Lexical Features of Medical Terminology in Modern English

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Lecture Outline and Objectives

In this lecture, we will:

- analyze the features of academic vocabulary in medical English;
- focus on major difficulties in spelling and use, which can be encountered in healthcare setting;
- identify the common errors in English medical writing;
- trace the modern tendencies of English medical discourse;
- analyze the samples of medical discourse from *PubMed* database.

This lecture will cover:

- commonly misspelled terms in medicine;
- general differences in British and US medical English (words choice and spelling).
- correct use of pseudo-internationalisms and Latin-derived medical terms in modern English.

English as a Global Language

- The prevalence of English as ***lingua franca*** and an important transmission medium of knowledge compels medical professionals to be well-versed in lexical features of medical terminology, its potential challenges and modern tendencies in order to ensure **effective communication** between doctors – both in spoken written forms of English.
- Incorrect or unappropriate use of medical terminology can impede the communication process in a clinical setting, resulting in unnecessary **waste of time** and **misleading actions** in the diagnosis and treatment, as well as leading to poor quality of produced academic discourse.
- Careful study of lexical features of medical terminology in modern English is important **to avoid misunderstanding** in a foreign-language clinical setting, and **to eliminate possible mistakes** when producing English-language academic discourse, such as case reports.

Commonly Misspelled Words in Medicine

- Medical communication in an English-speaking setting can be often impeded by **PARONYMS** – words with similar sounding and a partial coincidence of morphemic composition.
- These lexical units are frequently found in specialized languages, and the language of medicine is no exception.

We developed the following classification of medical paronyms (Lysanets Yu. et al., 2018):

1) paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology;
2) paronyms in clinical terminology;
3) intersystem paronyms;
4) paronyms with eponymic component (i.e., a disease, structure, operation, or procedure, usually derived from the name of the person who discovered or described it first).

Paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology

- **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)

Paronyms in anatomical and histological terminology

- **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).

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).

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** – a) given as a free gift; b) favourable (expressing a compliment) and **complementary** – a) fits/goes with/matches something; b) alternative (other acceptable therapy)

The subgroup of intersystem paronyms

- **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** (adjective: the most important; the chief) and **principle** (noun: a law or rule);

Are these words used correctly?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

1. An examination of his skin revealed more than 100 dome-shaped red-purple cutaneous hemangiomas, the abdomen and the extremities with no ***mucus*** membranes involvement (2013).
2. The researcher wanted to ***illicit*** information from patient and nurses (2018).
3. Open left ***humoral*** fracture over 1 week old that could not be corrected: 0.60 (2015).
4. Three weeks later her visual acuity had not changed, and the vessels had started to ***perfuse*** again (2013).
5. Metformin inhibited most of these stimuli (a group at increased risk for the development of ***prostrate*** cancer) (2018).

Analysis and corrections (if any)

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5. Metformin inhibited most of these stimuli (a group at increased risk for the development of ~~prostrate~~ ***prostate*** cancer) (2018).

Are these words used correctly?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

1. We planned testing the sufficiency of her pedal pulses after temporarily clamping her ***peroneal*** artery (2014).
2. Amyotrophy remained the ***principle*** feature of his disease (2013).
3. This study suggests that ***perfuse*** sweating after intense exercise may increase cortisol concentrations detected in hair (2014).
4. Physical examination of the abdomen: ***palpitation***, percussion, auscultation of the abdomen (2013).

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Paronyms with eponymic component

Meniere's disease (cochlear hydrops)

Menetrier's disease (hyperplastic hypersecretory gastrophy);

Wermer's syndrome (multiple endocrine neoplasms, type 1)

Werner's syndrome (hereditary premature aging)

Meigs' syndrome (ovarian fibroma with ascites and pleural effusion)

Meige's disease (lymphoedema praecox)

Meige's syndrome (blepharospasm with oromandibular dystonia)

Commonly misspelled eponyms

- Another common error arises due to confusion with capitalization of such terms as ***"Southern blotting", "northern blotting", "western blotting" and "southwestern blotting"***.
- The first blotting technique – **Southern blotting**, was discovered by Edward Southern, and therefore, this eponym is capitalized.
- Meanwhile, "northern blotting", "western blotting" and "southwestern blotting" **are not eponyms**, but merely a play on eponymously-named Southern blot, and therefore must not be capitalized.

