

An English-Maltese Dictionary of Medical and Pharmaceutical terms

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An English-Maltese dictionary of medical and pharmaceutical terms is being made available for all those who need a quick reference to assist them in translating medical and pharmaceutical documents. This task is undertaken by pharmacy students (carried out under the supervision of academics) during the course of Pharmacy at the University of Malta.

Maltese has been a working language of EU institutions since the EU Commission recognised it as one of the twenty-three official languages of the European Union. In fact, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) determined that 'certain documents for medicinal products authorised by the centralised system have to be translated into Maltese'.¹ Medical translators are experiencing difficulty in not having easily available Maltese equivalents for many of the English medical terms used in the documents to be translated. This is resulting in having non-standardised medical and pharmaceutical Maltese terms. An English-Maltese dictionary of medical and pharmaceutical terms thus contributes towards establishing such terms.

The Department of Pharmacy of the University of Malta has recognised this fact and in 2007, Eliza Camilleri, under the supervision of Professor Anthony Serracino-Inglott, compiled the terms from 'A' to 'E'. This work was disseminated in electronic format. In the current project, terms from letters 'F' to 'K' were translated and validation of the Maltese terms with an established linguist, laymen and healthcare professionals has been undertaken. The compilation of terms A-K, is being made available online and as a book.

The process of this dictionary's compilation consisted mainly of two phases. The first phase involved the collection of terms which had already been successfully translated and adapted into the Maltese language: this was done by gathering medical and pharmaceutical entries from the Medicine's Authority's 'Glossary of Terms'² and from the dictionary suggested by EMA, the 'English to Maltese Dictionary' by Professor Joseph Aquilina.³ The second phase involved the actual translations of medical and pharmaceutical terms which had not yet been translated into the Maltese language. Such terms were extracted from *Mosby's Medical Dictionary*⁴ and translated in accordance with Medicine's Authority's requirements and EMA guidelines.¹ These new Maltese equivalents for English medical terms were then discussed with the linguist, in order to review the grammatical and linguistic issues. During this phase, the following three guidelines were followed:

- 1) Colloquial Maltese terms that are known to the majority of the Maltese population must be used. This is of vital importance since the translated documents must be clearly understood by the general Maltese public.
- 2) Generic and trade names should not be translated. The same applies for chemical names, excipients and names of enzymes. There is no need to use italics for these terms.
- 3) Prior to translating, a good understanding of the text is required since it is impossible to produce a good translation of a text unless this is fully understood. Literal translations must not be carried out since the intended message may be altered.

To enhance the quality of the dictionary, feedback on the newly translated terms was obtained from the target users (laymen and healthcare professionals) during the compilation process. This gave the possibility to consider the users' feedback for

References

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2. Medicine Authority. Glossary of terms. 2008. Available at: <http://www.medicinesauthority.gov.mt/pub/Glossary%20in%20Maltese%20Terms%202008%201.doc>
3. Aquilina J. English-Maltese dictionary. Valletta: Mifera Books Ltd; 1999.
4. Mosby's medical nursing and allied health dictionary, 9th ed. St. Louis: Mosby Inc; 2002. S. de Solzyvar GM, Frazee DL. The Concept of 'Simultaneous Feedback': Towards a New Methodology for Compiling Dictionaries. 2008. Available at: <http://www.medicinesauthority.gov.mt/pub/theses/2008.pdf>

implementation prior to having the final version of the dictionary published, a process referred to as 'simultaneous feedback'.⁵ This was done by exposing some of the translations ('F' and 'G') in the form of a small-scale dictionary and distributing other translations from letters 'H' to 'K' in the form of lists.

Constructive criticism was used as a tool to improve the material included in this dictionary and amendments were made to the original translations. As an example, the original translation for the term 'frozen shoulder' was 'spalla frittata'. However healthcare professionals have suggested that 'kundizzjoni fejn ma tkunx tieta' tmaxxi l-ispalla fid-direzzjonijiet kollha' would be a better Maltese equivalent for this particular term. Also, laymen gave the impression that 'spalla gġamjata' would be more understood. These two new translations were added to the original translation. Another example is the term 'fracture of skull'. The original translation was 'ksur fi-ghadam kranjali' but as suggested by laymen, 'ksur fi-ghadam tar-ras' is more comprehensible and the latter translation was then added to the original translation.

English medical term	Original Maltese translation	Final version of translation after the validation exercise
fever blister	nuffata tad-deni	nuffata tad-deni; <i>ponta tad-deni</i>
full blood count	ghadd generali tad-demm	ghadd shh tad-demm
full term	il-perjodu normali tat-tqala tal-bnednin	il-perjodu normali tat-tqala fil-bnednin, <i>il tkom ghalqittha 2-zmien</i>
gastric mucous membrane	membrana mukoza tal-istonku	<i>fatjorra tal-istonku</i>
genpectoral position (knee-chest position)	pozizzjoni ġenpetorali	pozizzjoni ġenpetorali; <i>pozizzjoni fejn l-irkoppa tmiss mas-sider</i>
gross haematuria	ematurja makroskopika	ematurja makroskopika; <i>demm vitabbli fl-aurina</i>
herbal medicine	medicina erboristika	medicina erboristika; <i>medicina tal-herbet</i>

Table 1: Validation of terms by laymen and healthcare professionals

Through the process of 'simultaneous feedback', it was found that the majority of translated terms selected during validation by laymen were understood, which confirms that, as required by the Medicine's Authority¹, colloquial Maltese was used in the translations.

Additionally, positive feedback was obtained from healthcare professionals, who agreed with most of the translations and with the format of the small-scale dictionary.

It is interesting to note that this dictionary of medical and pharmaceutical terms from letters 'A' to 'K' comprises more than 10,000 terms and a high percentage (7,049) of these terms were newly translated. The availability of these terms should facilitate the translation process of documents pertaining to medicinal products, particularly patient information leaflets.