

THE COMMUNICATIVE STATUS OF PARONYMS IN MEDICAL ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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Abstract

The article examines the role of paronyms in Medical English for Academic Purposes. The authors developed the classification of paronyms in English medical terminology, which is designed to minimize the difficulties that may arise while using special terminology in the process of professional communication, as well as to expand active and passive vocabulary of undergraduates, PhD students and academic staff at medical universities. The study of the phenomenon of paronymy plays an important role in the development of terminological competence of specialists in the field of medicine and health care. The proposed approach is aimed at developing the communication skills necessary for successful international communication and cooperation.

Keywords: paronyms; English for Professional Purposes; academic staff; PhD students

Introduction. Rapid development of integration processes necessitates placing more emphasis on teaching academic grammar and lexis, which will enable undergraduates, PhD students and academic staff to produce the English-language written discourse of competitive quality. Therefore, one of the most relevant tasks of teaching English for Professional Purposes is the study of potential writing challenges with a view to improve the academic writing skills. Paronyms are defined as words with similar sounding and a partial coincidence of morphemic composition (Bieliaieva et al. 2017). These lexical units are frequently found in specialized languages, and the language of medicine is no exception (Lysanets et al. 2018). Medical communication in an English-speaking setting can be often impeded by a range of translation and intercultural challenges (Bieliaieva et al. 2018; Lysanets and Bieliaieva 2018). Therefore, it is highly important to be aware of such potential difficulties. The objectives of our research are (1) to examine the prevalence of paronyms in the English sublanguage of medicine and healthcare, (2) to describe the major challenges which medical students may face in the process of mastering these lexical units, and (3) to

develop their classification in order to eliminate mistakes and to avoid possible misunderstanding. The study of paronyms in the English sublanguage of medicine and healthcare is important for developing guidelines when writing research papers and case reports, to ensure the doctor's effective communication with patients and other medical professionals. Our research will be useful for translation studies, teaching English as a second language, and developing multilingual competence of doctors.

Demonstration. The research has demonstrated a number of paronyms which can be encountered in foreign-language medical and dental settings (Bieliaiev et al. 2018). We suggest the following classification of these lexical units: 1) paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology; 2) paronyms in clinical terminology; 3) paronyms with eponymic component; 4) intersystem paronyms. The results of the research have been integrated into the 1st edition of Medical English for Academic Purposes by Yu. Lysanets, O. Bieliaieva, M. Melaschenko (2018) (Lysanets et al. 2018), which focuses on improving the communication skills of medical professionals. Let us consider the subgroups of paronyms in detail.

The subgroup of paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">– afferent neurons (convey the sensory stimulus to the brain, the efferent neurons) and efferent (convey the motor stimulus to the muscles);– apophysis (a projecting part of a bone) and epiphysis (the end of a long bone, usually wider than the long portion of the bone, either composed of cartilage or separated from the shaft by a disk of cartilage);– callus (noun) and callous (adjective)– humeral (pertaining to the humerus bone) and humoral (referring to a body fluid (such as a hormone); |
|---|

- **ileum** (the gut) and **ilium** (the bone)
- **mucus** (noun) and **mucous** (adjective)
- **osteal** (bony (osseous)) and **ostial** (pertaining to an ostium or os (an opening));
- **perineal** (pertaining to groin) and **peroneal** (pertaining to fibula);
- **pleural** (refers to the pleura, the serous membrane lining each half of the thorax) and **plural** (more than one);
- **prostate** (the prostate gland) and **prostrate** (lying prone);
- **vesicle** (noun) and **vesical** (adjective);
- **villose**, **villous** (shaggy with soft hairs; covered with villi) and **villus** (plural is villi: small vascular protrusion, particularly a protrusion from the surface of a membrane);
- **viscous** (characterized by viscosity) and **viscus** (internal organ; singular form of viscera).

Table 2 represents paronyms in clinical terminology.