Nazi-associated eponyms and their replacements

• One of the most hotly debated topics, associated with the usage of eponymous terms nowadays, is the group of medical eponyms named for doctors, involved in Nazi atrocities. In the last decade, there has been a dramatic decline in the usage of such eponyms and they are replaced with the following descriptive terms:

Nazi-associated term	Replacement term
Asperger syndrome	**high-functioning autism**
Beck-Ibrahim disease	**congenital cutaneous candidiasis**
Cauchois-Eppinger-Frugoni syndrome	**portal vein thrombosis**
Clara cells	**club cells**
Eppinger's spider naevus	**spider naevus**
Hallervorden-Spatz disease	**pantothenate kinase-associated neurodegeneration**
Reiter's spirochete	**Treponema forans**
Reiter's syndrome	**reactive arthritis**
Seitelberger disease	**infantile neuroaxonal dystrophy**
Spatz-Stiefler reaction	**paralysis agitans reaction**
Van Bogaert-Scherer-Epstein syndrome	**cerebrotendinous xanthomatosis**
Wegener's granulomatosis	**granulomatosis with polyangiitis**

Other Commonly Misspelled Words

- **sagittal** (NOT *saggital*)
- **tonsil** (NOT *tonsill*), but **tonsillectomy** (NOT *tonsilectomy*)
- **occur – occurring – occurrence**
- **persistent** (NOT *persistant*)
- **indispensable** (NOT *indispensable)*

The use of Latin in Medical English: Latin plural endings

(in: Lysanets Yu., Bieliaieva O.M. The Use of Latin Terminology in Medical Case Reports: Quantitative, Structural and Thematic analysis. ***Journal of Medical Case Reports* (2018)** 12:45 doi: 10.1186/s13256-018-1562-x)

- Pluralizing Latin terms can sometimes be quite a challenge.
- For instance, a common mistake occurs when deriving the plural form of the Latin word "*septum*". This lexical unit belongs to the 2nd declension of Latin nouns, neuter gender. Therefore, the correct plural form in Latin (and in English) is "*septa*".
- However, the plural form "septa" is quite often mistaken for a singular form, and consequently it is erroneously pluralized as "septae" (on the model of "vertebra" – "vertebrae"). As a result, a misspelling ("septae") occurs.
- In our research (*Journal of Medical Case Reports,* 2018), we found 20 papers in *JMCR* containing the incorrect plural form of this word, for example: "...surgical drainage of the hepatic abscess (that contained many ~~septae~~ ***septa***) was performed"; "Alveolar ~~septae~~ ***septa*** were inflamed, thickened and fibrotic", etc.

Latin Plural Endings in English Medical Vocabulary

(in: Lysanets Yu., Bieliaieva O.M. The Use of Latin Terminology in Medical Case Reports: Quantitative, Structural and Thematic analysis. ***Journal of Medical Case Reports* (2018)** 12:45 doi: 10.1186/s13256-018-1562-x)

- A similar error may occur with the word "dorsum" which also belongs to the 2nd declension of Latin nouns, neuter gender.
- We found 3 papers in *JMCR* with this misspelling ("dorsae"): "Her dermographism was improving but she had developed confluent erythema and slight hyperkeratosis between and over the ~~dorsae~~ ***dorsa*** of her fingers", etc.
- Another challenging aspect of using Latin in MCRs is the subject-verb agreement in number. We detected this type of error in the words "bacterium" (singular) – "bacteria" (plural), and "labium" (singular) – "labia" (plural): "The next closest ~~bacteria~~ ***bacterium*** was Haemophilus parainfluenzae with a 97% similarity score"; "Right ~~labia~~ ***labium*** was asymmetrically enlarged" .

