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The Voice of an Asian Expat in a Qatari Short Story by Nurah Al-Saad: *The Newspaper Seller*

Najla Kalach, (PhD)
UNINT University, Italy

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Abstract:

Qatari literature is still budding, as its diffusion can be credited to the birth of the press in the 1960s, and it is yet to have garnered the attention of Western scholars, especially if compared to the literature from Arabian Persian Gulf countries, such as Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

This study aims at contributing to enrich the discourse on Qatari literature, by analysing the structure and contents of the short story *The Newspaper Seller*, published in 1989 by Nurah al-Saad (Nūrah ʿāl Saʿad). This piece offers the reader a precious insight about the reality of expats' lives in the 1980s. The story depicts the harsh daily routine of an Asian immigrant, who attempts to survive by selling newspapers under the scorching sun in the streets of Doha. The main character, named Malik (Mālik), has just moved away from his family and is now dreaming of a better future, while finding himself in an entirely different reality: he is forced to work two jobs, in order to be able to live with some dignity and to help his family of origin.

This short story was highly acclaimed by literary critics. Due to its original topic and narrative techniques, through the use of interior monologue, associations, stream of consciousness and symbols, it is considered a pioneering work for that time.

Key Words: Qatari literature, Qatari Short Story, Women Writers, Gulf Literature, Nurah al-Saad.

Introduction:

Like most Gulf countries from the 1950s onwards, revenues from the oil industry rapidly contributed to the growth of the local economic prosperity, fostering the country's urbanisation process and the establishment of many educational and cultural institutions (Montigny-Kozłowska 1982, 475–476). Furthermore, the 1960s witnessed the rise of Qatari press¹, which represented a

¹ It is worth mentioning some of the most important Qatari journals and newspapers of 1960s and

turning point for the emerging local literature in its earliest form: the short story genre. The various stories were sent to the local newspaper by Qatari writers, who depicted and recorded the changes they had been observing within society. They especially focused on the conflicting gap between tradition and modern transformations, as portrayed in one of the earliest collections on this topic: *Bint al-ḥalīḡ* (The Daughter of the Gulf), by Yusef al-Na‘mah (Yūsuf al-Na‘mah), editor-in-chief of *al-ʿUrūbah* during that time (Saleem 2017, 384).

However, starting from the mid-1970s, the evolution of the short story genre in Qatar begins to take on romantic tendencies, particularly thanks to the contributions of Qatari female writers, such as Kaltham Jabr (Kaṭṭam Ġabr), Umm Aktham (ʿUmm Akṭam), Hassa al-Jabr (Haṣṣah al-Ġabr), Maitha al-Khalifi (Maysah al-Ḥalīfi) and Nurah al-Saad (Nūrah ʿāl Saʿad).² The main issues, brought to the fore during this phase, mainly concern the role of women within the Arab community. The topic of marriage here represents a means to explore and reflect on the relationship between men and women (Fahmi 1983, 7–11). To this purpose, it is worth mentioning the first collection of short stories by Kaltham Jabr *Anta wa-ḡābat aṣ-ṣamt wa-at-taraddud* (You and the Jungle of Silence and Hesitation), published in 1978.

Later on, during the 1980s, the Qatari short story reaches a certain technical maturity and starts to tend towards realism. It is now characterised by a consideration for psychological aspects and for the inner workings of the characters' minds. All this is supported by a strong use of symbolism, such as metaphors, similes and the interior monologue, which serve the purpose to bring to light and expose local social issues. Therefore, the focus of this phase continues to be on the issues pertaining to women's position and role within the local community, and on the generational gap between past and present generations, in terms of standards and values. It is to be noted that similar subject matters are also present in the productions of Qatari male writers, such as Hasan Rashid (Ḥasan Rašīd), Nasir Salih al-Fadal (Nāṣir Ṣāliḥ al-Faḍālah), Jamal Fayez (Ġamāl Fāyiz). (al-Dweek 1989, 148; al-Saad 2005, 45–46)

Most of the short stories written by Qatari women deal both with the status of the woman in the society and the relationship between her freedom and the cultural constraints applied by the local community, and the status of men. However, some short stories break out of this mold, as they deal with humanitarian issues such as migration, displacement and the resulting struggles and sufferings endured by those who live as foreigners in the Qatari environment and culture. A pioneering example on these issues, presented in the collection *The Newspaper Seller* (1989), by Nurah al-Saad, is the tale of an Asian worker and his hardships and attempts to survive by selling newspapers, after moving away from his family to a different country, in order to pursue a more peaceful and brighter future.

1970s: *al-Dawḥah*, *al-ʿUrūbah*, *al-ʿAhd*, *al-Faḡr*, *al-Rāyah* (Michalak-Pikulska 2016, p. 12).

² Henceforth Nurah al-Saad.

Nurah al-Saad and the Unheard Voice of Malik:

Nurah al-Saad is known in the Gulf area for being one of the most prominent Qatari writers and critics. She got a Bachelor's degree in Education at the Department of Arabic Language of Qatar University in 1985, and a Master's degree in Arts at the Department of Arabic Language of the University of Jordan in 1992.

In 1989, Nurah al-Saad published her first collection of short stories, with the title of *Bāʿi al-ġarāʿid* (The Newspaper Seller). In the following years, more of her collections of articles and studies about literary criticism were published. Among those we can find *Wa-ṭawāṣaw bi-al-ḥaqq* (Recommend Truth), a collection of papers published in 2003, followed by *Tag̃ribiyyat ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf fī mudun al-milḥ, dirāsah naqḍiyyah* (The Experience of Abd al-Rahman Munif in City of Salt, a Critical Study) and *Aṣwāt al-ṣamt: maqālāt fī al-qīṣṣah wa al-riwāyah al-qatariyyah* (The Voices of Silence: Essays on the Qatari Story and Novel), both published in 2005. In 2007 she released the literary criticism study *Al-šams fī ʿiṭrī: maqālāt fī al-šiʿr wa al-naqd* (The Sun After Me: Essays on Poetry and Criticism), and in 2011 her first novel appeared, called *Al-ʿArīḍah* (The Petition). In 2013 *Bārānūyā* (Paranoia), a new collection of seven short stories, was issued as well.

