EPONYMS – A TERMINOLOGICAL RESOURCE IN THE ROMANIAN MEDICAL LANGUAGE

Oana BADEA
University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Craiova

ABSTRACT

The influence of the English language on the Romanian medical terminology also manifests over the terms created as eponyms (*especially in the last decades*). *Proper names of various English or American medical personalities* (*doctors or researchers*), *of some patients suffering from a certain disease or syndrome*, *or of some places where an epidemy or virus manifested for the first time*, *have entered the medical vocabulary and are gaining more and more space as the time goes by. The study proposes the analysis of eighty biomedical terms from DM* (*Valeriu Rusu*, *2007*) *and MDN* (*Florin Marcu*, *2007*), *by describing and classifying them in a rigurous manner.*

Key words: *eponym*, *patronym*, *medical terminology*, *deonymization*, *English*

1. After the end of World War II, in 1945, there also began an expansion, respectively an extraordinary development within science, technology and economical activity worldwidely. Thus, it came up a world dominated by two main factors: on the one side, technology, and, on the other side, a current that imposed the emergence of an international language. Due to various reasons, this responsibility was undertaken by the English language in a well-known context of globalization, namely that of the economical power held by the United States of America. If before World War II, knowing a foreign language represented just a luxury specific only to highly educated people, this is not the case anymore for English used as an international language in the technical and scientific developmental process. Therefore, there has been created a “new” generation of persons who had to learn English for purely practical reasons: business men who wished to merchendise their products, engineers who needed to understand technical instructions, and, last but not least, doctors who thrived about finding out the latest medical discoveries (Turner, 1981: 57). Also, the ones involved in the process of teaching English as a foreign language started to be more interested, due to the fact that, although students acquired English knowledge during classes, they were not able to apply it in specialized domains.

One of the main issues regarding Romanian linguistics, at least nowadays, is that of establishing some rules for adapting new-formed terms, in various activity domains, to the Romanian phonetic and morphologic system. Thus, neology, as a lingusitic discipline, takes into account the monitoring of terminological borrowings, by classifying and

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

rate-setting them, also named neonisms. Within medical terminology, neonisms are classified in two types of neonimy: denominative and translational. There is taken into consideration the fact that the pace of acquiring medical neonisms is very high, because of the significant progress of scientific research in medicine, through the discovery of new pathologies and of new perfected treatment and diagnose methods. These medical language neonisms are not used only by doctors, but by the patients as well, while the latter try to aknowledge and find these terms specialized meaning. In most cases, the problem of terminological creation goes beyond the strict domain of terminology. Generally, it is included in a program of "linguistic politics", having a national character. Innovation is the process that stands at the core of scientific and technological terminology, and, implicitly of the medical one. Belonging to innovators (science men or specialists in various domains) has obviously got important conotations, by accepting the specialized neologism as a *social object.*

Specialized terminology comprises a large number of name terms. We refer to proper names, mainly to those of scientific personalities, geografical places or mythological characters, if the case. Some aspects of the annalysis of name terms show the fact that there are more lexical or morphological possibilities. As far as these two categories are concerned, and also from a syntactic point of view, these proper names had a natural tendency to enter present Romanian language. The problems that appear only demonstrate, once more, a terminological reality in relation to onomastics, a process in a permanent progress. The origin of the proper name is not really important for the formation of new terms, but is viewed as a starting point for establishing the report between a *proper name* – as a denomnative subject – and a *term* – used to individualize the object. A significant proof in this sense is represented by etymological studies, thus finding an impressive English terms collection, especially in the last decades.

The number of proper names in medical terminology is ever growing, especially those coming from personalities (scientific or common ones) of English or American nationality – researchers, doctors, and patients –, cities or places where a disease or a virus manifested for the first time, etc. These proper names are to be found in the terminology of different medical or biological specialties also as a source of common names, nouns or adjectives. The study proposes the analysis of eighty biomedical terms, coming from proper names, taken from both the *DM*, and the *MDN*.

2. According to dictionaries, the word *eponym* – entered in the Romanian language from French – has its origin in Greek and may be defined as follows:

- *EPONIM*, *-Ă*, *EPONIMI*, *-E*, masc. noun, adj. 1. Magistrate that, in antiquity times, gave his name to the year. 2. Which gives his name to a city, a region, etc. (*DEXonline*, 2008);

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

- *ÉPONYME*, 1755, from the Greek *eponumos*, of *epi* and *onuma* name, attributed to the person who gives his name to something. (*Dictionnaire étymologique – Larousse*, 1998);
- *EPONYM*, a person, real or imaginary, from whom something, as a tribe, nation or place, takes or is said to take its name. (*The New Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, 1997)

From the three definitions above, we may conclude the following: eponyms represent personalities or places whose proper names come to designate another entity than the initial one, or which acquired common values and serve for expressing some types of diseases, measure unites, corpuscles, syndromes, etc (*boala Chicago*, *sindromul Down*, *testul Papa-Nicolau*, *anemie Cooley*, *centimorgan*, *kelvin*, *brucella* and many others). Using these scientific terms becomes an interesting issue to which, at least for now, there appear to be no adequate solutions. Thus, we may found three meanings of the term *eponym*:

a) the meaning indicated by the definitions in dictionaries;

b) designating proper names that have become common ones;

c) designating common nouns that have their origin in proper names.