Latin Plural Endings in English Medical Vocabulary

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Singular	Plural
vertebra	vertebrae
atrium	atria
bacterium	bacteria
curriculum	curricula
datum	data
dorsum	dorsa
erratum	errata
labium	labia
medium	media
septum	septa
stratum	strata
symposium	symposia
criterion	criteria
ganglion	ganglia
phenomenon	phenomena

Singular	Plural
bacillus	Bacilli
bronchus	Bronchi
focus	Foci
fungus	Fungi
nucleus	nuclei
stimulus	stimuli
analysis	analyses
apex	apices
index	indices
appendix	appendices
axis	axes
crisis	crises
diagnosis	diagnoses
paralysis	paralyses
thesis	theses

Are these words written correctly?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

1. Non-contrast computed tomography head (axial and ***saggital*** sections) showing bilateral chronic subdural hematomas (2014).
2. The electrolysis was used especially in hypertrophy of palatine ***tonsills***, laryngeal polypes, laryngeal tuberculosis and laryngeal stenosis (2004).
3. Premature ovarian failure is a common ***occurence*** in the context of balanced X: autosomal translocations (2011).
4. Meticulous attention to needle placement with image guidance is ***indispensable*** in preventing neurologic complications (2012).
5. To examine the distribution of mutations in different brain regions, aliquots of 10% tissue homogenates were prepared and analyzed by ***Western blot*** (2008)

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1. ***Persistant*** biliary fistula was seen in 5 (14%) (2019).
2. Monoclonal antibodies are ***indispensible*** for the treatment of moderate and severe disease courses of rheumatoid arthritis, spondylarthropathies and vasculitides (2019).
3. We suggest that an emergency ***tonsillectomy*** should be performed as first-line treatment for this potentially life-threatening condition (2013).
4. The biological abilities of antioxidants were investigated by scavenging radicals and cultivating intestinally beneficial ***bacterias***, respectively (2019).
5. The authors present a case of inadvertently prolonged orthotic helmet therapy after endoscopic strip craniectomy for isolated ***sagittal*** synostosis (2015).

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Differences in British and US medical English

- There are several areas in which British and American variants of English are different.

NB! Follow the consistency principle:
use US or UK style in one document – never a mixture.

Lexical differences in British and US English

SICK and ILL

British English: ***ill*** refers to being unwell; ***sick*** usually refers to vomit:

- I'm going to be sick. = I am going to vomit.

US English: ***sick*** and ***ill*** both refer to being unwell.

- I feel sick. I had to leave school because I was ill.

Br and US: ***to be sick*** has a more general meaning:

- You can be off sick for a maximum of 2 consecutive days without a medical certificate.
- He has been on sick leave for the past 3 weeks.

Lexical differences in British and US English

to fill in / out (e.g., forms, case histories)

- "to fill <u>in</u>" prevails in British English, whereas "to fill <u>out</u>" is more common for US English.
- "to complete" means the same.
- You can fill out, fill in or complete a form (referring to the whole form).
- It is more usual to use "fill in" for individual sections of a form.

Lexical differences in British and US English

while / whilst –

Most Br and US English speakers use **while** and **whilst** in the opposite way:

- **British English**: "**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.

- **British English**: "**Whilst**" introduces a "contrast" between two events, things etc.: *"Patient 1 experienced complete wound healing during the 4-week test period, **whilst** the wounds of Patient 2 healed 24 days after the 4-week test period"*. **US** English uses "***while***" for this situation.

Spelling differences in British and US English

- The differences often come about because British English has tended to keep the spelling of words it has absorbed from other languages (e.g., Latin, French), while American English has adapted the spelling to reflect the way that the words actually sound when they're spoken.

