

MIGRATORY WORDS: THE MIGRATION OF WORDS FROM SPECIALIZED LEXICON TO COMMON LEXICON

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Résumé : Partant du principe que le langage, dans son aspect général, est la représentation de l'homme et de sa pensée, et ajoutant l'affirmation révélatrice que le langage est énergéïa, nous déduisons que le langage humain est dans une dynamique permanente, et que le changement du temps historique correspondra au changement linguistique. Le présent document retrace la manière dont un langage spécialisé, propre au domaine médical, inconnu du grand public, devient, en peu de temps, un langage commun. En fait, nous considérons des termes spécifiques au langage médical qui, pendant la pandémie de COVID-19, ont été intensément popularisés (en particulier dans les médias) en raison de leur importance, ce qui a entraîné leur « migration » dans le lexique général. L'article retrace donc la transgression lexicale d'un terme, le chemin qu'il parcourt pour devenir un mot.

Mots clés: terme, terminologie, mot, migration, transgression, lexique, COVID-19.

“Limba nebiruit martor iaste.” (*Language is an unconquerable witness.*) (D. Cantemir)

1. Specialized Language. Terminology

The complexity of the linguistic system increases with the development of human knowledge and is determined by the emergence of content that requires a different type of language than the common one for its expression. This is known as *specialized language*¹ and is closely connected with *specialized messages*, involving a certain way of “knowledge and

¹ “Proponents of descriptive linguistics consider this type of language to be non-existent. What is manifested in this type of communication, they argue, is merely a specialized vocabulary situated within the general language.” (Solovei, 2017: 200).

communication”² (Irimia, 1999: 67, translated), allowing access to the path of science and the interaction of the individual with what is called major culture.

Specialized language, situated within the general language as a branch of it, represents communication tailored to specific fields of activity (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2000: 530), where the word acquires the attributes of a term, and where the purpose of communication is replaced by the transmission of information (Macari, 2016: 135), with the dominant linguistic function being the referential one (Pleşca, 2017: 191).

Influenced by diatopic and diastratic varieties, specialized language began to take real shape in the Romanian space at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, as a result of progress, initially entering society through contact with the languages of other peoples. The real revolution” of this subsystem occurred from the mid-20th century onwards, and the vast space it came to occupy was directly proportional to the advancement of knowledge.

The existence of specialized language represents evidence of how humans can be active participants in the construction of language. This fact gives it a “character of artificiality” (Nistor, 2004: 3, translated), because its evolution is not a natural process of the natural language, but is conditioned and directed by human factors. Positioned within the general system of language, specialized language develops lexical, morphological, syntactic, discursive, and pragmatic features that make it distinct, even though over time there have been voices that either contested it, categorized it as “technical vocabulary,” or included it in the set of functional styles.

The discipline that deals with the study of specialized language is terminology³. It distinguished itself as a distinct territory within linguistics in the second half of the 20th century (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2007: 19-28), but the emergence of Romanian terminology predates this century, being related to the stages of development of the Romanian language and significant linguistic influences.

Thus, N. A. Ursu, in his study dedicated to the formation of Romanian scientific terminology, identifies the existence of two stages: a) until 1830 – when the interest in introducing scientific knowledge increased, and the development of the language became one of the necessities of the time; terminology entered the Romanian language predominantly through linguistic calques – in the regions of Wallachia and Moldavia, terms originating from Neo-Greek and Russian are notable, while in the region of Transylvania, terminology of European origin dominates: Latin, German, Italian; b) after 1830 – when borrowed terms from Latin and French dominate, and terms that were previously unadapted now, especially under French influence, stabilize in the form that will become established in the Romanian language as neologisms; this period is closely linked to the overwhelming influence that the elites from Wallachia and Moldavia exerted in the dissemination of knowledge, as well as to the establishment of Romanian secondary education, through the drafting of textbooks and courses; to all this, the written press contributed during the period 1830-1860⁴.

² “cunoaştere şi comunicare” (Irimia, 1999: 67).

