

LIVING LATIN IN TEACHING MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY: CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Antanas Vitkauskas

Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

Abstract. “Is it possible to build a normal sentence in Latin?” is one of the initial 1st year medical student’s questions when starting a Medical Latin course in a medical school. This question builds a problem – what is being studied in medical universities around the world – language or just a terminology system. The answer would be – we use required constructions to study Latin medical terms and writing diagnoses, which are taken from living Latin. This makes it possible to use some spoken methods in the medical Latin classes.

Medical Latin terminology course contains two major topics where spoken elements are possible to use: connecting nouns and the adjectives into a medical term, and then, naming diseases and medical procedures using combined words. The most important advantage of using Latin as a living language is that the medical terms are being treated like everyday language constructions. From the other point of view, this approach can be also used with games or puzzles, what makes the Latin classes attractive and interesting. This is also available for working in small groups of students.

The main goal of the paper is to highlight impacts of using spoken phrases when teaching in Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and after foreign mobility experience. The oral presentation also includes some practical parts with concrete examples of teaching material.

Keywords: Latin, teaching, language teaching, spoken Latin, medical Latin

Introduction

The main objective of the *introduction to Latin medical terminology* course requires the main skill among the students, which requires connecting nouns, adjectives (participles) and other types of words. The “regular” group of methods provides these skills using write-read-only methods, where ability to speak Latin is not needed. These “traditional methods” are enough to maintain training required skills. The problem is that during study process with foreign students sometimes the better option should include elements which inspire students to “think in Latin”. This makes medical terminology constructions more understandable from the point of view of languages. The main part of course remains “traditional”, but in addition few “innovative” methods are being used. For example, it could be puzzles, crosswords, short dialogues, which imitate medical constructions using everyday speech.

As a starting point of using “speaking” in Latin we will take a research *First year medical student attitude towards teaching/learning the basics of professional medical terminology in Latin* (Butrimė, Grigonienė, Šarkauskienė, 2016). Few surveys made in the framework of this research have highlighted the main problems described by 16% of students: they need more creativity, it’s too boring just to study rules, lack of revision same topics and additional material which could fulfill the inner picture of what medical terms are made from.

The other research, *Reflection on changes in the Latin language teaching methodology: teacher’s approach* (Butrimė, Morkevičienė, 2016) investigates perspectives on using games and other “informal” methods. This research concludes, that games, crosswords, building short dialogues, etc., is a good approach, but only after serious attention of theory and grammar.

To share our experience, we have chosen the results of a test, which includes writing of diagnoses, composed from few words, and combining of Greek and Latin roots into one combined term. This requires two main skills – connect a nominative and genitive case of a noun and connect noun and an adjective. The first group of terms contains “noun+noun” terms, or, “__of__”.

Example of “noun+noun / nominative+genitive” terms.

Deformatio corporis vertebrae	Deformation of body of vertebra
Cavum thoracis	Cavity of thorax
Fractura costarum	Fracture of ribs
Fractura septi nasi	Fracture of septum of nose
Conarctatio arteriarum	Narrowing of arteries

There are two usual problems in understanding structure and use of this kind of terms. First, the only way to express genitive case in English is a preposition “of” and ending “’s”. in Latin each noun has a genitive case given in a dictionary.

To solve this problem there is a short game, which does not require lot of time, but it connects the medical term with a speaking phrase from everyday speech.

The required vocabulary can be given in handouts or

TEACHER (or a student) ASKS (example)	STUDENT responds
Whose is this laptop? (everything what is on student’s desk is available to ask) Cuius hoc <i>computatrum</i> est?	This is <u>Mary’s</u> laptop. Hoc est <i>computatrum</i> Mariae (Mariae - of Mary)
Whose is this watch? Cuius hoc <i>horologium</i> est?	This is <u>Peter’s</u> watch Hoc est <i>horologium</i> Petri (Petri – of Peter)

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After this short game Latin medical term grammar can be explained easier, because students understand it as an everyday speech construction.

The other difficulty in understanding grammar is connecting nouns and adjectives. In English and in many non-Indo-European languages there is no need to adjust correct endings for noun and a leading adjective. But there is such a need in Latin (the same problem is to explain it in teaching Lithuanian). So, “spoken” games can also be used to explain connecting a noun and an adjective into a spoken phrase, and then, “noun+adjective” medical term. Another example provides giving on a handout, whiteboard or a screen some adjectives and nouns. Even better, if these nouns name the things, which are on the desks in the classroom. For example:

<p><i>II-I declension adjectives</i></p> <p><i>Albus, a, um (white)</i> <i>ater, ra, rum (black)</i> <i>flavus, a, um (yellow)</i> <i>ruber, ba, brum (red)</i> <i>caeruleus, a, um (blue)</i></p>	<p><i>III declension adjectives</i></p> <p><i>viridis, e (green)</i> <i>pinguis, e (thick/fat)</i> <i>levis, e (light/easy)</i> <i>gravis, e (heavy)</i> <i>simplex, icis (simple)</i></p>
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Then, using vocabulary students can build simple Latin sentences.

Telephonum est atrum / A cell phone is black.

Cor est rubrum / Heart is red.

Stilus est viridis / Pen is green.

Tabula est gravis / Whiteboard is heavy.

Medicina est gravis / Medicine is difficult.

Lingua Latina est simplex / Latin is simple.

The last topic, where “spoken” methods are available to use is using Greek-combined terms, e.g. *haemorrhagia*, *spondyloptosis*, *dialysis*, etc. According to experience during international teaching visit to Masaryk university of Brno, Czech Republic (2018), one of the most reliable methods is naming the super-heroes from comics, TV-shows and videogames – this also solves a problem of approaching to various cultural differences of international students.

Example of naming modern realities using Greek-combined terms.

<p>Spiderman Batman Facebook Ironman</p>	<p>Homo Arachnoideus Cheiropteranthropus, i m Prosopobibulum, ii n Sideranthropus, i m</p>
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Superman	Hyperanthropus, i m
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There also should be added the importance of atmosphere in the classroom (Rocca, 2010). All of actions, mentioned above can be proceeded in small groups. This can also help to establish good atmosphere among students, especially since the first topic “noun+noun terms” is located in the beginning of the course (3rd-4th week). This also reduces stress among first year students and can be easily combined with other types of games – puzzles, crosswords, etc. (Gachalova, Ševčikova, 2016; Abelite, Vilksne, 2015).

Before making the conclusions, we will present the change of test results (main topic – Greek-combined medical terms) before and after adding “spoken” methods to the course. In the year 2016-2017 the average number of points (best mark is 10, worst mark is 1) was 8,1. Next year, 2017-2018, after adding new methods the average point raised till 8,7. This is not a huge raise of a result, but generally it shows the tendency and validity of adding more “spoken” methods to the Latin professional medical terminology course.

Summary and conclusions

Not all of the teaching methods, described above can be used as basic methods. The grammar basics should be explained using “traditional” methods, but after the primary understanding of main grammar topics, showing the learned material as a part of “spoken” language could be useful. The average number of points after starting to use “spoken” language constructions actually raised not so much – from 8.1 to 8.7, but this result shows that “spoken” methods are perspective enough to gain experience in using them.

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