

QUO VADIS, CROATIAN MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY SHOULD THE DIAGNOSES BE WRITTEN IN CROATIAN, LATIN OR – ENGLISH?

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SUMMARY – Croatian physicians write the diagnoses in Latin. Recently, writing diagnoses in Croatian has been ever more frequently suggested. An intermediate solution would imply Croatization of Latin terms, similar to the practice in other European countries. Facing the dilemma due to the intrusion of Anglo-Saxon terminology, it appears preferable to Croatize Latin terminology over Anglicizing Croatian terminology.

Key words: *medical terminology; Croatia*

The article entitled “Diagnoses in Croatian or Latin” by Igor Petriček, an ophthalmologist from Zagreb, which appeared in *Liječničke novine*¹, has once again and more intensely than ever before, this time because of the high readership rating of the journal (15,500 copies), aroused discussion on the issue of writing diagnoses, i.e. should they be written in Latin, Croatian, or maybe even in English language. In the ensuing debate that was highly emotive and occasionally at the very limit of abusive language²⁻⁶, three main trends could be defined. One of them, conservative trend, insists on Latin terminology *versus* those advocating the use of Croatian terminology, whereas the third finds solution in Croatization of Latin diagnoses⁷, on the model of the colloquial style used in our daily hospital routine. What would be daily routine results of such a practice is best illustrated by some examples:

- Latin: *sinuitis acuta*
- English: *sinusitis acute*
- French: *sinusite acute*

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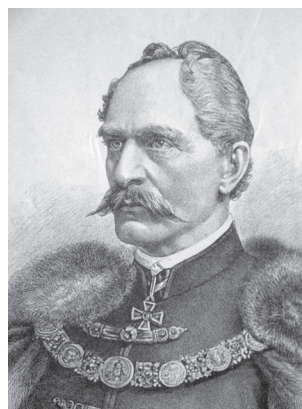


Fig. 1. Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, on whose proposal the Croatian Parliament substituted Croatian for Latin as official language in 1847.

- Italian: *sinusite acuta*
- German: *Nasenebenhöhlenentzündung* as well as *Sinusitis*
- Croatian: *upala sluznice pobočnih nosnih šupljina*
- Croatianized Latin: *akutni sinuitis*.

Followers to each of the above trends tend to substantiate their opinions by a variety of arguments that cannot be elaborated here due to space limitation. Most, however, come down to the tradition, convenience, and patriotism, and more recently to preventing invasion of medicine by the Anglo-Saxon terminology.

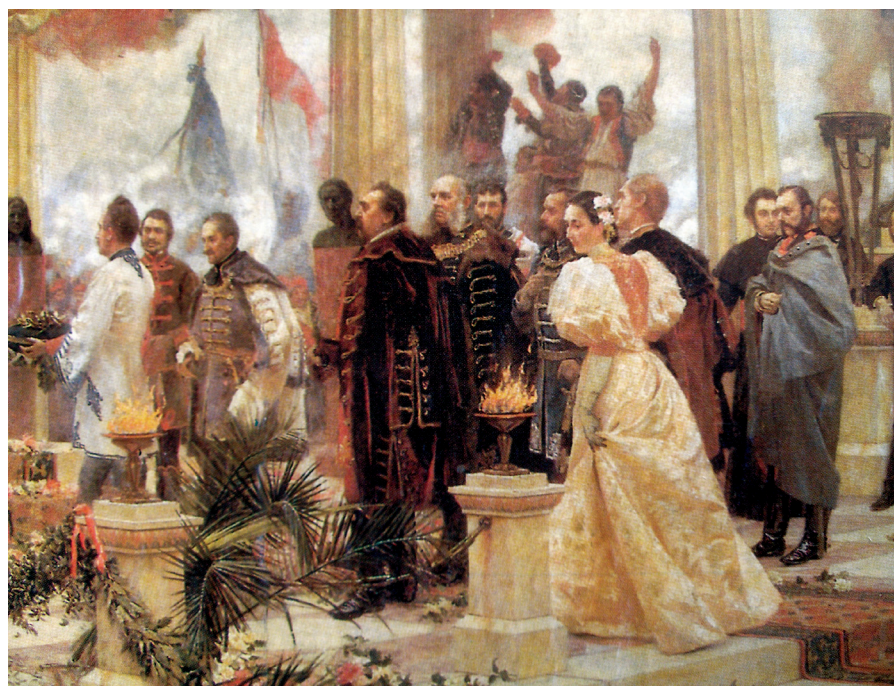


Fig. 2. *Sidonija Rubido-Erdödy, the first great Croatian opera singer.*

Now, a question arises of who is the one capable to resolve the dispute or, in professional terms, to standardize medical terminology. Under the Constitution, Article 12, Croatian language is the only language to be officially used in the Republic of Croatia; in practice, however, medical terminology is actually determined by the authors of medical textbooks and respective university departments because the terms the students acquire during the study will stay rooted in their daily communication for life, being practically ineradicable.

