

LATIN APHORISMS AND PHRASES IN THE DEONTOLOGICAL DIDACTICS OF ROMANIAN

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Abstract

Latin aphorisms and expressions constitute a form of human didactics. The present article is about Latin idiomaticity related to the didactics of Romanian as a foreign language. Teaching-learning lessons of the Romanian language and medical terminology, in alloglot classes, are important in the formation of a linguistic-terminological axis (which will ensure a later integration of the doctors in the socio-professional environment), but also of a respectful attitude towards the Romanian language. Deontological didactics (deontology is considered 'the science of moral duties and obligations') is based on the concepts of goodness and beauty, which are aesthetic categories that provide the basis for general human norms of behaviour and cultivate the qualities of bonhomie. These two aesthetic categories, goodness and beauty, are likely to be cultivated in the Romanian language teaching/learning classes, with Latin aphorisms and expressions as reference points. For example, the feelings of: respect - *Pulchra res homo est si homo est/A human being is beautiful if he is human*, etc.; tolerance - *De gustibus et coloribus non disputandum/ Tastes and colours are not discussed/There is no accounting for taste(s)*; moderation - *Si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses/Had you kept silent, you would have remained a philosopher*, etc.; *Medice, cura aegrotum, sed non morbum/Cure the man, not the disease* - the aphorism emphasizes the personality of the patient, which matters for the doctor's attitude.

Deontological didactics is fundamental in establishing interpersonal socio-professional relationships (firstly, doctor-patient). The knowledge of medicine, offered from a deontological perspective, projects the attitude of doctors both towards their future socio-professional status (as doctors) and towards the language.

Keywords: Latin aphorisms and expressions, didactics, medicine, the Romanian language.

Introduction

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Tudor Vianu wrote: ‘We can exist only through the adaptations of the entire phylogeny, which endowed us with our organs and functions, in the same way, we can participate in the work of culture today only starting from the countless intellectual and moral benefits, gathered over centuries and millennia. There is a phylogeny of culture’ [1]. And in order to form our own ‘phylogeny’, the sine-qua-non-condition is to know the uniqueness and non-recurrence of universal intelligence (‘synthesis of thought’), which has successfully passed the test of time – Latin aphorisms and phrases.

Latin aphorisms and phrases

The term *aphorism* appeared in the 1520s, meaning ‘a concise statement of a principle’ (especially in reference to the ‘Aphorisms of Hippocrates’), from French *aphorisme* (corrected from Old French *aufforisme*, 14c.), from Late Latin *aphorismus*, from Greek *aphorismos* ‘definition: short, pithy sentence,’ from *aphorizein* ‘to mark off, divide,’ from *apo* ‘from’ + *horizein* ‘to bound’ [2].

Some sources provide different definitions of the term. Jean D’ank, in his work *A Brief History of the Aphorism* [3], indicates the following rather controversial etymology: < lat. *a-* ‘hot or spicy’, ‘unpleasant’ + < gr. *phorizein* ‘opinion’ + *-ism* ‘spicy opinion about something or someone’. According to the above source, the aphorism has its starting point in Ancient Greece, and the first legible aphorism was discovered in the lava-covered ruins of the city of Pompeii; in translation – *When you fall, you have the opportunity to find your best friends*. There is also an opinion that aphorisms are based on sayings (ro. *zicale, ziceri*) from Egypt (3rd century BC), popular at that time in Greece. The phrase *winged words* (here, phrases), words ‘that fly from the speaker’s mouth’, is firstly used in the poem *Odyssey* by Homer, the ancient rhapsode calling them ‘words that fly from the mouth in the mouth’ [4].

Didactics – epistemology and deontology

Many definitions have been proposed for term *didactics* (Jan Amos Comenius, *Didactica Magna*, 1657; with the meaning of ‘*didactic art*’), which is based on the Greek *didaskhein* (‘to teach others’). Deontological didactics can be defined through the Latin aphorisms *Disce et doce* /*Learn to learn (yourself*

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and teach others) and *Docendo discimus/Docendo discitur* (Lucius Annaeus Seneca)/ *By teaching others, we learn/We learn by teaching others*.

We distinguish 2 major socio-human functions of didactics:

a) gnoseological function (< gr. *gnosis* ‘knowledge’ + < gr. *logos* ‘word, science, theory’; knowledge of ‘things’ – *Homo doctus [in] se semper divitias habet/The learned man always has wealth with himself; Quidquid discis, tibi discis/Whatever you learn, you learn for yourself*; and human knowledge, including ‘self-knowledge’ - *Nosce te ipsum/Know thyself*, etc.

b) the deontological function (deontology is ‘the science of duty and moral obligations’). Goodness and beauty are aesthetic categories that lay the basis for the norms of general human conduct, which, in turn, are essential in forming a correct attitude towards the Romanian language, a non-native language:

• *Bonum, i, n ‘good’*: *Bene habit/It's good; Summum bonum/The supreme good* etc.

