



## The Specifics of Translating English Medical Terminology into Russian

Imankulova Tolgonai Zhakypovna<sup>1</sup>, Sayed Qariya Anamur Rahman<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Teacher of the International Medical Faculty of Osh State University, Kyrgyzstan

<sup>2</sup> 1st year student of the International Medical Faculty of Osh State University, Kyrgyzstan.

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#### Corresponding Author:

*Sayed Qariya Anamur  
Rahman*

### Abstract:

The translation of English medical terminology into Russian is a complex linguistic and intercultural process shaped by historical development, typological differences between the two languages, and evolving international scientific standards. English has emerged as the dominant language of global medical communication, yet Russian maintains a highly structured medical lexicon rooted in Latin and Greek traditions inherited from European medical scholarship. This study explores the phonetic, morphological, grammatical, and semantic challenges encountered in translating English medical terms into Russian. It discusses transliteration, borrowing, calquing, semantic equivalence, and the coexistence of international and native Russian variants. The paper highlights the crucial role of terminological precision in clinical practice, medical education, and scientific discourse, emphasizing how mistranslation can endanger diagnostic accuracy and patient safety. Understanding these translation specifics is essential in an era of globalization, international medical collaboration, and multilingual education.

**Keywords:** medical terminology; translation studies; English–Russian translation; medical linguistics; intercultural communication; terminology standardization

## 1. Introduction

English has become the primary global language of medical research, education, and clinical documentation. International medical guidelines, journals, and evidence-based studies are predominantly published in English, creating a demand for accurate translations into national languages. In Russian-speaking contexts, medical professionals regularly consult English-language sources while maintaining a robust tradition of using Russian for documentation and practice. Despite the international nature of medical science, the translation of English medical terminology into Russian remains a specialized task due to structural and semantic differences between the languages. English and Russian differ in phonetics, morphology, and syntax, and these contrasts complicate the transfer of precise meaning. Translators must therefore possess both linguistic expertise and medical knowledge to ensure terminological accuracy. This paper explores the distinctive linguistic mechanisms involved in English–Russian medical translation, emphasizing phonetic adaptation, morphological restructuring, and semantic equivalence. It further examines historical influences, translation strategies, and the implications of terminological accuracy for medical education and clinical practice.

## **2. Historical Background of Russian Medical Terminology**

Russian medical terminology began forming during the 18th and 19th centuries, under the influence of Western European scientific reforms, particularly those initiated by Peter the Great. During this period, Russian scholars and physicians adopted Latin and Greek medical nomenclature, often through German and French intermediaries. As a result, many Russian medical terms share etymological roots with international terminology—for example, гипертония (hypertension), инфаркт миокарда (myocardial infarction), and неврология (neurology). This shared classical foundation facilitates translation from English but also presents challenges when modern English introduces new terminological innovations that lack established Russian equivalents.

### **Phonetic and Orthographic Adaptation**

Phonetic and orthographic adaptation is one of the key aspects of English–Russian medical translation. Borrowed terms are often transliterated into Cyrillic based on Russian phonetic norms—for example, catheter → катетер, ultrasound → ультразвук, computed tomography → компьютерная томография. However, difficulties arise when English orthography and pronunciation diverge significantly, or when certain English phonemes lack direct Russian equivalents. Stress placement may also differ: misplacing stress in professional speech (катЕтер instead of катетЕр) can reduce clarity or signal non-native usage. Translators must therefore balance phonetic fidelity with conventional Russian medical usage to ensure intelligibility and professional acceptance.

### **Morphological and Word-Formation Differences**

English medical terminology frequently relies on compounding (blood pressure, heart failure, chronic kidney disease), whereas Russian expresses the same concepts through syntactic and morphological restructuring: кровяное давление, сердечная недостаточность, хроническая болезнь почек. Both languages employ Greek and Latin affixes, but their productivity and combinatory rules differ. For example, English uses -itis, -osis, -ology, while Russian equivalents include -ит, -оз, -ология. Translators must apply Russian word-formation patterns correctly to ensure that new or adapted terms are morphologically natural and accepted within the professional community.

### **Semantic Equivalence and Terminological Variants**

Achieving semantic equivalence between English and Russian medical terms is often challenging. Some terms have direct equivalents—e.g., diabetes mellitus → сахарный диабет—while others require descriptive translation. For instance, stroke corresponds to инсульт, but in extended contexts may be rendered as острое нарушение мозгового кровообращения to emphasize pathophysiology. Semantic shifts can occur when translators rely on literal equivalence without considering contextual nuance. Such errors risk miscommunication in diagnosis and patient care. Ensuring precise semantic mapping therefore requires familiarity with both linguistic systems and medical domain knowledge.

### **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

English medical discourse is rich in abbreviations (e.g., ICU, COPD, MRI). Russian practice incorporates some international abbreviations but adapts others. For example, MRI → МРТ (магнитно-резонансная томография), ICU → ОРИТ (отделение реанимации и интенсивной терапии). Inconsistent translation or transliteration of acronyms can create confusion, especially in multinational research and education settings. Translators should adhere to recognized standards, such as WHO and ISO guidelines, and maintain consistency throughout texts.

### **Stylistic and Pragmatic Considerations**

English medical writing favors conciseness, nominal style, and passive constructions, whereas Russian medical discourse is more explicit and explanatory. Literal translation may preserve content but distort stylistic norms. For example, English noun-heavy structures like patient blood pressure monitoring protocol should be rendered as *протокол мониторинга артериального давления у пациента* in Russian. The translator's role extends beyond lexical transfer to pragmatic adaptation—ensuring the text suits its communicative purpose. Academic papers, clinical documentation, and patient education materials each demand different levels of formality, technicality, and clarity.

### **Implications for Medical Education and Practice**

Terminological accuracy directly affects patient safety, clinical decision-making, and the dissemination of medical knowledge. Misinterpretation of translated guidelines or terminology can lead to diagnostic errors or inappropriate treatment. In Russian-speaking countries, where many medical students study English-language sources, systematic training in medical translation improves comprehension of international literature and promotes professional mobility. The development of standardized bilingual glossaries and electronic terminological databases—aligned with WHO and ISO frameworks—can significantly reduce inconsistencies in translation.

### **3. Discussion**

The process of translating English medical terminology into Russian reveals broader issues of intercultural communication in science. While a shared Greco-Latin heritage facilitates understanding, linguistic structure and cultural norms require adaptation. Effective translation depends on interdisciplinary collaboration among linguists, physicians, and translators, as well as ongoing efforts to unify standards. As medicine becomes increasingly globalized, translation is not merely a linguistic task but a critical component of knowledge transfer and healthcare safety. Establishing consistent terminological practices strengthens the integrity of medical education, research, and clinical communication.

### **4. Conclusion**

The translation of English medical terminology into Russian is a multidimensional process involving phonetic adaptation, morphological restructuring, semantic alignment, and pragmatic adjustment. The historical Latin-Greek foundation provides continuity, yet modern medicine's rapid evolution continually introduces new challenges. Ensuring precise and standardized translation enhances the accessibility of global medical knowledge for Russian-speaking professionals, safeguards clinical accuracy, and supports the harmonization of international healthcare communication. Continued investment in terminological research, translator training, and cross-institutional collaboration will remain essential in this evolving linguistic landscape.

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