

PECULIARITIES OF ENGLISH MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY AND DISCOURSE IN MEDICAL DRAMAS: A CASE STUDY OF “GREY’S ANATOMY”

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This article focuses on the representation and adaptation of English medical terminology in popular media, with a particular focus on the topical problem of professional discourse analysis. Based on Grey’s Anatomy, the research examines how complex medical terminology is simplified to make it more understandable for a wide range of viewers. While the series is often praised for its accurate description of hospital life, the study has also indicated that medical terminology is intentionally changed and simplified through a variety of discursive techniques. It has been revealed that scientific accuracy and storyline clarity are combined in medical dramas. In addition, the research has studied the etymology and prevalence of certain etymological groups as well as other semantic components of medical terminology. When examining the medical terms used in the medical drama Grey’s Anatomy, it has been uncovered that Greek-derived prefixes and suffixes are more common than Latin ones. This tendency coincides with and proves the series’ emphasis on pathology and surgical procedures, which mainly use Greek elements and words. Examples of actual-life discussions include techniques such as analogical explanations, metaphorical simplifications, and didactic asides, in which senior physicians describe procedures to interns. Quantitative observations have revealed that anatomical and physiological terms are more frequent than pharmacological or medical equipment vocabulary. It reflects a practical balance between precision and better viewer comprehension. The article also situates “Grey’s Anatomy” within the broader context of medical discourse popularization and frames the series as a cultural mediator that introduces expert knowledge to everyday linguistic consciousness. Medical discourse in TV series goes beyond terminology. It helps tell stories, build relationships, highlight ethical dilemmas, and reflect society’s views on medicine.

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ АНГЛОМОВНОЇ МЕДИЧНОЇ ТЕРМІНОЛОГІЇ ТА ДИСКУРСУ В МЕДИЧНИХ ДРАМАХ НА ПРИКЛАДІ СЕРІАЛУ «GREY’S ANATOMY»

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Стаття присвячена актуальній проблемі вивчення професійного дискурсу, зокрема тому, як англійська медична термінологія представлена та адаптується в популярних медіа. Досліджуванним об'єктом був взятий медичний серіал «Grey's Anatomy». Його аналіз демонструє, як спеціалізована медична мова риконтекстуалізується, щоб стати більш доступною для широкої аудиторії, яка не має професійних знань у галузі медицини. Хоча серіал часто отримує позитивні оцінки за реалістичне зображення життя в лікарні, проведені дослідження показує, що медичні терміни свідомо модифікуються за допомогою різноманітних дискурсивних стратегій. Такий підхід забезпечує баланс між професійною точністю та чіткістю викладення матеріалу. Аналіз охоплює семантичні аспекти медичної термінології, включаючи етимологію та домінування певних етимологічних груп. Суфікси та префікси грецького походження трапляються частіше за латинські, що відображає центральну увагу серіалу на патології та хірургічних техніках, які значною мірою спираються на грецьку мову. Практичні приклади діалогів ілюструють такі стратегії, як дидактичні відступи, де старші лікарі пояснюють процедури інтернам, метафоричні спрощення та пояснення за допомогою аналогій. Кількісні спостереження показують, що терміни на позначення анатомічних та фізіологічних понять використовуються частіше, ніж терміни з фармакології або терміни на позначення медичного обладнання. Це відображає практичний баланс між точністю та особливостями сприйняття професійної лексики широкою аудиторією. Стаття також розглядає серіал «Grey's Anatomy» у ширшому контексті популяризації медичного дискурсу й представляє серіал як культурного посередника, який вводить експертні знання в повсякденну свідомість. Медичний дискурс у серіалах виходить за межі термінології: він допомагає розповідати історії, будувати стосунки, підкреслювати етичні дилеми та відображати суспільне ставлення до медицини.

Introduction. In contemporary linguistics, the study of specialized discourse has become one of the most topical tasks as professional communication is penetrating into various spheres of everyday life, popular culture, and mass media. Medical discourse takes one of the leading positions among other types of discourse. It can be explained by its social relevance and direct impact on human lives. It is challenging to imagine a modern person who doesn't know at least basic medical terms, especially after the severe COVID-19 pandemic.

Medical discourse has attracted the attention of scholars due to its complexity, high degree of specialization, and a key role in the life of society. Traditionally, studies of medical terminology have focused on semantic features, word-formation patterns, and translation issues. However, the influence of mass media has increased drastically during the last decade, eliminating the boundaries between specialized communication and popular culture and the simple representation of complex notions. Such a course of development has led to the growing need to examine in detail how medical discourse and its terminological function outside strictly professional contexts.

Medical dramas, as a television genre, are a unique space where professional medical terminology meets popular discourse. They must not only maintain a cer-

tain level of authenticity but also offer easy accessibility for broad audiences. This duality results in what researchers name as a "hybrid discourse". In this type of discourse, specialized vocabulary is often simplified, rephrased, or embedded in emotionally charged dialogues. It is done to enhance narrative engagement.