• *Pulchrum, i, n ‘beautiful’*: *Pulchre, bene, recte!/Beautiful, good, correct!*; *Pulchra res homo est, si homo est/Man is a beautiful being if he is human*, etc.

It is important that the teaching-learning process of the ‘things’ (gnoseology) of medicine focuses on *goodness* and *beauty* (principles promoted by means of Latin aphorisms and phrases) in studying and practicing medicine. Considering the fact that a good part of doctors is non-native, and the existing and persistent bilingualism in the Republic of Moldova has left its influence, often promoting an adverse attitude towards the Romanian language, these two categories are on the agenda.

Deontological didactics and the cognition of the ‘things’ of medicine

It is essential that the student acquire a comprehension and a living sense of values.

He must have a strong sense of beautiful and good things. (Albert Einstein)

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Medical precepts often take the form of aphorisms, since Hippocrates was the first to use the term *aphorism* in the ‘coherent and concise’ identification of the symptoms of certain diseases, in order to correctly diagnose and treat them. Later, from medicine, the idea was taken up by other sciences.

The use of Latin aphorisms and phrases in Romanian language and medical terminology lessons is recommended. Despite the fact that the *Polyglot Dictionary of Latin Aphorisms and Expressions* [5, p. 233] attests about 30 Latin aphorisms and expressions, used in teaching (e.g., *Nota bene!/Remember/Be careful!*), the deontological perspective proposes aphorisms that are intended to foster respect for the Romanian language, to value the personality of the student and that of the Romanian language teacher. The inventory of Latin formulas attested in the above dictionary shows a number of 80 aphorisms used in medicine [*ibidem*, p. 206].

Therefore, in the Romanian language lessons, the Wisdom Laboratory section (*Laborator de înțelepciune*), in which various Latin aphorisms and expressions are proposed to be explained, is attractive to medical professionals.

For instance, the article *Structura organismului uman (The structure of human body)* [6, p. 25] can be joined by the explication of such aphorisms like: *Barba crescit, caput nescit/The beard grows, but the mind does not know more/Older but not wiser; Barba non facit philosophum/The beard does not make the philosopher* etc. The ancient Greeks considered the beard a symbol of wisdom and knowledge. The beard was a marker of maturity and social position. Later, the beard fashion was suppressed by Alexander the Great, who conquered Greece. For the Romans, the beard was a marker, a symbol of barbarism, and a clean male face was an indicator of civilization.

The article *The nervous system. The brain* [*ibidem*, p. 83] can be joined by the phrases: *pia mater* and *dura mater*.

Thus, the Latin phrase *pia mater* is literally translated ‘humble, soft mother’, ‘merciful, pious mother’. Currently, the formula is an established medical term, denoting, in anatomy, ‘the internal meninge, consisting of a plexus of blood vessels’, as opposed to *dura mater* (< lat. ‘severe mother’) – the outer membrane and the thickest of the three covering the brain and spinal cord. We

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assume that the inner, vascularized meninge is ‘soft’ and the outer meninge, meant to protect the vulnerability of the inner meninges, is thick and ‘hard’.

In the same source, we come across the aphorism *Si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses/If you had kept silent, you would have remained a philosopher*. Boethius in his work *The Consolations of Philosophy*, II, 7 (written in prison, being in disgrace) relates a situation that has become a fable; a pretended philosopher docilely listened to all the insults of a man, accusing him of lies. In the end, he broke his silence and asked him with a smile: ‘Do you now understand that I am a philosopher?’, to which the man replied: ‘*Intellexeram, si tacuisses!/I would have understood, if you had kept silent!*’. The moral is: if he had resisted and had not reacted to the insinuations, the would-be philosopher would have demonstrated his status. Interrupting his speech, he did not respect the philosophical principle of silence: ‘If, however, the discussion arises among simple people about some principle of philosophy, keep silence as much as possible. Thus, there is the danger of throwing out food not yet digested,’ given that, philosophy is proved by deeds, not by words [Epictet, *apud* 7, p. 90].

The Hippocratic Oath is the most open to aphoristic interjections, possibly because Hippocrates himself is considered the author of the first aphorisms: *Primum non nocere/First do no harm*; a short form of the aphorism *Primum non nocere, deinde curare/ First do no harm, then treat*. It is an ideal text to promote good-natured qualities:

1. Humanism – *Homīni homīne nihil pulchrius vidētur/ There is nothing more beautiful for man than man himself/For a human being there is nothing more beautiful than a human being*;
2. Charity – *Dum vivo, prosum/As long as I live, I do good*;
3. Friendship – *Ex amicītia pax/Peace from friendship*;
4. Devotion – *Feci, quod potui/Feci, quod potui, faciant meliōra potentes (Publius Ovidius Naso)/I have done what I could, those who can do more may do better/I have done what I could, others may do better* (a paraphrase of the formula by which the consuls concluded their activity);
5. Tolerance and acceptability – *Fecisti patriam diversis de gentībus unam/From different peoples, you made one homeland*;