Consistency within one document is essential.

British and US English: the Latin diphthong “ae”

Br	US
aetiology	etiology
anaemia	anemia
anaesthetic	anesthetic
caesarean	cesarean
defaecation	defecation
dyslipidaemia	dyslipidemia
glycaemic	glycemic
gynaecology	gynecology
haemoglobin	hemoglobin
haemorrhage	hemorrhage
ischaemic	ischemic
leukaemia	leukemia
orthopaedic	orthopedic
paediatric	pediatric

British and US English: the Latin diphthong “oe”

“oe” (Br)	“e” (US)
diarrhoea	diarrhea
coeliac	celiac
dyspnoea	dyspnea
foetus	fetus
manoeuvre	maneuver
oedema	edema
oesophagus	esophagus
oestrogen	estrogen

Spelling Differences in British and US English

“-ise” (Br)	“-ize” (US)
organise	organize
recognise	recognize
realise	realize
“-yse” (Br)	**“-yze” (US)**
analyse	analyze
catalyse	catalyze
paralyse	paralyze

British and US English

Endings: “our” (Br) and “or” (US)

“our” (Br)	“or” (US)
behaviour	behavior
colour	color
favour	favor
humour	humor
labour	labor
tumour	tumor

British and US English

Endings: “re” (Br) and “er” (US)

“re” (Br)	“er” (US)
centimetre	centimeter
centre	center
fibre	fiber
litre	liter
titre	titer

Other spelling differences in British and US English

Br	US
ageing	aging
aluminium	aluminum
counsellor	counselor
dependant (noun), dependent (adjective)	dependent
fulfil	fulfill
intervertebral disc	intervertebral disk
leucocyte	leukocyte
to license (verb), licence (noun)	license (verb and noun)
mould	mold
to practise (verb), practice (noun)	practice (verb and noun)
programme	program

Is this the UK spelling style?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

- **Case presentation.** We report the case of two Angolan children aged 10 and 11 respectively, of African origin with sickle cell anaemia who underwent surgery to treat chronic necrosis, fistula of the bones and bone destruction. This presentation describes the perioperative course, including general anaesthesia. A partial exchange blood transfusion decreased S-haemoglobin levels from 81% to 21% and simultaneously treated the anaemia (2010).

The UK spelling style:

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Is this the UK spelling style?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

- Repeat investigations performed post-natally showed the presence of similar antibodies as in the newborn and an anti-D titer of 1:32 (0.25 IU/mL), which was significant. A diagnosis of hemolytic disease of the fetus and newborn secondary to anti-D and anti-S was made. **Authors' contributions**. RY obtained the case history and consent from our patient's mother. SAA and NY analyzed and interpreted our patient's laboratory investigation results and assisted with the literature review.

The US spelling style:

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Is this the U.S. spelling style?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

- Invasive breast tumours in the ageing women are thought to have a more favourable biology compared to younger females. Improvement of prognostic tools is needed for more accurate prediction of prognosis in the older breast cancer patient, considering that only very few older patients with breast cancer aged over 70 years receive chemotherapy. Postmenopausal women with relatively high systemic concentration of oestrogen have a higher risk of developing breast cancer (2019).

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Is this the U.S. spelling style?

(excerpts taken from PubMed database: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed)

Yes/No feedback:

- **RESULTS:** Magnetic resonance images revealed enlargement of the tumor with perifocal edema. Histologic examination showed a meningioma with contiguous metastatic poorly differentiated adenocarcinoma, as well as a clearly defined border between the two components. The clinical origin of the metastasis was presumed to be from the left lower lobe of the lung. Although our case does not strictly fulfill the definition of tumor-to-tumor metastasis, we suggest a contiguous occurrence develops by the same mechanism and may be a subtype of this process (2019).