To support the affirmations above, we will enumerate some opinions from international linguistics: "Here is what it is clear: in the most general sense of the term, there may be an eponym any patronym or name, even a pseudonym. But, eponyms may also be names of gods, semi-gods or heroes pertaining to a mythology…" (Gemar, 1993: 5). Most of the time, the authors use the term with the first meaning (a), although they quote the dictionary definition. The majority refer to words – and not to persons/characters –, sometimes to proper names, other times to common ones: "An eponym is a proper name that has become a common name" (Vanhemleryck, www. vlrom.com/2008).

Nevertheless, we can find in French articles, dedicated to terminology and translation, the term *éponyme banalisé* (with no recognized equivalent in Romanian): "By *éponyme banalisé* one can understand all substantivized terms (*parkinsonism*), verbalized (*a pasteuriza*) or adjectivized (*parkinsonian*), in opposition to the eponym that remained a proper name (*boala Parkinson*)" (Van Hoof, 2001: 82). We consider necessary the completion of the definition in the new editions of dictionaries for promoting the actual use.

3. Eponyms may be found in quite a large number in all scientific domains, among which the ones of biology and medicine. Pierre Germa stated in a note of the dictionary of eponyms published in 1933: "I have chosen the original version of this dictionary of eponyms in order to give the reader a book more easily to consult. I have excluded, for example, the

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

phosphates, silicates or other sulphates, trees, flowers or other flowers from far away countries, all named after the name of a scientist, chemist or botanist..." (Germa, 1933: 65). In general, in the medical field, the new proper name terms have as source the following linguistic categories:

- **Patronyms** – the term may be syntagmatic, also comprising the name of the creator or even the names of two, three (more rarely) scientists that have come across the same results in their research activity. For example, *boala Addison* (named after the English doctor Thomas Addison, 1793-1860) has the meaning of a chronic suprarenal failure (*DM*, 2007: 229). There is also *boala Addison-Biermer* (named after the same Thomas Addison, and also after the German doctor, Anton Biermer, 1827-1892) meaning a disease characterized by absence of secretion for gastric intrinsec factor, which causes B12 vitamin malabsorbtion (*DM*, 2007: 229). Another example for a syntagm formed with a name of one or more medical scientists may also be *boala Brill* (carrying the name of Nathan Edwin Brill, American doctor that lived in New York, between 1860-1925) that designates a form of benign exanthematic thyphos, also called resurgent, of endogenous origin, found in subjects that host no parasyte (*DM*, 2007: 233), with its synonym *tifos resurgent.* To Brill's name it is also added another name in order to form a new patronym, namely *boala Brill-Symmers* (from the American pathologist Douglas Symmers, who lived in new York, too, bewteen 1879-1952). The definition of the new syntagmatic term is different from Brill disease: denomination for a lymphoma anatomopathologically characterized by large ganglionary follicles, nowdays being integrated into the non-hodkinian lymphomas with nodular structure (*DM*, 2007: 233), synonymous to *limfom gigantofolicular.* Thus, these are only a few examples that demonstrate the two researchers worked together and discovered new notions, connected (or not) to the notion denoted by the patronym with a single proper name. Other examples of syntagmatic patronims may be: *adenopatie Blumer* (George Blumer, American doctor, 1858-1940); *anemie Cooley* (Thomas Benton Cooley, American bacteriologist, 1890-1960); *anomalie tip Dalton* (John Dalton, English chemist, physician and naturalist, professor at Manchester, who also studied daltonism, which he himself suffered from, 1766-1844); *bacil Flexner* (Simon Flexner, American anatomopathologist and bacteriologist, medical research director at the Rockefeler Institute, New York, 1863-1946), with the synonym *shigela flexner*; *constanta Michael-Menten* (Leonor Michael, American chemist, 1875-1949 and the Canadian pathologist established in USA, 1879-1960); *coree Huntington* (George Summer Huntington, American doctor, 1851-1916); *corpusculi Howell-Jolly*

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

(William Henry Howell, American physiologist, Baltimore, 1860-1945 and Justin Marie Jules Jolly, French histologist, professor in Paris, 1870-1953), and many others (*DM*, 2007). We may also find simple patronyms that took their name from a place where a virus or disease manifested for the first time. Among the various examples, there are: *Coxsackie*, a virus named after the town in New York state where the virus was detected for the first time; (*cromozom*) *Philadelphia*, a small chromosome named after the place where it was discovered in 1960, a chromosome of the 22nd pair that lost half of its substance; *boala Chicago*, association made to a viral micosis with an endemic pulmonary entrance gate, in the North half of the USA (*DM*, 2007), etc.