The collection of short stories *Bāʿi al-ġarāʿid* (The Newspaper Seller), by Nurah al-Saad, stands out for her time, alongside Kaltham Jabr's collection *Waġʿ imraʿah ʿarabiyyah* (The Pain of an Arab Woman) published in 1993 (al-Nadawi 2007, 54). The collection *The Newspaper Seller* (1989) includes the following seven short stories: *Bāʿi al-ġarāʿid* (The Newspaper Seller), *Al-mazraʿah al-kabīrah* (The Big Estate), *Zahrāt al-balūṣiyyah* (The Daisy's Flower), *Raġab al-šayyāl* (Rajab the Labourer), *Al-mūmyāʿ* (The Mummy), *Fī al-badʿ kān al-suqūṭ* (At the beginning, the fall), *Al-šitāʿ* (Winter). With its vast variety of topics and innovative narration techniques, this anthology represents a pivotal artistic and objective shift in the development of the short story genre in Qatar. It encompasses many substantial issues, such as the emerging conflict between younger and older generations, the juxtaposition between life's hard reality and one's musings and dreams, and the unfairness of the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor, within Qatar's hierarchical society (al-Hirtani 2013, 277). The short story *The Newspaper Seller* (al-Saad 1989, 3–9), which gives the compendium its title, was enthusiastically acclaimed by literary critics.

The story is about a newspaper seller, who spends endless hours working hard under the burning sun and waiting for drivers in the city to stop by and purchase some newspapers from him. One day, at one o'clock in the afternoon, he manages to sell his first newspaper of the day, before any traffic dissipates quickly, as the heat in the streets becomes unbearable.

كان يجلس وحيداً في هذا الجحيم، وتمنى لو أن أحداً يمر الآن، تمنى لو.. لو يكون الآن هناك، هناك لكنه هنا وفي وسط ذلك النهار الساجي، والكرة الشمسية المصمتة، والشوارع

التي تسبح في الأشعة، كان «مالك» مع جرائده يبدوان كشيء زائد.³

He was standing alone in the middle of that burning hell, in hopes that someone would drive by. He wished he were somewhere else, but there he was, under the sun rays which bathed the streets on that flat day. Malik and his newspapers seemed to be out of place⁴.

The world around him looks like a mirage, the street is deserted, he would like to take a break and rest, but he cannot afford it. Malik keeps thinking about the ice that will refresh him and soothe him after the work.

هناك، وعلى بضع خطوات منه، جدار متهدم، له ظل صغير على الأرض ولكنه لم يكن
ليستطيع الابتعاد عن الشارع، فربما أغراه الظل والجوع والتعب... فنفس، بينها الوقت
يمضي وعمله الآخر ينتظره في بيت كفيه.⁵

A few steps from him, there was a ruined wall casting a little shade, but he couldn't get off the road. Perhaps because of that shadow, or the hunger, or the fatigue ... he fell asleep, and as time passed, his second job at his sponsor's house was still waiting for him.

Malik thinks of his life, and scenes from his past and present alternate: his mind goes back to his country of origin, where he didn't enjoy his life. He thinks about his family, he remembers the shared room where he used to live with other workers. He reflects about how hard he needs to work just to earn a few riyals, and about his side hustle as a servant, which he has to get to, after he finishes selling the newspapers.

وتذكر الحجرة التي تأويه، هو وثلاثة رجال آخرين من الشرق، في منطقة بعيدة عن الدوحة،
هي في الأصل، مسكن شعبي قديم، مقطع إلى حجيرات صغيرة، واطئة السقف، معظمها
بدون نوافذ، وليس فيها غير لمبة.⁶

He remembered the room where he used to live, shared with three more Orientals, in an area far from Doha. It was originally an old popular residence, which had been made into small rooms with low ceilings, most of which without windows, and only one lamp.

At one point, his stream of consciousness is interrupted by the arrival of a skinny, wounded dog being chased and thrown stones at by merciless children. Malik jumps into the dog's rescue, but the children will then target him, too. They start throwing rocks at him, and then they casually walk away.

وانتبه على صباح ولغط بقربه، ورأى كلباً أربد، يهرول باعياء تجاهه، يتبعه ثلة من أطفال،

³ Nurah al-Saad, *Bā'i al-ḡarā'id* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.8.

⁴ All the passages taken from the story are translated from Arabic into English by the author of this article.

⁵ Nurah al-Saad, *Bā'i al-ḡarā'id* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.4.

⁶ Nurah al-Saad, *Bā'i al-ḡarā'id* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.4–5.

يرمونه بالحجارة، وقلوبهم خالية من الزلل والندامة، وكان الكلب يتعثر ثم ينهض بتثاقل،
يجر وراءه خيطاً ثخيناً من الدم.
وقام هو، ونهته الأطفال، هز بجمع كفه في وجوههم الساكنة، فأخذوا يرمونه بالحجارة ولما
نزف دمه عادوا من حيث أتوا في هدوء.⁷

He heard a noise nearby and saw a gray dog running weakly towards him. A group of children were chasing it mercilessly, hurling stones, while the dog struggled to get up on his legs, leaving a trail of blood behind it.

He stood up and threatened the children waving his fist in front of their expressionless faces, so they started throwing stones at him, too, and when he started to bleed, they quietly walked away, going back to where they came from.

The dog remains agonising on the ground. Finally, a car pulls over and the driver buys a couple of newspapers. Malik takes the money and points to the dog in an attempt to ask for help, but the man in the car spits up in the air, and a few drops hit Malik's face. Then he drives away.