"Grey's Anatomy" is one of the well-known and long-running medical dramas. It offers rich material for researching how English medical terminology and discourse are shaped and contextualized in media narratives. The series demonstrates how professional communication is selectively maintained, transformed, or even dramatized to facilitate storytelling, reflect character development, and engage the audience more effectively.

This article **aims** to study the peculiarities of English medical terminology and discourse as represented in medical dramas, with a specific focus on "Grey's Anatomy".

To explore the peculiarities of English medical terminology and discourse in medical dramas, it is necessary to complete the following tasks:

- 1) to examine the structural and semantic features of medical terms in the series;
- 2) to analyze the strategies used to make professional language both accurate and accessible;
- 3) to explore the functions medical discourse performs in the storyline.

The object of the research is represented by English medical terminology and discourse as reflected in medical television dramas. The subject of the article is the structural, semantic, and functional peculiarities of medical terminology and discourse in the series “Grey’s Anatomy”.

Theoretical Framework. In medical dramas, language plays a critical role as it is necessary not only to develop a plot but also to transfer deep medical knowledge to a broad audience that has “poor” familiarity with professional healthcare and its features. This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). They enable us to examine how medical terminology and discourse are constructed and received in popular media.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) primarily examines how texts and speech reflect, reinforce, challenge, or legitimize social power dynamics and inequalities within social and political contexts [Van Dijk, 2015]. In medical dramas, words pronounced by doctors and medical staff can show expertise, have an impact on viewers’ perceptions of medical roles and profession, as well as shape attitudes toward health and addressing illnesses. According to Guglielmo Pescatore, medical dramas serve as a “significant touchstone for understanding complex social relations and systems” [Pescatore, 2023]. At the same time, some researchers believe that medical dramas often present an idealized view of healthcare, emphasizing positive outcomes and portraying medical interventions as more successful than they are in reality [Luz, 2021].

Also, the research is based on Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which underlines that meaning is rarely conveyed by words alone [Kress, 2023]. In “Grey’s Anatomy”, dialogue works alongside facial expressions, body language, and visual cues to create a complete picture of medical reality. Multimodal elements help demonstrate and communicate complex procedures and emotional tension. This helps enhance both authenticity and engagement with the audience.

Medical dramas, while mostly designed for entertainment, also act as a learning tool because they reflect medical routines, ethical dilemmas of doctors and medical staff, and standards of professional conduct [Cambra-Badii, 2021]. Scholars note that these series emphasize central ethical principles and professional values, ranging from patient confidentiality to empathy and interpersonal communication. So, being a popular genre among viewers of different ages, it has become crucial not to mislead the audience. They can teach people some medical concepts and features of complex procedures, but at the same time, they can spread misconceptions if terminology or medical actions are misrepresented. This reflects

the social impact of television representations on viewers’ understanding of medicine.

Results and discussion. “Grey’s Anatomy” is not just a medical series; it has become a sign of high-quality television series. Since its premiere in 2005, the show has maintained cultural relevance and won the hearts of millions of people all over the world, including professionals in the sphere of medicine and ordinary people. It has been nominated for 39 Emmys, five of which it won [ABC News]. “Grey’s Anatomy” managed to combine medical accuracy with compelling character-driven storylines. It stands out as a narrative space where professional medical terminology intersects with everyday language. Such a combination creates a hybrid discourse accessible to both medical specialists and broad audiences.

When analyzing “Grey’s Anatomy” in terms of its lexical, discourse, and stylistic peculiarities, it has been revealed that medical terms and discourse in medical dramas like this serve several functions. Firstly, they create the authenticity of the narration. Secondly, they highlight professional identity and integrity. Finally, they are intermediary between reflecting medical expertise and providing understanding for a broad audience.

Three interconnected factors can be used to group the findings of the research: the etymological characteristics of medical terminology, the accessibility and simplification processes, and the discursive and narrative functions that medical language plays within the plot.

The etymology of medical terminology within “Grey’s Anatomy”. The series makes consistent use of specialized vocabulary, particularly in scenes depicting surgical procedures. A corpus-based analysis of four seasons, from the 5th to 9th seasons, totaling 118 episodes, reveals the predominance of terms related to seven areas:

1) anatomy and physiology: *pericardium, dura mater, peritoneum, aorta, alveoli, hippocampus*;

2) diseases and conditions: *sepsis, ischemia, infarction, aneurysm, embolism, tachycardia, bradycardia*;

3) procedures and interventions: *laparotomy, tracheostomy, thoracotomy, craniotomy, mastectomy, angioplasty*;

4) diagnostics and tests: *echocardiogram/echo, angiogram, biopsy, ABG (arterial blood gas), troponin, LFTs*;

5) pharmacology and therapeutics: *heparin, morphine, vasopressors, broad-spectrum antibiotics, insulin*;

6) devices and medical equipment: *defibrillator, ventilator, chest tube, central line, PICC, Foley catheter, NG/OG tube*;

7) roles and specialties: *resident, intern, scrub nurse, anesthesiologist, cardiothoracic surgeon*.