- **Terms whose eponym dimension disappears** (**deonymization or autonomase**) – as time passes by, some eponyms with a patronymic value become so frequently used that there appears the tendency to avoid (especially by specialists) their eponym sense and there is no need to write them with a capital letter, although the basic denomination still comes from the proper name of a scientific personality from domains like medicine, physics, chemistry or biology. The most eloquent examples may be: *bruceloză* (denomination given to a disease after the name of the English doctor David Bruce, 1855-1931) signifying an infectious disease that affects both humans and animals, caused by infectious germs of Brucella type (*DM*, 2007: 262); *faradizare* (Michael Faraday, English physician, 1791-1867) defined as appliance of experimental or therapeutical inducing current (*DM*, 2007: 428); *cowperită* (William Cowper, English surgeon and anatomist, London, 1666-1709) signifies an inflammation of the glands, with the synonym *glandă bulbouretrală* (*DM*, 2007: 334); *huntingtină* (George Summer Huntington, American doctor, 1850-1916) designating a protein whose anomaly is invoved in determining Huntington disease (*DM*, 2007: 520); *cushingoid* (Harvey Williams Cushing, American brain surgeon, 1869-1939), caharacterizing a person with the aspect of a patient affected by Cushing disease – also named after Cushing – (*DM*, 2007: 343); *pagetoid* (Sir James Paget, English surgeon, 1814-1899 and Latin “eidos”, meaning *form*) has got two meanings, one in which the term characterizes a disease with a similar morphopathology to Piaget disease (mammary or extra mammary), and the second one as something characteristic to Piaget disease (*DM*, 2007: 699); *salmoneloză* (Daniel Elmer Salmon, American pathologist, 1850-1914), denomination that shows the affections caused by the bacilli of Salmonella type (*DM*, 2007: 924), and many others.

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

4. As far as the morphological class of biomedical eponyms is concerned, we may find these either as nouns, adjectives or verbs. The greatest number is represented by nouns, for example: *brucella*, *bruceloză*, *cowperită*, *dalton*, *daltonism*, *darwinism*, *faradizare*, *gray*, *huntingtină*, *kingella*, *listeria*, *listerioză*, *salmoneloză*, etc. We may notice the fact that there are used the suffixes of the specialized area, most of them of Latin origin, like: *-ism*, *-oză*, *-ită*, *-tină*, *-ella*, etc.

The adjectives that have their source in proper names are present in Romanian medical terminology in a smaller number than nouns. Here are some examples: *antiparkinsonian*, *cushingoid*, *pagetoid*, *parkinsonian*, *jacksonian*, etc. Here, too, may be observed the tendency to frequently use the suffixes *-oid*, *-an*, *-at* for making up medical terms that come from proper names of great personalities in medicine, physics, chemistry or biology.

The number of the verbs coming from proper names is quite reduced in comparison to that of nouns and adjectives; that is why, only a few examples are given: *a pasteuriza*, *a listeriza*, etc.

Conclusions

Eponyms and, most likely, patronyms preserve their important place in the Romanian medical terminology. It is true that these terms have their origin highly connected to the name of some personalities, of diverse nationalities, who exposed their professional outcomes so evident in the medical field (and not only), but, at least in the last one hundred years, the number of English and/or American scientists has ever grown. This fact reflected not only in economics, law or technology, but also in medicine, contributing, thus, to the enrichment of medical specialized lexis, as interesting and complex as it may be. Either we find them as patronyms (simple or syntagmatic), or as terms that lost their eponym dimension (totally integrated in the specialized medical terminology as terms of their own), it is certain that proper names play and will continue to play quite an important part in the development of a specialized medical lexis. Subsequent research will confirm this fact, by observing the integration and adaptation of proper names in medical specialized vocabulary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Banque de dépannage linguistique, http://www.oglf.qc.ca 2008/ 09/18.

DEX Onlline http://dexonline.ro 2008/09/15.

Gemar, Pierre, *Du nom propre au nom commun*, *dictionnaire des éponymes*, Paris, Éd. Bonneton, 1993.

Marcu, Florin, *Marele dicționar de neologisme*, Bucureşti, Editura Saeculum I. O., 2000.

Rusu, Valeriu, *Dicționar medical*, Bucureşti, Editura Medicală, 2007 (*DM*).

Turner, R., *A note on "special languages" and "specific proposes"*, Copenhagen, School of Economics, 1981.

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)

Van Hoof, H., “La traduction des éponymes médicaux banalisés de langue anglaise”, in *Meta*, XLVI, 2001, p. 83-91.

Vanhemelyryck, Françoise, *Et si on jouait avec des éponymes?* http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/vir/983eponymes.html 2008/09/17.

Vlas, Mariana, „Onomastică şi terminologie”, în *Cultură*, *Interculturalitate şi Traducere*, Chişinău, Institutul de Filologie al Academiei de Ştiințe a Moldovei Centrul Național de Terminologie, 2007, p. 68-70

BDD-A3749 © 2008 Editura Sitech

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-08 15:05:49 UTC)