ومد إليه يده، وبعد تردد، أشار إلى الكلب، ولمحه الرجل بعجل، ثم بصق في الهواء تطاير
الرداذ على وجه بائع الجرائد، وقال الرجل:
- كلاب مشردة. كلاب.⁸

He held out his hand and, after a moment of hesitation, he pointed to the dog. The man looked at him quickly, then spat up into the air, and his saliva descended onto the newspaper seller's face. The man exclaimed:

- Stray dogs! Dogs!

The dog continues to fret, laying suffering on the asphalt, and Malik continues to look at him, aware that it would die of hunger and thirst, if left there. Then, he hoists the unsold newspapers on his shoulder and sets out to get to his other workplace.

The story is told in the third person narrator and it revolves around the character of Malik, the newspaper seller. As shown through the synopsis and the excerpts presented above, the story depicts the tragedy that underscores living in such harsh conditions, as the writer aims to highlight the social and humanitarian issues that come with the suffering of expatriate workers. The location where the story takes place is presumably a street in Doha, and while time moves through the technique of flashbacks, the arrangement of past and present times is coherent and it allows the reader to share Malik's pain (al-Hafiz et al. 2016, 148).

A novel conceived specifically for that time: the narrative techniques used by Nurah al-Saad offer a stylistic diversity which poignantly expresses the suffering of her characters, in the context of economic and social

⁷ Nurah al-Saad, *Bā'i al-ḡarā'id* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.6.

⁸ Nurah al-Saad, *Bā'i al-ḡarā'id* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.9.

transformations.

In this story, the dog is the one character that warrants special consideration. When the dog arrives at the scene, it is being chased by children, who are attacking it to the point of bleeding; so, Malik rushes to push them away, with the result of being assaulted, too. These children symbolise the loss of values that affects the new generations, as they behave with utter disregard and disrespect for life. Such an image reflects a concern shared by many Qatari writers about the posterity. Accordingly, as events escalate in the story, Malik's pain intensifies to mirror the pain of the wounded dog, as displayed by this excerpt:

وعند ذلك الحد، اختلجت الأفكار في صدره المحرور، وأخذ يذق رأسه بقبضته، وقربه كان الكلب يذق رأسه في الحصى المدبب بشراسة.⁹

At that point, his thoughts stirred in his furious chest and he began to punch himself in the head with his hand, while the dog, ferociously, banged his head on the pointed gravel.

When a car approaches and Malik gestures for the moribund dog to the driver, the latter reacts by spitting into the air and exclaiming "Stray dogs! Dogs¹⁰!". Clearly, Malik and the dog are one for that driver, and their suffering is something to be dismissed, perhaps even despised, as they are invisible beings on the margins of society. A slow death will consume the dog, much like the pain that will consume Malik's body and soul.

In the following paragraphs, a critical literary analysis¹¹ of *The Newspaper Seller* will be presented, in order to highlight the value of this short story in its original, local context.

The Newspaper Seller, a Work Out of the Choir:

During the 1950s in Qatar, three main elements were key to the development of local modern literature: the oil industry, journalism and education (Saleem 2017, 383). The economic and cultural development quickly drove the immigration process from all over the world, particularly from Asian countries. Despite this, however, literary works¹² about the life of immigrants (called also 'expats') are very scant, although these citizens constitute a large part of the communities in the Gulf. Michalak-Pikulska affirms (2016, 20) that it is

⁹ Nurah al-Saad, *Bāʿi al-ḡarāʾid* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.7.

¹⁰ It is well-known that *kalb* 'dog' is a grave insult in Arabic and Islamic culture.

¹¹ It should be highlighted that Qatari literature is still a dimension that, despite progress being made, deserves sustained in-depth investigation, as the body of studies available – mainly in Arabic – is currently scarce, if compared to other Gulf literature. For an introduction of the Qatari short stories see in Arabic the work of Muhammad Kafud (Muḥammad Kāfūd) entitled *Al-Qiṣṣah al-qaṣīrah fī Qaṭar* dated 1985.

¹² In her study *Modern Literature of the Gulf*, Michalak-Pikulska (2016, 20–21) highlights that in the Gulf the short story dedicated to the immigrants in their role as servants have been mainly written by Kuwaiti authors such as Walid al-Rujayyib (Walīd al-Ruḡayyib), Fahd al-Duwayri (Fahd al-Duwayrī) and Laila al-Uthman (Laylah al-Uṭmān).

possible to find short stories dedicated to servants in Gulf literature, where “heroes are ordinary Indian or Asian servants. This subject was the outcome of the huge influx of labour force of poor Asian countries with the aim of making money”.

Thus, *The Newspaper Seller* represents perhaps the most important and pioneering example of the Qatari short story genre about immigration. According to al-Nadawi (2007, 58, 62–63) in this short story, Nurah al-Saad’s aim is to illustrate the reader some of the problematic manifestations of the local social imbalance and rift, as well as the fragmentation of social ties, that often afflicts societies during their civilisational transitions. Nurah al-Saad’s work aims to expose and condemn a social reality, marked by differences between classes based on wealth and luxury, which has led to the decay of core cultural values, in favor of a more materialistic spirit. To represent this, the writer extracts a model from the social fabric, as she depicts the life of misery and suffering of the Asian worker Malik, of a member and symbol of the growing expatriate labour force at the time.

It is a sensitive subject within the Gulf countries, but the writer cannot overlook this aspect of her local reality. Through her narration, she chooses to tackle the potential dangers taking root in the demographic structure, and uses her artistic creativity to reveal with great humanity the suffering of expatriate people. In doing so, she makes us see reality through the eyes of an Asian labourer, who came over with his dream of money and wealth, and whose life turned into a daily struggle, as he finds himself struggling against marginalisation and alienation.