³ The progress and evolution of a language are also measured by the existing terminologies.

⁴ N. A. Ursu notes that, around the period of 1830-1860, an “elementary terminology specific to various fields of science” could be distinguished in the Romanian language, indicating that by the mid-19th century, scientific terminology was well established in the Romanian vocabulary (Ursu, 1962: 126).

Thus, the favorable evolution of the formation of a scientific lexicon led, in the second half of the 19th century, to the systematization of a scientific style among the registers of the literary Romanian language (Ursu, 1962: 125-126)⁵.

In their entirety, terminologies, understood as groups of “words and/or specialized phrases for use in a particular field” (Chivu, 2013: 19), are defined by a few general characteristics: “univocity” and “monoreferentiality” (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2002), which ensure the strict perception of meaning, as there is only one path from the term to the concept and from the concept to the term (Zingan, 2017: 17); „precision” (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2002) – a characteristic according to which “each term must correspond instantly to its own concept”; “transparency” found in terms whose form is linked to their content, in the sense that the form itself suggests the meaning; “consistency,” i.e., following a pattern in the creation and use of terms, innovation not being an objective in the transmission of information within specialized language; “conciseness,” whose property is “linguistic economy,” achieved by shortening names, by compressing several terms into a single name; “redundancy” – even if it seems to contradict “conciseness,” it ensures the understanding of the transmitted information (Zingan, 2017: 18-19).

The active unit of specialized language is the term⁶ or the “terminological unit,” which can be analyzed in the following ways: “Label-term” – “an element of a nomenclature whose purpose is to identify concepts” (Grigore, 2019: 56); “Discourse-term” – “emerged in the specialized communication of a scientific field” (Grigore, 2019: 56).

2. From Term to Word: “Democratization of Knowledge”

In standard general language, the active unit used by most speakers is the word (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2007: 28). However, there are often connections between the two structures, term and word, that lead to their interchangeability. In this sense, the incorporation of words from common language into specialized language modifies the properties of the word, transforming it into a term⁷ through a process known as “terminologization” This movement involves a semantic selection, meaning that to become a term, the word erases its “past” and acquires a new meaning decoded in certain parameters (Rastier, 1995: 4). The reversal of this phenomenon, that is, the use of a term in common language, occurs through “lexicalization”⁸ (Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 28), resulting in the “democratization” of language and the “secularization of knowledge” (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2007: 31). Within this circuit, there are permutations in the semantic content of lexemes, which undergo “resemanticizations” under the influence of processes of “semantic extension, metonymic, metaphorical” (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 206), “contextual-semantic extensions” that develop polysemy (Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2007: 28), or “semantic mutations” through which the word acquires new meanings (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 209). Following these changes in registers, the form of the term undergoes no alteration, remaining the same, but there is an intervention on the signified, which either

⁵ Nowadays, with a well-developed linguistic system in what concerns the scientific terminology, we could consider a new phase of influence—that of the English language. We witness with caution a contemporary tendency to replace Romanian terminology with English terminology.

⁶ Inga Druță draws attention to the fact that there are researchers who consider “the concept to be the object of study in terminology, a universal entity, superior to the term” (Druță, 2014: 87).

⁷ This phenomenon is not specific to all terms, as some of them are part of the general vocabulary and thus belong to common language (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 205).

⁸ Silviu Berejan refers to this process as “determinologization” (Berejan, 2007: 80).

becomes the center of gravity of rhetorical figures or is assigned new meanings (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 209). However, it should be noted that the semantic enrichment of a term does not occur with every readjustment; instead, there is a multitude of fleeting words, “lexical ephemerides,” often born in journalistic language through attempts to adapt a specialized term to common use (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 209).

