unfamiliar with it, it can be totally misinterpreted. We also refer to foreign medical students, who face quite a large number of grammar and especially semantic problems in learning the Romanian language in general and medical terminology in particular.

These medical constructions, selected from different domains, such as obstetrics, neurology or rheumatology, have as semantic centres common words with medical jargon values. Within our corpus analysis, we have identified many common verbs enhancing well-known meanings which embrace completely new significance in medical contexts, for example: *a interesa* (to interest), *a descrie* (to describe), *a traduce* (to translate), *a sugera* (to suggest), *a prezenta* (to present), *a dezvolta* (to develop), *a migra* (to migrate), *a aboli* (to abolish), *a tolera* (to tolerate), *a exprima* (to convey), *a se înscrie* (to manifest) in verb + noun constructions: „examinarea abdominală *interesează* (affects) sensibilitatea abdomenului”; „*sunt interesate* (affected) articulaţiile”; „retina *interesează* (ensures) vederea”; „*s-au descris* (analysed, examined) infecţii cutanate cauzate de streptococi”; „*s-au descris* (manifested) şi distrofii musculare progresive tardive”; „migrena *traduce* (manifests) o durere paroxistică a capului”; „miopiile oculare *traduc* (guide) un proces distrofic”[10]; „*a traduce* (indicated) nevoia sporirii volumului de aer inspirat”; „datele epistemiologice *sugerează* (describe)”; „*sunt sugerate* (indicated) valori anormale”; „pacienţii *prezintă* (manifest) o imaturitate a reflexelor”; „pacienta *va dezvolta* (will develop) scleroză multiplă”; „femeia care *dezvoltă* (manifests) hipertensiune recurentă”; „cheagul *a migrat* (migrated) prin vena cavă”; „*a aboli* (disappear) mişcările de verticalitate”; „femeia *a tolerat* (tolerated) travaliul fără dificultate”; „medicamentul *a fost tolerat* (was assimilated) bine de organism”[11]; „reacţia de sprijinire proprioceptivă *exprimă* (manifests) o compensare”; „*a exprima* (distinguish) stadiul precoce a unei tumori de lob”[12]; „îngustarea spaţiului articular *se înscrie* (manifests) la scurt timp după tumefierea părţilor moi”; „genunchii *înscriu* (present) modificări”[13].

The verb *a întuneca* (to darken) denoting powerful poetic stylistic utterances, is surprisingly found in this medical phrase: „Asocierea unei neoplazii *întunecă* prognosticul” being best explained in medical terms as *to deteriorate* or *to bring complications* in detecting the cause of the disease.

A variety of common nouns were emphasized in medical combinations which can only be completely understood by specialists in these specific medical areas. We have selected some interesting nouns, such as *atac* (attack), *criză* (crisis), *mecanism*

[10] Ionel Cezar, *Compendium de neurologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Medicală, 1982, p. 112, 113, 289.

[11] Ioan Munteanu, *Tratat de obstetrică*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, p. 436.

[12] Ionel Cezar, *Compendium de neurologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Medicală, 1982, p. 219.

[13] Eugen Popescu, Ruxandra Ionescu, *Compendium de reumatologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Tehnică, 1998, p. 237.

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(mechanism), *teritoriu* (territory), *cale* (path), *agresiune* (aggression), *risc* (risk), *efect* (effect), *furt* (steal) having different medical collocations of the type noun + adjective: „*atac* ischemic tranzitor"; „*criză* migrenoasă"; „*mecanism* embolic, hemodinamic"; „*teritoriu* silvian"; „*cale* extrapiramidală"; „*risc* iatrogen"; „*efect* advers"; „*furt* sanguin"[14].

Other common nouns such as *cavitate* (cavity), *canal* (canal), *punte* (bridge) have migrated into the medical language used by dentists, with precise terminological meanings when they are combined with adjectives, as in: *canal* radicular, *cavitate* pulpară, *punte* cimentată.

3. Cliché phrases

After analysing the corpus of terms from various medical fields, we have selected some cliché phrases containing common words used to describe various diseases, disorders or similarities of certain organs, best understood only by specialists. For example, *şaua turcească* (sella turcica) is defined as "a transverse depression crossing the midline on the superior surface of the body of the sphenoid bone, and containing the hypophysis"[15]. The collocation *plămân de oţel* (*iron lung*) may, therefore, confuse the patient who is unfamiliar with medical terminology, or a foreign student for whom this combination of two nouns does not precisely explain in detail the medical meaning. The specialists have to disambiguate this cliché phrase, by defining it: "an electromechanical device system enclosing the body of the patient in order to maintain his artificial respiration"[16]. The Medical Dictionary states that this phrase is synonymous with Drinker respirator, which is probably better understood by a foreign student in medicine, defined as: "a type of negative-pressure ventilator consisting of a metal tank enclosing the body of the patient with the head outside. It is also called *tank ventilator* or *iron lung*"[17].

In physiotherapy or ophthalmology there are various expressions that refer to body positions or resemblance in phrases consisting of words taken from common language, of the type noun + preposition + noun, as in: *mers de raţă*, *mers de pitic*, *mers cosit*, *flexie în lamă de briceag*; *ochi de iepure* ("ochi deschis în somn"), *ochi de pisică* ("cecitate unilaterală care se însoţeşte de un aspect strălucitor al pupilei"). In neurology we have found the medical expression *senzaţia membrului fantomă* (phantom limb sensation), defined as: "a pseudesthesia after amputation of a limb, consisting of the sensation that the absent part is still present"[18].

In our medical corpus of texts we have identified the noun *zgomot* (murmur) in certain cliché phrases of the type noun + adj., frequently used in heart and lungs auscultation, which very accurate describe symptoms or dysfunctions: *zgomot alb*, *zgomot hipocratic*; or in constructions of the type noun + prep. + noun: *zgomot de galop*, *zgomot de moară*, *zgomot de tun*.

In conclusion, we have to state that all the examples illustrate, once again, the rigid, specialized nature of medical terminology, even when common words are to be found in these medical phrases.

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[14] Alexandru Zolog, *Afaziile, semiologie, neurolingvistică, sindromatologie*, Timişoara, Editura Eurobit, 1997, p. 128-129.

[15] *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 30th Edition, Philadelphia, Saunders, 2003, p. 1677.

[16] Vasile Rusu, *Dicţionar Medical*, Bucureşti, Editura Medicală, 2007, p. 818.

[17] *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 30th Edition, Philadelphia, Saunders, 2003, p. 1616.

[18] *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 30th Edition, Philadelphia, Saunders, 2003, p. 1045.

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Examining the connections established between medical language words, we have noticed that the typological characterizing pattern of entourage in a specialized context, is defining for the precise description of a lexeme in a certain medical context. Every word reveals its semantic nuances through its lexical-semantic entourage.

With our approach we have tried to prove the systematic nature of medical vocabulary interrelations, special approaches in which the constituent terms of this terminological unit update their meanings, both at the level of the Romanian language vocabulary, considered as a well-defined system, in continuous innovation and at the dynamic level of syntagmatic relations between the component elements of this lexical unit, where specific contextual achievements of medical terms are strongly outlined.

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