Economic and social changes, as well as the conflict between past and present generations, have caused social fragmentation, at this time allowing the materialistic spirit to emerge and sparking concern for Qatari writers: they are witnessing the dissolution of those social ties that used to be based on love and cooperation. Compared to her literary peers Nurah al-Saad, in *The Newspaper Seller*, conveys a more disillusioned character typology, and objectivity replaces subjectivity, where symbolism is used to support her critical description of reality.

Echoing al-Nadawi’s statement mentioned above, Abu Shihab (2016: 28, 96) also affirms that the issue of labour and employment in Qatar, described in *The Newspaper Seller*, trends towards an unprecedented topic in the short story genre of the time. It marks a shift from the subjective values of romantic tropes that dominated the Qatari short story, to encompass a wider dimension, characterised by humanity and psychological exploration, which brings the Qatari story closer to its maturity, in terms of style and art.

In her study, al-Hirtani (2013, 267–268) highlights on the linguistic style employed by Nurah al-Saad, as her sarcasm and dry sting support her use of symbolism and come together as a powerful tool to create an atmosphere that combines the essence of heritage and development, the diversity of narrative models, and the figurative approach to common topics. Al-Hirtani (2013, 268)

adds that, as shown in *The Newspaper Seller*, this writer is capable of expressing her concern in a manner that is equal parts informing and witnessing, and she employs the spirit of ‘carnivalisation’ to target the living conditions of the lower class, mainly composed by Asian immigrants, and to bring reproach upon this aspect of reality.

It can be observed that the author, through the interior voice of Malik, blames the profound hierarchical, social and economic differences that characterised Qatar at that time, as when she writes:

كل مرة سينوب الثلج، وهم سيدفعون في مقابل ذلك، كل مرة..كل مرة..ما الفائدة، هذه الشمس فقط من نصيبه، أما الثلج فيملكه الآخرون¹³.

The ice always melts and they always have to pay... always... What benefit is that? For him, the sun, while the ice is for the others.

The reference to a sort of “invective” (*hiġāʿ*) by the author, allows us to find some residual elements of pre-Islamic poetry in this story. In fact, in Qatar, as well as in the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, poetry has always been the most historically widespread genre, as a heritage of the Bedouin culture. The image of Malik losing his gaze and himself in his deserted surroundings, makes us think of the bleak representation of the remains of the abandoned camp (*aṭlāl*). Similarly, by using the image of an animal (a dog), the author evokes an association to the meticulous descriptions of animals, a recurring element found in the *qaṣīda*; by focusing on the details of animal imagery, poets can easily give life to states of mind, to the emotions of the human soul, and to spiritual and physical pains (Amaldi 2004, 22–23). The description that Nurah al-Saad presents of the many journeys on foot that Malik is forced to take every day, in order to reach his two places of work, as well as his accommodation, recalls a parallel with the overarching life journey (*raḥīl*) of a man, who must incessantly work hard and can never stop going.

Conclusions:

Qatari literature is a little-explored domain in Western studies, although it offers an abundance of fascinating literary prose works, such as short stories and novels, which deserve to be investigated. This study aims at contributing to enrich the discourse on Qatari literature, by offering a literary analysis of the short story entitled *The Newspaper Seller* by Nurah al-Saad, which is included in the homonym collection which was published in 1989.

This piece depicts the harsh daily routine of an Asian worker, Malik, in the erstwhile city of Doha and offers the reader a precious insight about the reality of the expats’ lives in the 1980s, who left their motherland, dreaming of an opportunity to make some fortune. The short story was highly praised by literary critics, since it is considered a pioneering work, due to its refined narrative techniques and novel topic in the Qatari short story genre of that time.

¹³ Nurah al-Saad, *Bāʿi al-ġarāʿid* (The Newspaper Seller), 1989, p.7.

Concerning the narrative techniques, the author uses interior monologue, associations, stream of consciousness, imagery and symbols, which were considered innovative in the local literary context. In fact, stories and characters were mainly presented photographically and descriptively according to the literary trend, which characterised the 1970s and the first half of 1980s.

Moreover, *The Newspaper Seller* is very interesting because it presents an original topic, which is the harsh living conditions of Asian workers, who live in a foreign environment and culture. Nurah al-Saad very humanely illustrates a delicate social issue, which emerged at the beginning of the economic and social transformations of the Gulf area and, through her story, she has finally given voice to the unheard voices.

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of interest.

The authors of this paper certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; membership, employment; affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Accuracy and Transparency in Medical English Terminology. A Focus on Suffixes, with Particular Reference to the Use of *-itis*

Barbara Cappuzzo
University of Palermo, Italy

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Abstract

The prominent position of English in medical research makes term accuracy a very important feature in the successful transmission of meanings. Accuracy refers to the correctness of a term; it represents a very important feature of medical communication together with other principles, such as transparency. The latter is the possibility of immediately decoding the meaning of a term through an analysis of its surface form. Transparency does not always overlap with accuracy. In this respect, medical English terminology shows terms that, despite being transparent, are not used with the meaning an analysis of their form would suggest but are referred to different concepts. Starting from Tanchev's discussion regarding the misuse of osteoarthritis in orthopedic surgery, this paper investigated whether other cases exist in medical English of inaccurately used terms ending in *-itis*. A list of diseases and conditions referring to inflammatory diseases was retrieved from Wikipedia, and the PubMed database was queried by means of keywords to provide illustrative text strings. The International Classification of Diseases served as a reference tool for the analysis. The investigation was also supported by authoritative medical dictionaries. The results showed that even though most of the investigated English terminology ending in *-itis* is accurately used, cases exist of either improper use of the suffix or imprecision due to the lack of the suffix itself. Corrective terminology interventions should be carried out to guarantee accuracy and semantic precision in taxonomies of diseases to prevent any ambiguities and misleading uses in medical literature and practice.

Keywords: Medical English terminology, accuracy, transparency, affixation, terminology misuse

Introduction

The rapid and continuous progress of medical science entails a parallel renewal and development of its language. In this respect, if on the one hand the naming of new concepts is carried out in accordance with principles of

terminological standardization and systematization, on the other hand, the rapidity of medical knowledge does not always allow compliance with those principles.