As a result of the various combinations that arise, it is observed that any lexical unit can be involved in this process of migration⁹ from one register to another, validating the idea that a lexeme requires the appropriate activation of meaning depending on the communicational context (Cabr , 1999: 16-17). Thus, in decoding a communicational context, the categories of pragmatics become key elements, along with “semantics and lexicology” (Bidu-Vr nceanu, 2007: 30). All these mutations ensure, on one hand, the dynamism of vocabulary, its enrichment¹⁰, and the development of language; but on the other hand, they create a semasiological inconsistency that constantly demands examination of the circumstances of communication, the recipient, and the channel to ensure the proper transmission of the message (Solovei, 2017: 201).

As we have previously anticipated, terminology branches into two types: a) an “internal” terminology, specific to specialists, also called “cognitive” terminology (Bidu-Vr nceanu, 2012: 25), “proper,” or “traditional” (Cilianu-Lascu, 2010: 6)¹¹, used exclusively in communication among scientists and classified according to various areas of activity (Bidu-Vr nceanu, 2010: 13); internal terminology relies on terms “limited to name assignment, to imposing their forms” (Bidu-Vr nceanu, 2007: 19), has a long-standing tradition, and its importance is given by the universality of the terms that ensure the transmission of knowledge in a monolithic, unified format (Grigore, 2019: 60); b) an “external” terminology that transcends the purely specialized domain, addressing a broader area that includes non-specialists (Bidu-Vr nceanu, 2007: 19); this terminology is “contemporary, current” (Cilianu-Lascu, 2010: 6) and interferes with common language (Grigore, 2019: 64). Thus, two different perspectives on the term can be noted: from the “intradomain” angle, based on specialized lexicon specific to scientists, and from the “extradomain” perspective, understandable to the general public, formed from a “migratory lexicon” (Rizea, 2009: 2).¹²

3. A Case of „Democratization” of Knowledge: The Pandemic Vocabulary

In the following, we aim to highlight the rapid nature of the “migration” of certain terms from specialized language to common language under the pressure of a challenging social context. Thus, we consider how the scientific vocabulary used during the COVID-19 pandemic became part of everyday language, validating the dynamic, and perhaps even evolutionary,

⁹ Since this metaphor of “migratory” words is specific to words that transgress from one language to another, from one linguistic space to another, we affirm that in the present research we are using a restricted meaning of this term, referring to words that circulate from one register to another, from one domain to another.

¹⁰ Valeria Nistor argues that more than half of the neologisms in the Romanian language originate from the transfer of terms from specialized language to non-specialized language (Nistor, 2004: 1).

¹¹ <http://www.dialogos.rci.ase.ro/22/Abstracts%20nr.%202022.pdf>.

¹² The proximity and distance of specialized language from common language are determined by the multitude and complexity of the terminological structures used, which reveal different degrees of specialization in texts/discourses. Depending on the activation of the semantic features of a lexical unit, the specialized text/discourse presents:

nature of language, and demonstrating how the process of lexical “transgression” operates (Manea, Pruneanu, 2008: 199)¹³, resulting in the “democratization” of knowledge.

The primary means of incorporating scientific lexicon into common language during the pandemic established in 2020 was journalistic discourse, conveyed in both audiovisual media and print press. In this way, through the constant statements and explanations provided by doctors and scientists, numerous medical terms were introduced and explained to the general public. The frequent use and significant importance of these terms led to their acceptance among speakers, which later materialized in their integration into common vocabulary. Evidence that these terms have become ingrained in the language and behave like traditional words is their derivational power, the capacity to form compound words or even stable combinations of words. These new acquisitions prove to be productive means of developing the vocabulary of the Romanian language.