The US spelling style:

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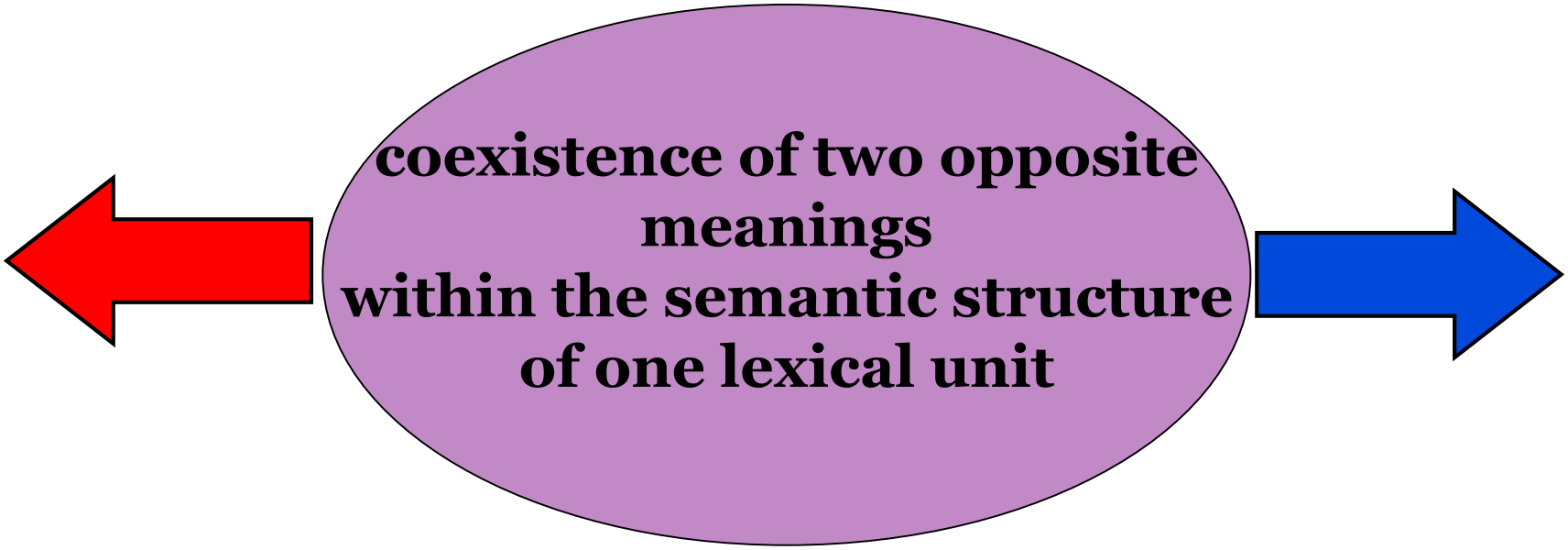
Enantiosemy
in the language of medicine and healthcare



Enantiosemic units are commonly referred to as “contronyms”, “Janus words” or “auto-antonyms”

Examples of enantiosemy

In: Lysanets Yu. "Enantiosemy in the English medical discourse". *Current issues of modern medicine*. 2014, Vol. 14, no. 4. P. 256-259):

- Semantic syncretism, i.e., coexistence of two opposite meanings.

For example, the verb ***to clip*** means:

a) "to hold in a tight grip; to clutch; to clasp; to fasten", e.g.:

The nurse ***clipped*** the drip tube to the stand with a peg.

This procedure would require a patient to ***clip*** the photo sensor on the finger.

b) "to shorten or remove by cutting; to cut off; to trim", e.g.:

She ***clips*** her toenails every week.

Elderly patients need help with ***clipping*** their toenails.

Instruct patient to ***clip*** hair at application site, but to avoid razors, which may irritate skin.

Noun: ***a clip*** – a fastener e.g.: a paperclip, a harness clip.