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6. Perseverance/ Consistency – *Gutta cavat lapidem non vi, sed saepe cadendo* (Publius Ovidius Naso)/ *The drop wears away the stone, not by force, but by constant dripping; Basis virtutum constantia/Consistency is the foundation of virtue;*

7. Professionalism – *Homo homini deus est si suum officium sciat/Man [for man] is God if he knows his job, etc.*

8. Perceptiveness – *Bis dat, qui cito dat/Bis dat, qui dat celeriter* (Publilius Syrus)/ *He who gives quickly gives twice/He who gives quickly gives well/He gives twice who gives quickly* (it is best to help someone immediately, even if waiting might ultimately allow you to offer more aid);

9. Sincerity/Good faith – *Bona fide/With (of) good faith/Sincerely/Conscientiously/ With all my heart;*

10. And the following aphorism, as a rule, makes people smile: *Medice, cura te ipsum!/Doctor, treat yourself!* The sentence teaches that only a ‘healthy’ man can take the responsibility to treat; in other words, health begets health, and a ‘sick’ doctor is unconsciously dominated by it.

So, the deontological dimension is reflected by the Latin formula *Pulchra res homo est si homo est/ A person is a beautiful being if he is human*, and the strong condition in covering medical deontology is generally a human one, that of being human, a governing condition for medical practice, a guarantee for *Officium medici est, ut toto, ut celeriter, ut jucunde sanet/The doctor's duty is to cure safely, quickly and pleasantly*, obligations focused on the doctor's personal skills in ‘understanding’, ‘synthesizing’ and treating the morbid condition.

Ars medendi is contained in sentences of the type: *Non quaerit aeger medicum eloquentem, sed sanantem/The patient does not want oratory but healing*, although the doctor's verbal mastery plays an essential role in establishing a correct diagnosis, the anamnesis stage, and the verbal medicine assistance is a continuous one throughout the treatment: *Quod medicamenta non sanant, verbum sanat/What is not treated by medicine is treated by the word*. In the *Surgery Course* [8], an essential moment in medical practice is highlighted: *Errare humanum est/To err is human*, urging doctors to have the courage to recognize and correct an error (*mea culpa/my mistake*).

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Deontological didactics is complementary to epistemology: *Medicus sine materia Latina non est medicus/A doctor without knowing Latin is not a doctor.*

Thus, Latin formulas can be found in medical prescriptions, methods of medicines preparation, methods of taking medicines, etc., considering the fact that, until recently, the Latin language was the basic language at the doctor-pharmacist level of communication. Currently, it is recommended to write prescriptions in the national language, but doctors continue to use the Latin language, repeatedly proving its perpetuation:

a) Mode of administration: *ad usum internum/for internal use; ad uzum externum/for external use; ad balneum/for the bath* etc.

b) Curative/healing effect: *contra tussim/against cough; contra morbum/against the disease; against scabiem/against scabies* etc.

c) Time of administration: *inter cenam/during dinner (= meal); per diem/during the day; ex tempore/as needed*, etc.

d) Destination: *pro me = pro auctore /for the author* (the doctor prescribes it for himself); *pro aegrotus/for the sick; pro narcosis/for narcosis; pro infantibus/for children*, etc.

e) How to prepare remedies: *cum aqua/with water; as extracto/with extract; pro dosi/for a dose*, etc.

f) Quality: *sine color/no color; sine residio/no residue; per se/in pure state*;

g) Form of administration: *in tabulettis/in tablets; in vitro nigro/in black bottle; in vitro fusc/in brown bottle; in ampullis/in ampoules*, etc.

h) The reason: *prae dolore/because of the pain*, etc.

i) Quantity: *dosis pro dosis/dose for one day; dosis pro die/dose for a day*, etc.

All these formulas aim at the professional, high-quality training of doctors.

Conclusions

Latin aphorisms are "scholarly bodies" that, once more, illustrate the perpetuation of the Latin language as the *language of science*. Medicine is the field *par excellence*, in which the Latin language demonstrated its status as '*Latina gintă e regină/Între-ale lumii ginte mari...*' (Vasile Alecsandri). The

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updating and interpretation of the Latin corpus in the didactic context offers new openings for teaching medical terminology. The frequent use of the Latin corpus (various fields of activity, including the medical one), its popularization, etc. demonstrates the vitality of the Latin language, considered a model of scientific, personal and professional training. Latin aphorisms and phrases are also called didactic, because they are a concise 'space', where spirit and intelligence coexist and which, in their entirety, form human didactics.

Deontological didactics, implemented through scientific formulas, cultivates human qualities, indispensable to the process of studying medical things; they are also important in establishing the social status of a doctor.

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