In the following, we present a series of terms used in written press, specifically in the publication *Adevărul*, during the period 2020-2023, which have entered common language, evidenced by their inclusion in DOOM3 in 2021. Prior to this year, these terms were only found in medical terminology dictionaries (see DTM, 2014). However, some of the lexemes mentioned were known to speakers even before the pandemic, but with this moment, we observe an increase in their frequency, an enrichment of their meanings, and a high lexical productivity. This observation allows us to argue that the terms have migrated from scientific language, particularly from the medical field, becoming widely recognized words and entering common language. Of course, the correct decoding of the new meaning in common language requires both paradigmatic reporting (“reporting to dictionary definitions for isolating common and distinctive meanings”) and syntagmatic reporting (“at the level of texts—the textual context or even the co-text can provide important clues”) (Rizea, 2009: 4). At the same time, in the context of the migration of terms, on one hand, there is a loss of “precision, theoretical substance, scientific rigor,” but on the other hand, there is a “gain in both frequency and the semantic aspect” of the term “through the plurality of the discourse in which it appears” (Grigore, 2019: 77; Gaudin, 2006: 2).

The following acronyms are understood today by the vast majority of the population, which is why they are no longer accompanied by explanations in current press, as was the case at their emergence in 2020. This fact attests to their integration into the common language of speakers:

- RNA/ARN: “What the messenger RNA vaccine contains, explained in simple terms” (*Adevărul*, 29.09.2021);¹⁴
- ICU/ATI: “146 patients are hospitalized in ICU, 5 fewer than the previous day” (*Adevărul*, 14.09.2022);¹⁵

¹³ At the same time, closely related to the more rigid or accessible modes of expression is the field in which the communication of scientific information takes place: science, in its entirety, is rooted in general scientific language, while fields such as “production, manufacturing processes, technology” etc., employ specialized language proper, whereas in domains like “sales, marketing, consumption, media”, a specialized language filtered through reduction and “simplification” (Botezatu, 2019: 115) is used. Therefore, the degree of accessibility of information is closely linked to the field in which it is transmitted, but it also permanently concerns the type of recipient.

¹⁴ Original quote: „Ce conține vaccinul ARN mesager, explicat pe înțelesul tuturor” (*Adevărul*, 29.09.2021);

¹⁵ Original quote: „La ATI sunt internate 146 persoane, cu 5 mai puține față de ziua anterioară.” (*Adevărul*, 14.09.2022);

- COVID-19: “the pandemic of the deadly coronavirus, Covid-19” (*Adevărul*, 15.09.2022). This term also forms derivatives such as: *covidat*, *covizi*, *covidic*, which attest to its productive character in common language, but also highlight its stability: “The hunt for covizi. Romanians infected with SARS-CoV-2 and discharged at their request, sought by authorities based on the new quarantine law” (*Adevărul*, 21.07.2020). The compounded construction long COVID has also been noted: “When we talk about long COVID, things are quite varied, and I cannot say that we have a valid diagnostic code for all types of manifestations we encounter in long COVID” (*Adevărul*, 19.09.2022);¹⁶
- PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORATE/ DSP: “DSPs expand the testing program for symptomatic patients at hospital-dedicated centers, and nationally, after the results in Bucharest” (*Adevărul*, 02.02.2022);¹⁷
- PCR: “Authorities decree localized lockdowns, impose PCR testing every 72 or 48 hours, and individuals traveling to another province risk isolation” (*Adevărul*, 30.08.2022);¹⁸
- SARS/SARS-COV-2: “Omicron or even different variants of SARS-CoV-2 that cause concern” (*Adevărul*, 14.09.2022).¹⁹

Alongside the aforementioned acronyms, we provide a list of words that, in a very short time, have entered the common language of people, regardless of their social status or communication register. Some of these terms were not used in common language, supported by their absence from Romanian explanatory or normative dictionaries (DEX, DOOM); others, although registered, have expanded their semantic field, adding new meanings derived from medical dictionaries.