Of the several important features of medical language at a lexical level, two are particularly important, accuracy and transparency. Accuracy refers to the correctness with which a given term is employed. Transparency is “the possibility to promptly access the meaning of a term through its surface form” (Gotti 2003: 37). A transparent term may not necessarily also be accurate. A term can be used with a meaning other than the one the analysis of its form refers to, or it can lack semantic components that are essential to obtain the thorough meaning with which that term is used. In medical language, terms are sometimes made up of two or more lexical components, which can be decoded separately, and by the union of all components, the meaning of the whole term is achieved. Thus, for example, the term *hysterosalpingo-oophorectomy* is composed of *hysteron* (uterus) + *G. salpinx* (trumpet/tube) + *ōon* (egg) + *phoros* (bearing) + *ektomē* (excision), forming the complete meaning “excision of the uterus, oviducts, and ovaries” (*Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* 2006).

One of the strategies employed in medical discourse to ensure transparency is the use of conventional affixation. As a result of the need for systematization, affixes have assumed precise meanings. They generally refer consistently to the concepts with which they are conventionally associated. However, there are also cases where an affix is not used properly.

Affixation is the process where a bound morpheme, an affix (prefix, infix, and suffix) is attached to a root (or morphological base). The word “affix” comes from the Latin “affixus”, the past participle of the verb “affigere”, i.e. “to fasten to”, *ad-* (to) + *figere* (fix). Affixation is a very important strategy in the terminology construction process in scientific texts and represents one of the main objects of investigation of derivational morphology (Ackema and Neeleman 2004; Lieber 2004; Montero-Fleta 2011; Manova 2016; O’Dell 2016; Carstairs-McCarthy 2018). Halliday (1978: 195) identifies affixation as one of the seven strategies in the word-formation process in specialized terminology:

- reinterpretation of existing words;
- creation of new words from a native stock;
- borrowing of words from foreign languages;
- calquing;
- invention of totally new words;
- creation of locutions;
- creation of new words from a non-native word stock.

Affixation, which in medical language is considerably manifest, is part of the second strategy listed above. This strategy includes several word-formation processes occurring thanks to inner mechanisms whereby a language uses existing resources to form neologisms. Montero-Fleta (2011) investigated the productivity of 14 affixes in two scientific English registers, medicine and

information science, and found out that affixation is a very productive resource in terminology production in both domains. Areej *et al.* (2018) highlight the importance of affixation in medical language and its role in changing the meaning and the grammatical function of terms. In their book on medical terminology, Cohen and Jones (2013) devote a large space to affixation, providing a comprehensive description of it. Suffixes, in particular, are given a broad account; they are classified according to the grammatical category they form, i.e. nouns and adjectives, and also include endings pertaining to diseases, treatments, and body systems.

The majority of medical affixes are of classical origin, Greek or Latin. The most common types of prefixes denote quantity, e.g. *hyper-* (excessive), as in the case of *hyperglycemia*; deviation from normality, e.g. *dys-* (difficult, painful, not functioning properly), as in *dyslipidemia*; site, e.g. *peri-* (around), as in *pericardium*; lack, e.g. *an-*, *a-*, as in *anemia*; time, e.g. *pre-* (before), as in *prenatal*. Suffixes usually indicate a test or a procedure, e.g. *-ectomy*, “removal of”, as in *cholecystectomy*; a pathology, e.g. *-pnea*, “breathing”, as in *dyspnea*; a specialty, e.g. *-ian*, which indicates someone who is a specialist or a practitioner, as in *pediatrician*; study of / science, i.e. *-ology*, as in *dermatology*, etc.

In medical language, the suffix of Greek origin *-itis* is conventionally added to anatomy terms to form nouns that denote the inflammation of the organ or tissue the terms refer to. *Gingivitis*, *dermatitis*, *nephritis*, *blepharitis*, and *laryngitis* are only some of the innumerable examples of terms where *-itis* is used to refer to an inflammatory condition. *-Itis* is often used as opposed to another common suffix, of Greek origin too, namely *-osis* (e.g. *nephritis* / *nephrosis*). *-Osis* deserves special attention as, unlike *-itis*, this suffix shows significant polysemy. The following is the definition given by *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (2006) sub voce (s.v.) *-osis*:

Suffix meaning a process, condition, or state, usually abnormal or diseased; production or increase, physiologic or pathologic; an invasion or infestation; in the latter sense, it is similar to and often interchangeable with Greek *-iasis*, as seen in *trichinosis*, *trichiniasis*. [G.]

Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical>) registers the following definitions for *-osis*:

1. a) action; process; condition
ex: *hypnosis*
- b) abnormal or diseased condition
ex: *leukosis*
2. increase: formation
ex: *leukocytosis*

Both *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (2006) and *Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical>) display numerous meanings of *-osis*, ranging from generic definitions ('condition', 'process', 'state', 'action') to more specific meanings ('abnormal or diseased condition', 'production', 'increase', 'invasion', 'infestation'). Thus, *-osis* has not been given any systematicity. Although in the majority of the above-mentioned examples the underlying concepts of "condition" and/or "process" are present, *-osis* displays several other meanings referring to diseases/disorders of different nature and etiology.

The present study focused, in particular, on suffixes, with special attention to the use of *-itis*. More specifically, this study explored whether other cases exist of inaccurately used terms ending in *-itis* in medical English terminology. The starting point for the investigation was an article by Tanchev (2017), a Bulgarian orthopedic surgeon who examines the inaccuracy of *osteoarthritis*, a term that in the Anglo-Saxon literature and practice is used to refer to degenerative joint disease. In medical language, the suffix *-itis* is conventionally used to denote inflammation, and not a degenerative condition, which is usually referred to by the suffix *-osis*. Hence, the incorrectness of *osteoarthritis* as opposed to the appropriateness of *osteoarthrosis*, which is (or should be) the correct term to refer to degenerative joint disease.