Table 2

Paronyms in clinical terminology

- **enuresis** (inability to control urination) and **anuresis** (retention of urine in the urinary bladder);
- **exacerbate** (to increase the severity, bitterness, or violence of (disease, ill feeling, etc.)) and **exasperate** (to irritate; to annoy greatly; to make very angry or impatient)
- **palpation** (the act of feeling with the fingers) and **palpitation** (the subjective feeling of an irregular or abnormally rapid heartbeat);
- **regime** (a form of government) and **regimen** (a systematic approach to diet, medicine, or exercise)
- **scatoma** (a tumor-like mass in the rectum formed by an accumulation of fecal material) and **scotoma** (an area of depressed vision; a dark or blind spot in the visual field, which is surrounded by

an area of more normal vision).

Paronyms with eponymic component also constitute an important subgroup (Bieliaieva et al. 2017; Lysanets and Havrylieva 2017) (Table 3).

Table 3

Paronyms with eponymic component

- **Meigs’ syndrome** (ovarian fibroma with ascites and pleural effusion), **Meige’s syndrome** (blepharospasm with oromandibular dystonia) and **Meige’s disease** (lymphoedema praecox);
- **Meniere’s disease** (cochlear hydrops) and **Menetrier’s disease** (hyperplastic hypersecretory gastrophyl);
- **Wermer’s syndrome** (multiple endocrine neoplasms, type 1) and **Werner’s syndrome** (hereditary premature aging).

The subgroup of intersystem paronyms is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The subgroup of intersystem paronyms

- **access** (admittance) and **excess** (the degree or state of surplus, or beyond the usual);
- **allude** (to make indirect reference) and **elude** (to avoid);
- **appose** (to set one thing beside the other) and **oppose** (to be on the opposite side of an argument/debate);
- **apposition** (setting of one thing beside the other, as in suturing wounds) and **opposition** (act of being opposite).
- **complimentary / complementary: complimentary** – a) given as a free gift; b) favourable (expressing a compliment); **complementary** – a) fits/goes with/matches something; b) alternative (other acceptable therapy)
- **elicit** (to draw out) and **illicit** (unlawful, improper, not permitted);
- **ensure** (to make certain of) and **insure** (to guarantee protection; used mostly in a monetary sense);

- **perfuse** (to cause to flow or spread) and **profuse** (lavish, extravagant, bountiful);
- **principal** (the most important; the chief) and **principle** (a law or rule);
- **while** / **whilst**: Most Br and US English speakers use **while** and **whilst** in the opposite way: **Br**: “**While**” introduces or differentiates between two (or more) events happening at the same time. While the surgeon was making the incision, the anaesthetist was monitoring the patient’s vital signs. **US** English uses “**whilst**” for this situation. **Br**: “**Whilst**” introduces a “contrast” between two events, things etc.: Patient 1 experienced complete wound healing during the 4-week test period, whilst Patient 2’s wounds healed 24 days after the 4-week test period. **US** English uses “**while**” for this situation.

It is also necessary to draw attention to common mistakes in such words as **sagittal** (NOT *saggital*); **tonsil** (NOT *tonsill*), but **tonsillectomy** (NOT *tonsilectomy*); **occur** – **occurring** – **occurrence**; **persistent** (NOT *persistant*); **indispensable** (NOT *indispensible*).

We developed the linguo-didactic mechanisms for organizing the training material and delivering the course of Medical English for Academic Purposes. The proposed system of training tasks is intended to support courses in professional English for undergraduates, PhD students and academic staff at higher medical educational institutions. Sample tasks:

Ex. 1. Read the words, pay attention to their similarity in sounding and explain the difference in meaning:

- **ileum** and **ilium**;
- **mucus** and **mucous**;
- **osteal** and **ostial**;
- **perineal** and **peroneal**;

- **pleural** and **plural**;
- **prostate** and **prostrate**;
- **vesicle** and **vesical**.

The didactic purpose of the task: assessment of the level of mastering the lexical meaning of paronyms.