In some cases, the most productive have developed lexical families:

- Quarantine: The meaning of this term, found in specialized dictionaries but not in common language, entirely overlaps with the sense conveyed in specialized language: “the principle of preventing the spread of an infectious disease by isolating persons, luggage, consumables, and other possibly infected objects or those coming from an infected locality until they are proven harmless, to the satisfaction of the authorities” (DTM, S.V. “carantină,” 137-138); this term will become a basic word for derivatives (a) *carantina*, *carantinare*, *carantinar*, thus attesting its effectiveness and productivity: “After about two weeks of legislative void, the law regarding quarantine came into force on Tuesday, allowing the quarantine and isolation of sick individuals, as well as other necessary measures to limit the spread of the virus” (*Adevărul*, 21.07.2020);

¹⁶ Original quotes: „pandemia coronavirusului ucigaș, Covid-19” (*Adevărul*, 15.09.2022); „Vânătoarea de covizi. Românii infectați cu SARS-CoV-2 și externați la cerere, căutați de autorități pe baza noii legi a carantinării.” (*Adevărul*, 21.07.2020) „Dacă vorbim de long COVID, lucrurile sunt destul de variate și nu pot să spun că avem un cod de diagnostic valabil pentru toate tipurile de manifestări pe care le întâlnim în long COVID” (*Adevărul*, 19.09.2022);

¹⁷ Original quote: „DSP-urile extind programul de testare pentru pacienții simptomatici la centre dedicate spitalelor, și la nivel național, după rezultatele din București.” (*Adevărul*, 02.02.2022);

¹⁸ Original quote: “Autoritățile decretează lockdown-uri localizate, impun testarea PCR la fiecare 72 sau 48 de ore, iar persoanele care se deplasează în altă provincie riscă să fie izolate.” (*Adevărul*, 30.08.2022);

¹⁹ Original quote: “Omicron sau chiar de diferite variante ale SARS-CoV-2 care determină îngrijorare” (*Adevărul*, 14.09.2022).

- **Contacts:** The term used primarily in the medical field was immediately adopted into Romanian, especially since it is closely related to the lexeme “contact,” which any speaker knows; thus, through this lexical acquisition, it denotes someone who has been in contact with a sick person: “Individuals who wore a mask are excluded from the category of direct contacts” (*Adevărul*, 26.08.2021). At the same time, we believe that due to the principle of frequency, a new word combination is imposed in common language: direct contacts.

- **Contagiousness, contagionists, contaminated:** “The number of infections with the new coronavirus has decreased by 20% last week, compared to the previous week” (*Adevărul*, 26.04.2022); “The elderly at the ‘Sfânta Mina’ Senior Home did not show symptoms, but following the tests conducted, they were found to be contaminated” (*Adevărul*, 04.07.2020); “An open letter from a doctor infected with Covid-19 to young people. ‘The disease exists and has a very high contagiousness.’” (*Adevărul*, 01.07.2020);

- **Isolation:** This term highlights another phenomenon that appears at significant moments in a language’s life, namely the enrichment of semantic content. Alongside the usual meaning of the word “izolare” = “separation” (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/izolare/definitii>), there is also the medical denotation = “a preventive measure that prohibits a contagious sick person from coming into contact with others” (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/izolare/definitii>): “After about two weeks of legislative void, the law regarding quarantine came into force on Tuesday, allowing for the quarantine and isolation of sick individuals, as well as other necessary measures to limit the spread of the virus” (*Adevărul*, 21.07.2020). From this term, through learned compounding with a prefixoid, autoizolare is formed, and through derivation with a suffix, the word izoletă emerges: “Moldovans entering Romania will have to remain in autoizolare” (*Adevărul*, 04.01.2021); “Unique izoletă in Romania, arrived at a hospital in Iași. What are the advantages of the equipment” (*Adevărul*, 16.06.2020);

- **Triage:** Alongside the common meanings referring to the action of selecting, the medical sense of this lexeme is introduced, which the general public likely already knew, as it is a frequently used term in medical units, but during the pandemic, this meaning expands: “a universal term used for prioritizing treatment for victims during disasters or in times of war [...] allocating a certain degree of priority so that patients are seen in order of severity rather than in the order of arrival” (DTM, S.V. “traj,” 756): “COVID patient triage, like on the front lines in all hospitals” (*Adevărul*, 06.04.2021).