Materials and Methods

To carry out the analysis for this work, the *Wikipedia* encyclopedia (<https://www.wikipedia.org/>) was initially searched for using the entry "inflammation." The search drove to the item "list of inflammatory disorders" and "list of types of inflammation by location." Both entries included a list of terms organized depending on the body system affected by the inflammation, i.e. Nervous System, further subdivided into CNS (Central Nervous System), including 5 entries; PNS (Peripheral Nervous System), 1 entry; Eye, 9 entries, and Ear, 4 entries; Cardiovascular System, 9 entries; Respiratory System, 11 entries; Digestive System, 32 entries; Integumentary System, 7 entries; Musculoskeletal System, 15 entries; Urinary System, 7 entries; Reproductive System, subdivided into Female, 16 entries, and Male, 8 entries; Endocrine System, 6 entries; Lymphatic System/Immune System, 4 entries, for a total of 128 entries. All these entries were searched in the *PubMed* (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) database to investigate whether the suffix *-itis* was appropriately used, i.e. whether it was deployed with reference to inflammation or conditions of different nature. In this respect, strings of texts were retrieved as illustrative examples of terminology use.

The analysis was also supported by investigation of the World Health Organization (WHO) *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11, 2019)*, the global standard of health-related information, which contains more than one million terms referring to diseases and disorders, health-related conditions, causes of illness and death, medicines, vaccines, etc. Also, three authoritative medical dictionaries were consulted, viz. *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (2006),

Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary (2019), and *Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical>).

Results

Investigation of terms referring to inflammation in *Wikipedia* yielded five cases worthy of attention, *osteoarthritis*, *cellulite*, *pneumonia*, *diphtheria*, and *pleurisy*.

As for *osteoarthritis*, this was found s.v. *arthritis* and introduced as follows: "There are over 100 types of arthritis. The most common forms are osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease) and rheumatoid arthritis" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthritis>). As can be seen from the description, and as already discussed by Tanchev (2017), *osteoarthritis* is not used to refer to an inflammatory disease, as its suffix would suggest, but to a degenerative process. In this respect, *PubMed* yielded innumerable examples of scientific articles where *osteoarthritis* is used in this way; some excerpts are reported below:

1. Osteoarthritis (OA), the most prevalent chronic joint disease, increases in prevalence with age, and affects majority of individuals over the age of 65 and is a leading musculoskeletal cause of impaired mobility in the elderly. Because the precise molecular mechanisms which are involved in the degradation of cartilage matrix and development of OA are poorly understood and there are currently no effective interventions to decelerate the progression of OA or retard the irreversible degradation of cartilage except for total joint replacement surgery. [...] (Xia *et al.* 2014: 495).
2. Osteoarthritis (OA) is a degenerative joint disease involving the cartilage and many of its surrounding tissues. Disease progression is usually slow but can ultimately lead to joint failure with pain and disability. OA of the hips and knees tends to cause the greatest burden to the population as pain and stiffness in these large weight-bearing joints often leads to significant disability requiring surgical intervention. [...] (Litwic *et al.* 2013: 185).
3. Osteoarthritis (OA), the syndrome of joint pain and dysfunction caused by joint degeneration, affects more people than any other joint disease. In most instances joint degeneration develops in the absence of an identifiable cause, but increasing age, excessive joint loading, and joint abnormalities and insults increase the risk of OA. [...] (Buckwalter and Martin 2019: 150).
4. Osteoarthritis (OA) is a disease associated to age or conditions that precipitate aging of articular cartilage, a post-mitotic tissue that remains functional until the failure of major homeostatic mechanisms. OA severely impacts the national health system costs and patients' quality of life because of pain and disability. [...] (D'Adamo *et al.* 2020: 1232).

As can be seen, there is no reference to inflammation in any of the above excerpts. Osteoarthritis is described as a disease characterized by joint degeneration (extracts 2 and 3) and is mostly associated with aging (extracts 1 and 4). This shows the incorrect use of the term, which should be more appropriately substituted with *osteoarthrosis*. To further confirm this, *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (2006) and *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary* (2019) provide the following definitions s.v. *osteoarthritis*:

This word is a misnomer in that the dominant pathologic process is degeneration rather than inflammation. Arthritis characterized by erosion of articular cartilage, either primary or secondary to trauma or other conditions, which becomes soft, frayed, and thinned [...]; mainly affects weight-bearing joints, is more common in old people and animals. SYN arthrosis, degenerative arthritis, degenerative joint disease, osteoarthrosis (*Stedman's Medical Dictionary* 2006).

A non-inflammatory degenerative type of arthritis marked by degeneration of the articular cartilage, overgrowth of bone at the margins, and changes in the synovial membrane. [...] Also called degenerative joint disease (*Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary* 2019).

However, it is important to say that even though not dominant, inflammation is a component of osteoarthrosis, and recent studies (Robinson *et al.* 2016; Marchev *et al.* 2017; Griffin and Scanzello 2019; Nees *et al.* 2019) have highlighted its important role in the development and progression of the disease. The fact that recent research has found out the important role that inflammation plays in what has always been considered as a degenerative non-inflammatory disease makes *osteoarthritis* – perhaps – not entirely incorrect.

Osteoarthritis (OA) has long been viewed as a degenerative disease of cartilage, but accumulating evidence indicates that inflammation has a critical role in its pathogenesis. [...] (Robinson *et al.* 2016: 580).

Although osteoarthritis (OA) was historically referred to as the non-inflammatory arthritis, it is now considered a condition involving persistent low-grade inflammation and activation of innate inflammatory pathways. [...] (Griffin and Scanzello 2019: 57).