Ex. 2. Write down the paronyms with eponymic component. Arrange the terms into paronymic pairs:

- 1) ovarian fibroma with ascites and pleural effusion:

- 2) multiple endocrine neoplasms, type 1: _____
- 3) blepharospasm with oromandibular dystonia:

- 4) hereditary premature aging:

- 5) cochlear hydrops: _____
- 6) hyperplastic hypersecretory gastrophylia: _____
- 7) lymphoedema praecox: _____

The didactic purpose of the task: to review and draw attention to paronyms with eponymic component.

Ex. 3. Write down the clinical terms which apply to the following definitions. Arrange the terms into paronymic pairs, where appropriate:

- 1) retention of urine in the urinary bladder:

- 2) to increase the severity, bitterness, or violence of (disease, ill feeling, etc.) : _____
- 3) the subjective feeling of an irregular or abnormally rapid heartbeat: _____
- 4) a systematic approach to diet, medicine, or exercise:

- 5) inability to control urination: _____
- 6) the act of feeling with the fingers:

- 7) to irritate; to annoy greatly; to make very angry or impatient: _____

8) an area of depressed vision; a dark or blind spot in the visual field, which is surrounded by an area of more normal vision:

The didactic purpose of the task: to review and draw attention to clinical terms that are similar in sounding.

Ex. 4. Using the lexical units from Table 4, write a letter of patient's referral to your colleague.

The didactic purposes of the task: a) checking the level of mastering the graphic form of terminological paronyms and spelling skills; b) control of the level of mastering the morphological features of terms.

Yet another effective activity is the *Kahoot!* Quiz as a formative assessment tool. The lexical units for the quiz, i.e., the cases of correct and wrong spelling of paronyms, were taken from the PubMed database, published within the last three years:

Question 1 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "...examination revealed no mucus membranes involvement"

Question 2 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "The researcher wanted to illicit information from patients"

Question 3 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "Open left humoral fracture could not be corrected"

Question 4 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "Her vessels started to perfuse again"

Question 5 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "We tested the sufficiency of pedal pulses after clamping her peroneal artery"

Question 6 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "Amyotrophy remained the principle feature of his disease"

Question 7 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "perfuse sweating after intense exercise"

Question 8 - True or False

This is the correct word usage: "palpitation, percussion, auscultation of the abdomen"

Question 9 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "isolated sagittal synostosis"

Question 10 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "Hypertrophy of palatine tonsils"

Question 11 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "Premature ovarian failure is a common occurrence"

Question 12 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "Meticulous attention is indispensable"

Question 13 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "...tissue homogenates were analyzed by Western blot"

Question 14 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "Persistent biliary fistula"

Question 15 - True or False

This is the correct word spelling: "An emergency tonsillectomy should be performed"

The didactic purposes of the task: a) checking the level of mastering the graphic form of terminological paronyms and spelling skills; b) control of the level of mastering the morphological features of terms; c) developing the ability to use correct terms depending on the context; d) developing understanding of the modern medical English discourse as exemplified by the PubMed database.

Conclusions. Thus, the suggested classification is expected to facilitate the process of mastering paronyms in medical English. This list is by no means exhaustive – it stipulates further development and elaboration. As one can easily observe, it is essential to remember the correct spelling of each lexical unit in order to avoid misunderstanding. It is highly important to be familiar with medical paronyms which can be met in the clinical setting in order to be ready to work in a foreign

language professional environment. Thus, targeted and methodically thought-out work with paronyms at higher medical educational institutions is one of the effective ways of forming the terminological competence of undergraduates, PhD students and academic staff in the field of medicine and healthcare, which promotes the expansion and enrichment of the professional lexicon, provides practical implementation of interdisciplinary and cross-curriculum connections in the learning process. The prospects for research are in further in-depth study of the phenomenon of paronymy in sublanguage of medicine, as well as in the comprehensive study of other lexical and semantic relations, the practical result of which will be the development of Latin medical dictionary of synonyms, homonyms, and paronyms.

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