# MEDICAL TERMS IN MASS-MEDIA

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**Abstract**

The present article represents a survey on the study of medical specialized terms, which went beyond their specialized area and developed new, exquisite metaphorical meanings within the written language of mass media. The contexts analyzed here are non-specialized medical ones, belonging to the social, political, cultural or sports domain, extracted from the electronic archive of three important Romanian newspapers (*Jurnalul Național*, *Evenimentul Zilei* or *Adevărul*), over a period of six months.

**Key words:** *external terminology, media, term, metaphorical, meaning*

**Résumé**

Cet article représente une étude sur les termes médicaux spécialisés qui ont surpassé leur domaine de spécialisation en acquérant de nouveaux sens, inédits dans le langage écrit des medias. Les contextes analysés ci-dessus ne représentent pas seulement une terminologie médicale, mais aussi sociale, politique, culturelle ou sportive, extraits de l'archive électronique de certaines publications périodiques roumaines (*Jurnalul Național*, *Evenimentul Zilei* ou *Adevarul*) dans une période de six mois.

**Mots-clés**: *terminologie externe, médias, terme, métaphorique, sens*

## 1. Internal Terminology vs. External Terminology – General Considerations

Within terminology as a science, there may be identified two distinct theoretical categories, i.e.: *internal terminology* and *external terminology*. Regarding the first one, it is also called *normative* or *traditional* terminology, from Eugene Wüster, while the concept of *external terminology* appears for the first time in the works of Maria Teresa Cabré. *Internal terminology* deals with the term under ideal circumstances, for a

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standardization meant to avoid ambiguous communication among specialists within the same field of activity; *external terminology* analyzes the term from the point of view of its occurrence within texts, both specialized and non-specialized.

The distinction between *a term* and *a word* is very clearly outlined as far as *internal terminology* is concerned, by considering the term as being monosemantic, unlike the word, which may also be polysemantic. This is not the case, though, from the *linguistic* point of view, closely related to that of *external terminology*. Thus, we may find two distinct perspectives (Cabré, 2002: 2), namely:

- from the specialist's point of view – inner domain perspective;
- from the linguist's point of view – extra domain perspective, linked to the level of language, in general.

The consequence of this second perspective, the extra domain one, is represented by the passing over the borders between domains, the latter ones not being perceived merely as simple closed systems, without any internal dynamics. For a specialist, the term is defined by reporting it to a certain scientific domain, while, for a linguist, the term is defined according to a context, be it a linguistic or an extra linguistic one.

## 2. Medical Metaphors in Mass Media

After 1989, there followed a period that highlighted the dynamics of the Romanian vocabulary, also manifested through the emergence of some new meanings apart from those found in dictionaries, within new linguistic contexts (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 1993: 64). These extensions of meaning are necessary when they are required both by the function of communication and by the expressive one. Therefore, the new meanings developed by the medical terms are represented mainly by metaphorical ones, due to a specific tendency of modern languages.

The purpose of this article is to study a number of medical terms that pass over the strictly specialized area and enter the standard literary language, as it appears in the Romanian written mass-media. Mass-media represents one of the main sources of information, through the written word. Thus, it brings out the novelties in various domains, it catches live the

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changes within the language, by handling an extremely receptive language – directly open to innovations. There were studied the electronic archives of three Romanian important newspapers (not including medical ones), over a period of six months, from October 2009 to March 2010, respectively: *Jurnalul Național*, *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul*.