Osteoarthritis (OA) is one of the major causes of chronic pain. Although OA has long been considered a non-inflammatory "wear and tear" disease leading to loss of articular cartilage, recent findings provide convincing evidence that inflammatory mechanisms play a pivotal role in the pathophysiology of OA. [...] (Nees *et al.* 2019)

Independently of common aspects, osteoarthritis and osteoarthrosis

remain two distinct processes due to fundamentally different causes (François *et al.* 1995: 616; Tanchev 2017: 46) and are diseases that affect different age groups; osteoarthritis typically affects the elderly population, whereas osteoarthritis can also affect young people (see *Healthline*, <https://www.healthline.com/health/arthrosis-vs-arthritis>; *Humanitas*, <https://www.humanitas.net/news/arthritis-arthrosis-difference/>).

The misuse of *osteoarthritis* has also influenced medical Italian language, where *osteoartrite* has been employed with the meaning of degenerative disease for more than thirty years, as shown by *Churchill's Medical Dictionary* (1989):

osteoartrite Forma di artrite cronica caratterizzata da una degenerazione cartilaginea. [...]. Generalmente l'osteoartrite si verifica negli anziani, o in quei soggetti in cui le articolazioni si sono precedentemente deformate per qualsiasi ragione. Anche *osteoartrosi*, *artrite atrofica*, *artrite degenerativa*, *artrosi deformante*, *malattia degenerativa articolare*, *reumatismo di Heberden*.

[A form of chronic arthritis characterized by cartilage degeneration [...]. Osteoarthritis usually occurs in the elderly, or in those subjects whose joints have previously deformed for any reason. Also *osteoarthrosis*, *atrophic arthritis*, *degenerative arthritis*, *deforming arthrosis*, *degenerative joint disease*, *Heberden's rheumatism*].¹⁴

The use of *osteoartrite* as an equivalent for *osteoartrosi* is reported in the second definition provided by the *Treccani* encyclopedia (<https://www.treccani.it/>):

1. Processo infiammatorio, acuto, subacuto o cronico, a carico dei capi ossei articolari, osservabile nel corso di alcune malattie infettive.

[Inflammatory process, acute, subacute or chronic, affecting the joint bone heads, observable in the course of some infectious diseases.]

2. In adesione alla nomenclatura medica anglosassone, sinonimo di *osteoartrosi* o di *artrosi*.

[In compliance with the Anglo-Saxon medical nomenclature, synonym for *osteoarthrosis* or *arthrosis*.]

A research article clearly shows the use of *osteoartrite* as a synonym for *osteoartrosi* in medical Italian language:

Lo sviluppo dell'osteoartrite è associato alla presenza di determinati fattori di rischio come l'età avanzata, lo stato ormonale, la predisposizione genetica, l'obesità e la sindrome metabolica. [...] (Migliore and Picarelli 2018: 13)

¹⁴ The translations are by the author.

[The development of osteoarthritis is associated with the presence of specific risk factors such as old age, hormonal status, genetic predisposition, obesity, and metabolic syndrome].

As can be seen, osteoarthritis is referred to as a disease associated with several risk factors, the first of which is old age, which, as previously mentioned, is a characteristic of osteoarthrosis.

Another term about which there is confusion is *cellulitis*. *Wikipedia* includes this term in the list of types of inflammation pertaining to the integumentary system, and immediately specifies “not to be confused with *cellulite*.” Leroy Young and DiBernardo (2021: 521) state that there is “frequent and inappropriate interchangeable use of the terms “cellulite” and “cellulitis” (a potentially serious infection) to describe the same condition.” Both *cellulite* and *cellulitis* include the suffix conventionally used to refer to inflammation (although *cellulite* has a slightly different form as it has maintained its original Greek suffix), but the conditions the two terms refer to are completely distinct. Cellulitis is “the inflammation of subcutaneous, loose connective tissue” (*Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* 2019), while *cellulite* describes “dimpled contour alterations of the skin that are present in approximately 85% to 90% of post pubertal females” (Young and DiBernardo 2021: 521). *Cellulite* was loaned by English from French in 1968 after its use mainly in fashion magazines for beauty treatments (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com>). However, as Young and DiBernardo (2021: 521) report, the first clinical description of cellulite was provided in 1920, when it was described as “a non-inflammatory mesenchymal disorder attributable to abnormal water metabolism.” The precise, scientific term for what is referred to as *cellulite* is, indeed, *edematous-fibro-sclerotic panniculopathy*, which shows no element referring to inflammation, as well as other synonymous terms, namely *adiposis edematosa*, *nodular liposclerosis*, *gynoid lipodystrophy*, and *status protusus cutis* (Leroy Young and DiBernardo 2021: 522).

The list of types of inflammation provided by *Wikipedia* includes another term that deserves attention, namely *pneumonia*. As can be immediately noticed, this term does not contain the suffix *-itis*, yet it is used to refer to an inflammatory condition of the lung. More precisely, *Wikipedia* reports two terms to refer to the inflammation of the lungs, *pneumonia* and *pneumonitis*. The analysis of the use of these terms seems to suggest that *pneumonia* has a more specific meaning as compared to *pneumonitis*, which shows a more generic use: “Pneumonitis is distinguished from pneumonia on the basis of causation as well as its manifestation” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pneumonitis>). In this respect, it emerges that *pneumonitis* is the “inflammation of the lung” (*Dorland’s Illustrated Medical Dictionary* 2019), and *pneumonia* the “inflammation of the lung with consolidation and exudation” (*ibid.*). *Dorland’s Medical Dictionary* (2019) also specifies that “while *pneumonitis* and *pneumonia* are often used synonymously, *pneumonitis* is typically used when the cause is a non-infectious agent (such as chemicals or radiation).” The distinct use of *pneumonia* and *pneumonitis* according to the cause of the inflammation –

whether it is an infection or not – is confirmed by research literature on the topic, as shown by the following article extracts:

Pneumonia remains the leading cause of death in children outside the neonatal period, despite advances in prevention and management. [...] New conjugate vaccines against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* have contributed to decreases in radiologic, clinical and complicated pneumonia cases and have reduced hospitalization and mortality. [...] (le Roux and Zar 2017).