In terms of the frequency of use and appearance in series, the most numerically dominant groups are anatomy and physiology terms and terms related to the naming of diseases and conditions, accounting for 31% and 24% respectively (Diag. 1). This prevalence can be explained by the series' strong focus on medical procedures, clinical diagnoses, and patient care scenarios. They usually require frequent references to body structures, functions, and specific illnesses.

The remaining terminological groups are distributed as follows: procedures and interventions – 18%; diagnostics and tests – 10%; pharmacology and therapeutics – 8%; devices and medical equipment – 5%; and roles and specialties – 4%. The relatively lower frequency of these groups reflects the emphasis of medical series on patient-centered events over the technical or administrative aspects of healthcare. Nevertheless, these terms are essential for providing context, guiding the storyline, and maintaining the realism of hospital operations, because they help depict the full picture of medical practice (Diagram 1).

A characteristic feature of English medical terminology in general and that used in “Grey’s Anatomy” is the presence of purely Latin and Latinized Greek terms, as well as Latin-Greek and Greek-Latin terms composed according to the rules of Latin spelling and grammar.

Many of the terms related to diseases, organ systems, and surgical procedures originate from Greek. Such prefixes as cardio-, neuro-, hemo-/hemato-, nephro-, hepato-, gastro-, pneumo-, osteo-, melano-, and dermat- are extensively used in all seasons of “Grey’s Anatomy”. For example, in the analyzed material, the following terms are used in numerous scenes: *hepatomegaly*; *gastroenterology*; *gastritis*; *pneumothorax*; *dermatitis*; *cardiomyopathy*.

Regarding common suffixes of Greek origin, they include -itis, -emia, -oma, -osis, -pathy, -tomy, -ectomy, -ostomy, and -scopy. These elements allow

the precise description of conditions and procedures, reflecting the series' emphasis on clinical accuracy. For example:

*It's solo surgery time, and you all have heard, the past two years, the chief has assigned an **appendectomy*** [Season 5, E. 9].

*He's got multiple contusions and **ecchymosis** over his back. He's gonna need lumbar and thoracic films* [Season 6, E. 5].

Hospital abbreviations and anatomical terminology are based on Latin. Examples of the use of classical Latin for body structures include *dura mater*, *femur*, and *radius*. The following Latin abbreviations are common in medical records and instructions: *q.h.* (every hour), *b.i.d.* (twice daily), *t.i.d.* (three times daily), *stat* (statim, instantly), and *NPO* (nil per os, nothing by mouth). In medical communication, these Latin expressions reflect standardization and simplicity.

During the research, it has been discovered that the large group of terms used in “Grey’s Anatomy” is composed of words with the prefix *hyper-*. These include both simple terms, such as *hypertension* (high blood pressure) and *hyperglycemia* (elevated blood sugar), as well as more complex term combinations, like *hypertonic solution* or *hyperactive reflex*.

The wide use of this prefix can be explained by the series's focus on pathological conditions and physiological imbalances, which often form the core of patient cases. So, in such a way, the series efficiently conveys abnormal excess or heightened activity in bodily systems, making medical descriptions precise yet understandable for both professional and general audiences.

Greek-derived suffixes and prefixes are more common than Latin prefixes and suffixes when examining the medical terminology used in *Grey's Anatomy*, Seasons 5–9. This tendency coincides with the series's focus on pathology and surgical techniques, which heavily rely on the Greek language.

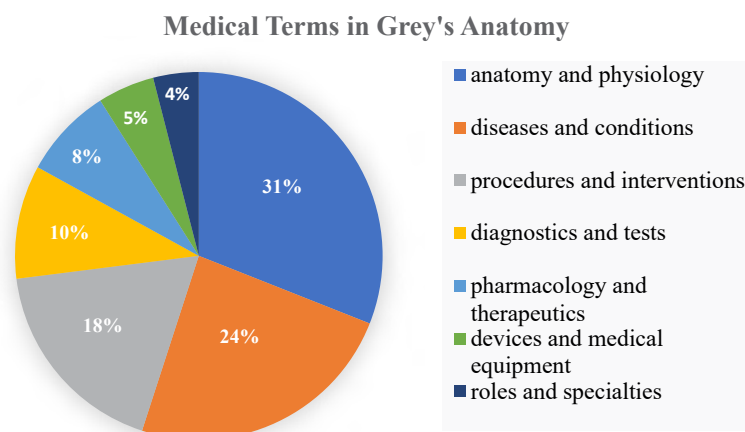


Diagram 1. Distribution of medical terms in “Grey’s Anatomy”

Greek suffixes were used in almost 60% of medical terminology during these seasons. It reflects their importance in describing illnesses, medical conditions, and surgical procedures.