Various articles in the studied newspapers use medical terms with a metaphorical meaning, the authors marking them by inverted comas. An example is the term *a trata*, whose specialized meaning is registered in *DEXI* (2007): "to subject to a medical treatment". In the following context, it appears under the form of *tratăm*, between inverted comas and it shows the speaker's intention to emphasize the meaning of "forgetting, ignoring, overcoming": "Suntem extrem de geloşi, dar încercăm să ne *tratăm* discutând despre orice, oricând, spune Măriuca" (*Adevărul*, 4.03.2010). The next medical term used with an unspecialized meaning is *laborator*, defined as "place or room equipped with special installations, equipment and instruments for scientific experiments and practical works within experimental or applied sciences". Within the medical field, this term is very often met with this meaning. Still, we may find it in a newspaper article, also written between inverted comas, but this time used metaphorically: "Iar *laboratorul* pentru identificarea şi testarea soluțiilor PSD la problemele din viața de zi cu zi a cetățenilor României sunt departamentele de specialitate, aflate în cadrul Consiliului Național" (*Jurnalul Național*, 10.03.2010). Another medical term used metaphorically and written between inverted comas is also *chirurg* (used in the plural) to designate persons who have no connection at all with the specialized area this term usually refers to: "Ca să impozitezi averile nedeclarate trebuie să identifici domeniile în care există acest tip de eludare a legii, să elaborezi o legislație cu care să poți opera şi să îți asiguri necesarul de *chirurgi* – angajați ai Fiscului, profesionişti şi incoruptibili" (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010).

Within articles on a cultural subject, there may also be found alterations of the specialized meaning of the medical term. This is the case of *a vindeca*, having the medical meaning of "to get or to make someone get rid of a disease, to get healthy, to heal", which appears in the following

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context “Asta te face să devii mai altruist, să te dedici muzicii şi publicului. Muzica te *vindecă*.” (*Jurnalul Național*, 16.02.2010), used with a metaphorical meaning. The medical term *fractură*, denoting “rupture of a bone or cartilage, *p. ext.* of a body limb” is to be found in the following context from an article regarding the problems emerged within the management of a psychiatric hospital: “S-a produs o fractură între actul de conducere şi actul medical, este de părere doctorul Mihăilescu. Tot el propune şi două căi de rezolvare a tensiunilor” (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 7.03.2010). Here, the meaning is clearly an unspecialized one, namely “lack of communication, break up”.

A context of a real linguistical colour, through the metaphorical use of specialized medical terms, is the next one: “Îi deosebesc *tumorile* crescute pe suflet pentru extirparea cărora sunt gata să recurgă la orice mijloace, să plătească oricât” (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). Here is how the medical term *tumoră* develops a figurative meaning, used for pointing out the dark sides of the soul. The specialized meaning is defined in *DEXI* as “newly formed tissue that develops through the abnormal and pathological multiplication of some cells and which tends towards a biological autonomy”, actually the only meaning met in general dictionaries. A similar situation is the one regarding the term *alergic*, also used metaphorically as “intolerant, non-accurate” in the following extract from a political article in Jurnalul Național: “Am urmărit la Sângeru, sabotat de capriciile unui cablu *alergic* la partidele istorice (Antena 3 a fost făcută tot timpul franjuri), congresul liberalilor” (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). The specialized meaning (and the only one) given by *DEXI* for *alergic* is: “belonging to an allergy, specific to allergy, regarding an allergy”.

A political article in *Jurnalul Național* lays down the use of *somnolență* with a metaphoric meaning of “inactivity, lack of activity”, thus: “Da, aproape nimeni din PNL n-a crezut în şansa lui. De ce să ne opintim? Tot pierde. Aşa se explică *somnolența* liberală” (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). *DEXI* presently records both the specialized meaning (“intermediary state between sleep and alertness, when various functions of the body are diminished”), as well as the metaphoric one used here. A very interesting example of metaphorization is emphasized in another article in

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*Jurnalul Național*, where the journalist uses the term *hipertrofiată*, with the specialized meaning "(about organs and tissues) to abnormally increase its volume as a consequence of an exaggerated nutritive function or of a diseased process", in order to expose social and political realities: "Doar în administrația publică lucrurile sunt certe: expansiunea sa *hipertrofiată* trebuie să dea înapoi, dacă nu din convingere, măcar ca o condiționalitate impusă de FMI" (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). In this context, the journalist expresses his intention to resort to a metaphorical meaning of the specialized medical term in order to assure himself that the idea he wants to transmit will be accurately understood by the readers. The meaning of "uncapable, unsatisfying" presented here is not registered in general dictionaries.