Examples of enantiosemy:

- The word ***to skin*** means:

a) “to scrape, to rub off, to damage the surface of”

E.g.: I fell and ***skinned*** my knee.

b) “to heal by scar formation”

E.g.: The wound was ***skinning*** over.

- Depending on the context, the noun “***oversight***” means:

a) supervision, watchful, responsible care (i.e., looking after someone, monitoring), e.g.: The patient needs constant ***oversight*** from experts, and a highly specialized course of treatment”

b) an inadvertent omission, e.g.: It was an ***oversight*** on his part that the patient was misdiagnosed.

Patients suffering from heart attack don’t get the critical treatment they deserve due to physician’s ***oversight***.

However: the verb ***to oversee*** means “to supervise, control”. Note it does not have the second meaning of the noun.

Translator's "false friends" in the language of medicine and healthcare

(in: Lysanets Yu. "False Friends" in the Language of Medicine as a Challenge for Multilingual Health Care Environment". *Book of Abstracts: Multiculturalism, Multilingualism and the Self.* 25th Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English, Szczyrk, 2016. P. 21)

- "Translator's false friends", also known as pseudo-internationalisms, are words in two languages that look or sound similar, but have entirely different meanings.
- It is well known that a great number of medical terms are derived from Latin and Greek. However, some lexical units can have different meanings in various European languages despite the same etymological origin
- Pseudo-internationalisms are frequently found in the language of medicine. They can significantly impede the communication process, especially in a multilingual health-care environment, where English serves as a common language.
- For instance, Spanish *embarazada* means "pregnant", not "embarrassed"; *constipado* means "head cold", and not "constipation"; *sano* means "healthy", and not "sanitized", and *injuria* means "offensive language", not "injury". German word *prägnant* means "distinct, expressive"; the noun *After* means "the sphincter at the end of the rectum"; *Tablett* means "tray", and *Dose* means "the tin can".

Some examples of absolute false friends in English and Ukrainian

"False friend" and its correct meaning	Common mistakes in transaltion due to similar spelling in Ukrainian
angina: stenocardia	quinsy, tonsillitis
climax: culmination of the disease	menopause, climacteric period
complexion: face color	bodily constitution
insult: an offensive remark or action	stroke
receipt: a document acknowledging payment **recipe**: a set of instructions to prepare a dish	prescription

In: Lysanets Yu. et al. "Pseudo-Internationalisms in the Language of Medicine and Healthcare as a Challenge for Translation Studies". *Relevant Issues of Romano-Germanic Philology and Applied Linguistics*, 2017. 2(15). P. 46–49.

Internationalisms with multiple meanings

- The table given below presents internationalisms from medical settings, which have multiple meanings in English, depending on the context.

Polysemantic words	International meaning	Another meaning in medical English
Caucasian, *n*	relating to the Caucasus or its inhabitants	referring to persons of European descent having usually light skin pigmentation
complex, *adj*	comprehensive	unnecessary complicated
compromise, *v*	to come to agreement by mutual concession	to cause the impairment of; to expose to risk, e.g.: illnesses that can seriously ***compromise*** the immune system
dramatic, *adj*	relating to the drama	abrupt, sudden, e.g.: a ***dramatic*** decrease of blood pressure
realise, *v*	to implement	to become aware of
regular, *adj*	recurring	normal, typical, standard

Have you encountered any other challenges in written or spoken English?

Key takeaways:

- It is highly important to be aware of such potential challenges in medical English as paronyms, “false friends” and multiple-meaning internationalisms in order to avoid mistakes and misunderstanding in a foreign-language clinical setting.
- It is necessary to pay close attention to the possible ways of translating contronyms in the language of medicine and healthcare through the use of compiled etymology dictionaries and glossaries.
- When working with medical eponyms, it is recommended to read up about the person who discovered or described this phenomenon in order to avoid possible misuse of these terms.
- Double check for grammar when using Latin-derived terms.
- Always pay attention to the context in which you are writing/speaking (UK or U.S.).

Thank you
for your attention!