Foreigners Hold Croatian Language in Higher Esteem than the Croats, Who Appear to Hold Foreign Languages in Higher Esteem than Their Own!?

It seems that the Croats generally tend to show inadequate care for their linguistic wealth while being highly prone to foreign influences. It was obvious more than one millennium ago, from the Glagolitic script and Bishop Gregory of Nin who did not receive support by king Tomislav, through the Glagolitic liturgy that has almost completely disappeared, although Croats were until recently the only nation allowed by the Pope to hold liturgy in their national language. The Croats have for centuries held to Latin as official language, and were the last nation to renounce it (by the Croatian Parlia-

ment in 1847, on the proposal submitted by Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski) (Fig. 1).

The Croatian indifference toward their linguistic wealth should best be illustrated by the fact that the Croatian Revival movement was mostly initiated by foreigners, or rather Croatianized foreigners such as the Czech Ljudevit Gaj, Slovene Stanko Vraz, Tzintzar Dimitrije Demeter (a physician!), Hungarian Ljudevit Vukotinović (alias Farkaš, meaning wolf in Hungarian), German Ferdo Livadić (alias Wiesner von Wiesenfeld, composer of the famous song entitled *Još Horvatska nij' propala*), Ignaz Fuchs (alias Vatroslav Lisinski), Czech son August Šenoa (originally Šejnoha), let alone the first great Croatian opera singer, countess Sidonija Rubido-Erdödy (*Ljubav i zloba*, 1846) (Fig. 2). All this is readily substantiated by looking at the figures presented in Bukovac's painting *Croatian Revival on the curtain* in the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb (Fig. 3), with a note that Bukovac himself was a Croatianized Italian named Faggioni (*faggio*, meaning beech in Italian or *bukva* in Croatian – Bukovac)⁸. The role of foreigners in medical circles is readily illustrated by the group photograph of 104 physicians that gathered at the ceremony celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Croatian Medical Association in 1899 (put up in the Croatian Medical Association entrance hall in Zagreb) (Fig. 4), most of them



Fig. 3. Croatian Revival by Vlaho Bukovac, on the curtain of the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb.

having foreign family names. We should not forget Dr. Josip Schlosser, the steps named after him being climbed daily by generations of Croatian physicians on their way to the School of Medicine in Šalata. Schlosser, who held the position of Chief Medical Officer of the Kingdom of

Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia in the mid-19th century, and was founder of the Croatian botany (*Flora Croatica*, 1869), was a Moravia-born (Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic).

These facts demonstrate the huge power of the Croats to assimilate foreigners on the one hand, and the pronounced Croatian inability to resist foreign linguistic influences on the other hand (think of innumerable loan-words, from words of Turkish origin like *boja*, *bubreg*, *breskva*...), so that in the second half of the 19th century, Croatinized foreigners were those that led in their care to preserve the Croatian language – and in xenophobia! This Croatian proneness to accept anything of a foreign origin has recently been expressed as servile adoption of the Anglo-Saxon terminology, and in medicine of the Anglo-Saxon eponymy in particular, the consequence (or maybe the aim?) of which is eradication of any remembrance of the contribution bequeathed to medicine by the Slavic, Romanic, Arab and other nations. Here is an example from eponymy: *Downov sindrom* instead of the well founded term *trisomija 21* (by the way, Down does not have priority in relation to this disease, so the term is simply preferred because he was – an Englishman!).

The latter feature, i.e. the servile, submissive, colonialist way of adopting Anglo-Saxon medical terminology and eponymy, has now got completely out of hand,



Fig. 4. Croatian physicians at the ceremony celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Croatian Medical Association in 1899 (sic. no woman!).



and we should seriously consider the role of Croatian language also in medical terminology, just as the French have risen in defense of their language against the invasion of English language (their *français* + *anglais* has been gradually turning into *franglais*).