Another term to which the media context gives an expressive value is also *laxitate*: "La aceasta s-a adăugat *laxitatea* fiscală asociată cu o administrație nefuncțională, supradimensionată şi hiperbugetată" (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). We can notice the fact that the specialized meaning of "high mobility of an articulation" is replaced by a metaphorical one, namely "weakness, lack of resistance". An exquisite context is the following one: "Mulți fruntaşi social-democrați nu sunt deloc *surzi* la cântecele sirenelor portocalii" (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). There may be observed how the author uses a term commonly denoting a physical inability: "who cannot hear (well), (totally or partially) deaf", in order to render a political attitude of "uncaring, indiference". We mention that both meanings are registered in *DEXI*.

In the sentence "Liberalii i-au supraviețuit. Şi *s-au imunizat* în mare măsură împotriva acestor tactici murdare." also taken from the electronic edition of March 9$^{th}$ 2010 of *Jurnalul Național*, the verb *a se imuniza* loses its specialized meaning of "making or becoming immune after a treatment or by suffering from the same disease in the past", thus acquiring a connotation adapted to the common language, namely "to become indifferent, uncaring, untouchable", a non-registered meaning in *DEXI*.

Some medical terms may receive unique, metaphoric meanings also within the contexts of articles about sports. For example, "Istoria meciului, în schimb, nu şi-a aflat forma definitivă. *Agonizează* prelung, într-o

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apreciabilă diversitate de păreri" (*Jurnalul Național*, 9.03.2010). The meaning that the term *agonizează* develops here is a metaphorical one, not recorded in *DEXI* (there are recorded only two meanings: "to agonize" and fig.: "to be in decline"), the meaning brought in by context being that of "dragging, continuing without any precise results".

The term *acut* is also used in the medical language with the meaning of "an illness with a rapid evolution, having the characteristic of a crisis". Despite all these, we find this term in the written media with a different metaphorical meaning "profound, powerful, violent", both meanings being recorded in *DEXI*: "Este vorba de un personaj care provoacă divergențe acute şi fundamentale în societatea noastră" (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 9.03.2010). The same situation is met within the following context: "În acel an, Franța trebuie să fi fost bântuită de boala zborului. După călătoria cu balonul, în luna decembrie, avea loc un alt eveniment gustat de nobilii francezi" (*Evenimentul Zilei*, 9.03.2010). The medical meaning of the term boală, "modificare organică sau funcțională a echilibrului normal al organismului; proces patologic care afectează organismul", passes on to an emotional register and it is used with a familiar meaning of "nuisance, passion for something".

The strictly specialized anatomical syntagm *vase capilare* recorded in *DEXI* as "the smallest blood vessels, which serve for feeding tissues and establish the connection between veins and arteries" acquires a metaphorical meaning in the following context taken from the Jurnalul Național newspaper, from March 10$^{th}$, 2010: "obligația *PSD* este aceea de a se deschide – profund, onest şi imediat – către români, pentru a pătrunde, prin toate *capilarele* organizațiilor sale, cât mai aproape de oameni." The new meaning imposed by the context is that of "areas, corners, infiltrations, etc". We may also have the same situation as far as the specialized medical term *scleroză* is concerned, defined as "a disease manifesting through the alteration of the normal structure of an organ or a tissue, due to the proliferation of conjunctive tissue it contains", found in the next context as a derivative adjective from the noun generally used in the medical language: "Sunt oare programele defectuos elaborate? Există probleme de gestionare a programelor? Sau instituțiile au devenit *sclerotice*?" (*Jurnalul Național*,

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10.03.2010). Thus, the basic specialized meaning becomes a metaphorical one, as the main issue here is not represented by patients, but by institutions.