The clinically indistinguishable overlap between pneumonitis caused due to immune checkpoint inhibition (ICI) and pneumonia associated with COVID-19 has posed considerable challenges for patients with cancer and oncologists alike. [...] (Abid 2021).

Globally, infectious diseases, including pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria, along with pre-term birth complications, birth asphyxia and trauma, and congenital anomalies remain the leading causes of death for children under 5 years. [...] (World Health Organization 2022, ICD-11).

The use of *pneumonia* and *pneumonitis* as distinct terms to refer to the inflammation of the lungs depending on the type of agent that caused the condition is an indicator of lexical accuracy; however, the lack of *-itis* in *pneumonia* makes the term inaccurate. *Pneumonia* represents what may be called an ‘inaccurately transparent’ term in that the analysis of its surface form allows immediate decoding of the meaning (*pneumonia* is formed by the Greek *pneumōn*, meaning “lung”, and by the suffix *-ia*, typically forming nouns in scientific discourse) but no element referring to the concept of inflammation is displayed.

Similarly to *pneumonia*, a term that refers to inflammation but does not show the suffix *-itis* is *diphtheria*, a term which refers to a once-feared disease that has now become very rare thanks to vaccination. Diphtheria is not included in the list of the types of inflammation provided by *Wikipedia*, where it is displayed separately and described as an infectious disease. However, diphtheria is characterized by a strong inflammatory component, which manifests itself through the formation of a necrotic, thick membrane in the throat. This membrane is similar to the tanned leather of animals that in ancient Greece was used as a writing material and called *diphthera*. Hence, the name of the disease and of the bacterium that causes it, *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. The lack of *-itis* in *diphtheria* is due to the etymology of the term, which derives from French *diphthérie*, coined in 1855 by the physician Bretonneau; the latter had previously named the disease *diphthérite* (1821), anglicized as *diphtheritis* in 1826 (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com>). It is worth noting that *-itis* is also absent in other languages, such as Spanish and German, where the denominations are, respectively, *difteria* and *diphtherie*, while in the Italian language the suffix has been maintained, as displayed in *difterite*.

Finally, in the list of types of inflammation provided by *Wikipedia*, another term can be found that lacks the suffix *-itis*, i.e. *pleurisy*, which shows a linguistic anomaly. *Pleurisy* refers to the inflammation of the pleura, which is “the serous membrane enveloping the lungs and lining the walls of the pulmonary cavities” (*Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* 2006). Medical English also displays another term to refer to the inflammation of the pleura, *pleuritis*. *Pleurisy* and *pleuritis* are used interchangeably, with *pleuritis* registering 5,704 occurrences in *PubMed*, and *pleurisy* 4,160. *Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical>) reports the etymology of *pleurisy*, which seems to have been influenced by the Anglo-French *pleurisie*, afterward anglicized as *pleurisy*.

Conclusion

The present paper was inspired by Tanchev’s (2017) discussion regarding the misuse of *osteoarthritis* in orthopedic surgery. It investigated whether other cases exist in medical English of inaccurately used terms ending in *-itis*. The prominent position of English in medical research makes term accuracy a very important feature in the successful transmission of meanings. Accuracy refers to the correctness of a term; it represents a very important feature of medical communication together with other principles, such as transparency. The latter is the possibility of immediately decoding the meaning of a term through an analysis of its surface form. Transparency does not always overlap with accuracy. In this respect, medical English terminology, despite being transparent, shows terms that are not used with the meaning an analysis of their form would suggest, but are referred to different concepts. Furthermore, the present investigation analyzed affixation in medical language, and the important role that it plays in the process of terminology systematization and standardization was highlighted. To address all the above issues, a list of diseases and conditions referring to inflammatory diseases was retrieved from *Wikipedia*, and the *PubMed* database was queried by means of keywords to provide illustrative text strings. The *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11, 2019)* served as a reference tool for the analysis. The investigation was also supported by authoritative medical dictionaries. The results showed that even though most of the investigated English terminology ending in *-itis* is accurately used, cases exist of either improper use of the suffix or imprecision due to the lack of the suffix itself. Corrective terminology interventions should be carried out to guarantee accuracy and semantic precision in taxonomies of diseases to prevent any ambiguities and misleading uses in medical literature and practice.

Medical sciences are in continuous evolution parallel to the rapid progress of scientific knowledge. Scholars Areej *et al.* (2018: 2) state that learning medical terminology “may seem like learning the entire vocabulary of a foreign language.” The rapidity with which medical language develops entails that the outcomes linguistic research can accomplish are extremely temporary but also that medical language is an endless source of investigation.

Although the principles of accuracy and precision in medical terminology

are generally respected to guarantee clear and effective communication, various factors can arise that lead to 'deviation from the rule'. There can be the case of a term that for tradition or inertia has been used improperly, and no remedial change has been made over time; on the contrary, its misuse has become so popular to be registered in dictionaries (e.g. *osteoarthritis*). There is also the unremitting progress of medicine, which leads to reinterpretation strategies whereby already existing linguistic elements are employed to create new meanings (e.g. *-osis*). Moreover, influences from other languages cannot be ignored. Medical English, in particular, has been intensely affected not only by Greek and Latin but also by French, which left important marks in its development. However, the fact remains that precise and accurate terminology is fundamental in medical language as it must ensure effective and safe communication. Medical terminology must refer unequivocally and accurately to the meaning with which it is used because it is directly related to practice, diagnostics, and treatment. In this respect, future research is needed to investigate whether other cases of inaccuracy and misuse of medical English terminology exist. Linguistic research can play a crucial role in identifying any critical issues and suggesting corrective interventions. This is crucial in the specific case of English, the chosen language for international scientific communication and therefore the most influential worldwide.

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of interest.

The authors of this paper certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; membership, employment; affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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