The question is whether Croatian language does offer substitutes and can produce substitutes for all foreign medical technical terms. In this field, considerable efforts have been invested during the last century, however, with quite poor results. Of the Croatian physicians that have collected popular medical vocabulary with much enthusiasm, mention should be made of Ivan Dežman⁹, Ante Kuzmanić¹⁰, Božo Peričić¹¹, Jozo Arambašin¹² and Milan Nemičić¹³. However, popular terminology could hardly find way to medicine proper. Let us only remember Bogoslav Šulek (another foreigner, Slovakia-born) and his Croatian-German-Italian Dictionary of Scientific Terminology from 1874¹⁴, which he published in an effort to help Croatianize the overall scientific terminology. His term *lučba* (chemistry) has never been accepted, whereas the term *sušica* was eventually ousted by the Europeanism *tuberkuloza*. The recently proposed term *kopnica* for AIDS cannot be expected to see any better fate. Coining new words to substitute Latin terminology has even less chances of success than the acceptance of foreign words, and may occasionally provoke derisive smile for suspicion of purism.

In recent times, mention should be made of Vladimir Loknar, our last physician – language editor (he worked at Medicinska naklada until retirement), who published his life-work, “Dictionary of Latin and Croatian Medical Terminology” with some 20,000 entries in 2003¹⁵. The major work in the field of terminology is the great “Encyclopedic Dictionary of Human and Veterinary Medicine Terminology”, 1884 pages, prepared by 94 collaborators led by academician Ivo Padovan (Teodor Dürriegl, editor for human medicine) who collected some 56,000 entries over 12 years of work on the dictionary¹⁶.

It should be noted that in 1897, the Croatian Medical Association appointed a board to collect Croatian medical terms, and from 1902 contributions on terminology issues appeared occasionally in the Association journal *Liječnički vjesnik*. Until 1976, thirty-six articles on terminology issues were published; I have compiled them in *Liječnik vjesnik Bibliography 1877-1977*¹⁷ (the period after 1976 has not yet been analyzed). The first such article appeared in 1902, written by the then Association president, Ladislav Rakovac, entitled “Croatian medical terminology”, to be followed by contributions

by Božo Peričić, M. Černič, Lujo Thaller, Drago Perović, Vladimir Bazala, Z. Sušić, Vladimir Čepulić, Tihomil Beritić, Teodor Dürriegl, Ivo Glavan, B. Antonin, Vladimir Dugački, Vinko Friščić and Vladimir Loknar.

Concerning organization, it should be noted that on March 11, 1969, Head Doctor Vinko Friščić from Bjelovar founded Section of Croatian Medical Language, consisting of 87 members at Croatian Medical Association¹⁸, and in 1973 started publishing material for dictionary of the Croatian medical terminology in *Liječnički vjesnik*. However, the Section activities faded away upon his departure to Libya in 1973. Two decades later, on October 7, 1992, Željko Poljak founded Section of Medical Terminology at Croatian Medical Association¹⁹, which did not prove highly active; yet, as editor of the journal *Liječničke novine*, Poljak introduced a section entitled Medical Terminology, providing an opportunity for the physicians to publish their comments and proposals ever since.

However, little of the overall popular lexical lore collected by our hard-working colleagues in the past from the people or thumbing through our old writers, and of the coined words invented to replace foreign terms for some new medical entities (let’s just remember the above mentioned *kopnica* for AIDS) in particular will actually take hold in practice, as it simply cannot compete with the Latin and Latinized Greek terminology, which has produced numerous and practically ineradicable Europeanisms. The objection raised by those opposing the use of Latin language, stating that it turned a dead language upon the collapse of Roman Empire, does not apply; Latin language has been preserved to the present through the medieval Latin-Greek, in the form of innumerable Europeanisms used daily; the more so, it has reached all continents *via* Christianity, Latin alphabet and Roman law, in medicine in particular. By the way, isn’t the French standard language a dead language too because it has to be learned at school and from books?

Therefore, the use of Latin-Greek terminology should not be resisted for fear of obliterating Croatian language. The situation is different with the invasion of Anglicism that has recently taken the form of an epidemic in the Croatian medicine, displacing not only the Croatian but also the Latin terminology. Facing a dilemma between the original Latin and modified, barbarized Latin, i.e. Anglo-Saxon terminology, the former, classic Latin terminology should be preferred. The term ‘barbarized’ should not be understood as a pejorative one,

but we should follow comparative linguistics teaching us how the Italian, French, Spanish, and to a lesser extent English language have been formed. By the way, the nice female name Barbara originates from Ancient Rome, where slave-owners used to give it to female slaves from Gaul and Germany (it is not known why the male form of the name, Barbarus, has not persisted to the present).