Within the sports context "Unirea Urziceni, Steaua, Politehnica Timişoara şi Dinamo au mai tras o gură de aer şi reiau cursa de urmărire a liderului fără *handicapul* paşilor greşiți comişi pe proprie răspundere" (*Jurnalul Național*, 11.03.2010), the term *handicap* develops a connotative meaning, diverging from the medical characteristic definition of "a sensorial, motion, mental deficiency or any other type of infirmity in a person". In the same type of context, we deal with another case of metaphorization of a medical term, namely *metastazic* defined in *DEXI* as "having the characteristic of metastasis" and used here as a noun: "*Metastazicii* blatului susțin că au greşit doar la un colț şi dezvoltă alte scenarii. Zic ei că Oțelul şi Marius Stan nu au câştigat cele trei puncte pentru folosință proprie" (*Jurnalul Național*, 11.03.2010). The newly developed meaning here (not recorded in *DEXI*) is that of "those who persist in doing the same thing, irrecoverable ones". The verb *a avorta*, having a strictly specialized definition in *DEXI*: "to undergo or causing oneself an abortion", may also develop a connotative value, as it may be deduced from the following sports context: "Altfel, orice eşec nu va fi decât dovada, dovada clară şi indubitabilă a faptului că prezicătorii *avortați* de mama Omida în fotbal au întotdeauna dreptate" (*Jurnalul Național*, 11.03.2010). We are once again faced with an intentional ironical attitude from the author of the newspaper article, probably to point out some unfavourable realities.

In a cultural context this time, the term *inhibitor*, defined as "a chemical substance that, added in small quantities, may slow down or even stop some chemical reactions; treatment that stops or delays the development of a pathogen agent, a physiological process, etc." drops its denotative value in favour of a connotative one, a metaphorical one respectively, as follows: "Sper ca «Depeche//Dance» să aducă la Odeon un număr şi mai mare de spectatori, cărora dansul contemporan să nu li se pară *inhibitor*" (*Jurnalul Național*, 11.03.2010).

Two more titles have also drawn our attention, where specialized medical terms enter the media language, with some new meanings: "Cum tratăm *cancerul* atroce din spitale?" (*Adevărul*, 11.03.2010) or "Stilul

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vedetelor sub *microscop*" (*Adevărul*, 6.03.2010). It is obvious how the two terms, *cancer* and *microscop*, respectively, deviate from their specialized meaning recorded in the general dictionaries, a method used (we believe) for adding more expressivity and, why, not, more credibility to the message sent.

All the analyzed examples so far prove the fact that the interference between the medical language and the one used in written media (performed in various social, political, cultural or sports contexts) represents a much more complex situation than the simple "migration" of medical specialized terms towards the literary standard language.

**3. Conclusions**

Generally speaking, terminology may be studied from two distinct perspectives: on the one hand, from the point of view of internal terminology, and, on the other hand, as external terminology. In this chapter, we performed a concise analysis of some medical terms that appear in newspapers, within non-specialized contexts, in which the medical terms have developed new, exquisite meanings. Thus, the medical terms "migrated" towards the common language, by means of the written media. As a consequence, we may state that we are faced with a "migration" process of medical terminology, from the specialized area to the literary one.

Our study was based on the medical terms that entered non-specialized texts from mass media, thus developing a metaphorical value and losing their specialized basic meaning, i.e. medical terms with connotative values. The most interesting phenomenon remains the one regarding medical terms used in the written media with a connotative meaning. Thus, these medical terms appear in various contexts (political, sports, cultural, social, etc.) and acquire some emotional values, enriching themselves with new meanings. This fact strengthens our belief that medical terminology is not a closed and uptight system, but it may also be seen as a perfect environment for refined semantic developments, in contrast with the usual standards that characterize specialized terminology, namely the lack of polysemantic relations. Most connotative meanings developed in case of the

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terms studied in this article have not been registered in general or specialized medical dictionaries.

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