An effective procedure contributing to the internal development of vocabulary is learned compounding, predominantly with prefixoids and less frequently with suffixoids:

- **anticoronavirus:** “COVID-19 Pandemic. Vaccination against coronavirus has begun in Moscow for the residents of the Russian capital” (*Adevărul*, 10.09.2020);²⁰

²⁰ Original quote: “Pandemia COVID-19. La Moscova a început vaccinarea anticoronavirus a locuitorilor capitalei ruse.” (*Adevărul*, 10.09.2020).

- antivaccinist: “It’s not about vaccinators and antivaccinists, but about how democracy should work” (*Adevărul*, 11.01.2022);²¹
- autoisolation, autoquarantine: “Moldovans entering Romania will have to remain in autoisolation” (*Adevărul*, 04.01.2021); “PSD leader Marcel Ciolacu self-isolated for 5 days after coming into contact with Culture Minister Lucian Romașcanu, who found out that he contracted the SARS-CoV-2 virus” (*Adevărul*, 14.01.2022);²²
- postinfection, postinfectious: “Pneumology specialists recommend imaging investigations such as CT scans as well as spirometry to assess lung function post-COVID-19 infection” (*Adevărul*, 22.02.2021);²³
- postpandemic: “Images and impressions from post-pandemic Romania” (*Adevărul*, 15.09.2022);²⁴
- pulsoximeter: “It is important to check our blood oxygen levels using a pulse oximeter” (*Adevărul*, 14.11.2020);²⁵
- telemedicine: “The pandemic regulates telemedicine in Romania” (*Adevărul*, 18.11.2020);²⁶
- thermometry: “For students who seem to have a fever, repeated temperature checks will be conducted” (*Adevărul*, 17.09.2022).²⁷

The list of „word-terms” previously discussed also highlights another phenomenon that drives the movement of the lexicon: the popularization of scientific information. Due to the constant need to remain closely connected to the world of science, scientists (or mediators) often resort to presenting information in a way that is easily understood by the general public. This is achieved by simplifying specialized terms through semantic equivalence, explanation, paraphrasing, or metaphorization. Such practices contribute to the assimilation of specialized terms into everyday language, transforming them into common words.

In conclusion, during moments of significant social importance, particularly when human life is at risk and threats are severe, communication – and thus language – plays a critical role in restoring balance. In such situations, we observe an accelerated process of adaptation, wherein language, driven by the urgent need to support complex communication, either creates new words by analogy with existing lexemes, extends the meanings of others, or borrows terms and shifts their register, with some even forming

²¹ Original quote: “Nu e despre vacciniști și antivacciniști, ci despre cum trebuie să funcționeze o democrație.” (*Adevărul*, 11.01.2022).

²² Original quote: “Moldovenii care intră în România vor trebui să stea în autoizolare.” (*Adevărul*, 04.01.2021); „Liderul PSD Marcel Ciolacu s-a autocarantinat, timp de 5 zile, după ce a intrat în contact cu ministrul Culturii, Lucian Romașcanu, care a aflat că a contactat virusul SARS-CoV 2.” (*Adevărul*, 14.01.2022).

²³ Original quote: “Specialiștii în pneumologie recomandă investigații imagistice precum tomografi dar și o spirometrie de evaluare a funcției pulmonare post-infecție COVID-19.” (*Adevărul*, 22.02.2021).

²⁴ Original quote: “Imagini și impresii din România postpandemică.” (*Adevărul*, 15.09.2022).

²⁵ Original quote: “Este important să ne verificăm nivelul de oxigen din sânge, utilizând un pulsoximetru.” (*Adevărul*, 14.11.2020).

²⁶ Original quote: “Pandemia reglementează telemedicina în România.” (*Adevărul*, 18.11.2020).

²⁷ Original quote: “Pentru elevii care par a avea temperatură se recomandă termometrizarea repetată, la intervale de 2-5 minute.” (*Adevărul*, 15.06.2020).

entire lexical families. All of this highlights the dynamic nature of language, its richness, and, importantly, its remarkable capacity to adapt in the face of danger.

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