The Anglo-Saxon medical terminology, which is in part a derivative of the medieval Latin-Greek terminology, has been strongly intruding along with the globalization processes and Internet expansion, threatening to destroy the current Croatian medical terminology by ousting the classic terminology and anglicizing the Croatian terminology. In contrast to Latin diagnoses, which have been traditionally written in the original Latin language in Croatia, thus preventing any disastrous impact on the Croatian language, as they always present an overt *corpus alienum*, the Anglo-Saxon terminology is now being malignantly growing into the Croatian language, i.e. Croatian words have been gradually but steadily removed from the Croatian language and replaced by Anglo-Saxon loan-words (e.g., *stres*, *blast*, *trend*, *stent*, *bypass*, not to mention the eponyms), and should therefore be considered an alarming threat. At present, keeping to the conventional Latin terminology, on writing diagnoses in particular, seems to be the best defense against the intruding Anglicization. On the other hand, those who would like to substitute exclusively Croatian terms for Latin terms in medicine should realize that, considering all said above, it is nothing but a wishful thinking.

It is Better to Croatianize Latin Terminology than to Anglicize Croatian Terminology

However, because of the physicians who have not acquired classical high school education and can hardly find way in the original Latin-Greek medical terminology, which applies to the great majority today, gradual Croatinizing of Latin diagnoses (e.g., *upala sinusa* instead of *sinuitis* but not the long and awkward term *upala sluznice pobočnih nosnih šupljina*) should perhaps be taken in consideration as a less unfavorable of two evils and as a sort of concession in the defense against the overall Anglicization of our medical terminology. The more so, similar actions have already been taken in most European countries. In addition, Croatian physicians have for long time now been freely using such Latin acquisitions in their colloquial communication. Of course, such terms should

first be thoroughly studied and standardized because, in contrast to the language of polite letters, scientific terminology requires absolute exactness. Medical diagnoses in particular need to be written precisely, without possible synonyms, according to the principle “one word for one term”. This job demands great knowledge, linguistic sensitivity, and assistance from philologists in order to avoid linguistic grotesques that have become quite abundant in our current medical jargon. I have pointed to them on several occasions in *Liječničke novine*, presenting in journalist style the most common awkward linguistic creations and absurd verbal crutches from the colloquial medical jargon²⁰⁻²²; e.g., pleonasm like *liječenje radioterapijom*, *fokalno žarište*, *laserske zrake*, etc. The troubles that would need to be solved on Croatinizing Latin diagnoses can be well exemplified by the term *akutni otitis* taken from the jargon used by our otologists, which forcefully exchanges male for female gender in the term *akutna otitis medija*.

In conclusion, one should admit that due to the current *trend* (does anybody at all remember the Croatian word for this term?), we cannot be optimistic, and all our endeavors will be simply defensive, and this certainly with a questionable success. With the process of globalization and the widespread use of Internet, English language has become predominant all over the world, among others owing to its incomparable advantage of most words in this language being monosyllables, thus two times more can be said in English as, e.g., in Croatian in a given time unit. Accordingly, the question is open to further discussion, whereas the final solution cannot be predicted. Just as until the mid-20th century it was quite inconceivable that French language might be displaced from the international scene, so now it would not be appropriate to go in for futuristic speculation of what may be in the next fifty years. Spanish, which has been rapidly spreading even within the USA, or maybe Chinese?

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Sažetak

KAMO IDE NAŠA MEDICINSKA TERMINOLOGIJA
TREBA LI DIJAGNOZE PISATI HRVATSKI, LATINSKI ILI – ENGLESKI?

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Liječnici u Hrvatskoj pišu dijagnoze na latinskom jeziku. U novije doba sve češće se predlaže pisanje dijagnoza na hrvatskom jeziku. Srednji je put kroatiziranje latinskih termina, slično kao što postupaju drugi narodi. U dilemi pred prodorom anglosaske terminologije bolje je rješenje kroatizirati latinsku nego anglizirati hrvatsku terminologiju.

Ključne riječi: *medicinska terminologija; Hrvatska*