About 40% of the terminology was Latin-derived. They are mostly used for clinical abbreviations and anatomical descriptions. This ratio highlights how crucial Greek is for describing medical conditions and procedures, while Latin is still necessary for standard clinical communication and anatomic terminology.

Strategies of accessibility and narrative clarity.

Although medical terminology in “Grey’s Anatomy” retains authenticity, it is deliberately filtered to support accessibility for a non-specialist audience. One widely used strategy is the didactic aside. It is when a senior doctor explains a procedure to interns and effectively breaks down jargon into understandable language. For example:

– *Grey, why do we dissect down in quadrants?*

– *So, we can **get a good look at the vessels** to make sure we have enough for reconstruction. Very good* [Season 5, E. 6].

In this example, the molecular architecture of dissection is put into everyday language: “quadrants” become simply “zones we cut to see vessels for reconstruction.” It’s succinct, factual, and instantly digestible to an ordinary audience.

Another strategy is metaphorical simplification, when complex medical phenomena are described with the help of everyday comparisons. Instead of overwhelming viewers with strictly clinical terminology, doctors often employ metaphors drawn from daily life, such as cars, plumbing, weather, or even relationships, to explain a patient’s condition. It ensures that television viewers without medical training can follow the storyline. For example:

They secrete blood thinners that break up pooled blood so it can be evacuated. It’s sort of like a big drain [Season 6, E. 7].

Instead of launching into a technical explanation of leech pharmacodynamics, Dr. Bailey explains the phenomenon by using a simple plumbing metaphor, a “big drain,” making the concept clear and accessible to viewers without sacrificing accuracy.

Also, one of the frequent strategies used in “Grey’s Anatomy” is the dramatization of risk. Phrases like “massive bleed” or “time is running out” transfer technical emergencies into emotionally charged, immediately comprehensible signals. Medical dramas achieve a balance between the narrative demands of tension and emotional engagement and the integrity of professional terminology.

Functions of medical discourse in storytelling.

Grey’s Anatomy’s discourse serves important narrative and social purposes besides lexical analysis. Not only may medical discourse be used to diagnose and cure patients, but it can also be used to build connections, dramatize ethical dilemmas, and reflect broader

social views regarding medicine. For example, in Season 6, Cristina Yang argues with Dr. Hunt about a surgical approach to a heart transplant. The technical terminology (“left ventricular assist device”) becomes a proxy for deeper conflicts about trust, authority, and ambition:

*Cristina Yang: ... We need to implant a **left ventricular assist device** – it’s the only way to stabilize him before transplant.*

*Owen Hunt: If we push him into surgery, **he might not survive the induction.***

*Cristina Yang: ... **This is his best shot at making it to transplant.***

*Owen Hunt: **Or it’s the fastest way to lose him on the table*** [Season 6, E. 2].

Clinical terminology and ethical discussions are regularly contrasted throughout episodes. In Season 7, doctors use sensitive terminology like “quality of life” and “letting go” mixed with terms like “multi-organ failure” when deciding if they should keep aggressive therapy for the dying patient. The conflict between medical objectiveness and empathy for others appears in this dual discourse. Another example of focusing on ethical and emotional layers in this medical drama is shown in one of the episodes of season 8. A patient requires an emergency cricothyrotomy. The technical term is introduced briefly, but the camera focuses on Meredith, who is performing the procedure under stress. Here, discourse highlights competence while the drama underscores human vulnerability.

Conclusion and prospects for further research.

Medical discourse in Grey’s Anatomy shows how scientific accuracy and narrative accessibility interact dynamically. Technical jargon and emotionally driven speech are interchanged throughout the conversation and demonstrate how specialized professional language changes when it is adapted for a broader audience. The results suggest that medical dramas create a hybrid discourse that is simultaneously professional, scientific, and pedagogical. The medical discourse in the series reveals several structural tendencies: the dominance of Latin and Greek roots in core terminology, the frequent use of abbreviations and acronyms in clinical dialogue, and the incorporation of metaphorical and colloquial shifts when addressing patients or explaining procedures. “Grey’s Anatomy” illustrates the discursive flexibility of specialized language when transferred into a popular media format. The show not only dramatizes medical practice but also influences audiences’ views of medicine as a science and a human-centered effort by switching between professional language and everyday conversation. In the future, it is essential to research diachronic shifts in terminology, compare intertextual strategies across medical dramas, and examine how such discourse balances between professional jargon and popular linguistic consciousness.

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