

## Nomination of mental illnesses in languages of different types

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*A study of names for mental disorders in English, Chinese and Russian is the best way to reveal the national specifics of this fragment of the linguistic worldview. The naming methods of these concepts indicate the nature of this specificity. It has two causes. Firstly, these languages are typologically different: Russian is synthetic, English is analytical and Chinese is isolating one. Secondly, this specificity is explained by the mentality differences of Russian, English and Chinese speakers. However, except specifics, there are a number of common features in the nomination of mental diseases in languages of different types. These common features are in the use of native language resources for common names and borrowings for special ones; in the same metonymic transfers, in the closeness of semantic spheres of "mental illness" and 'stupidity'.*

**Keywords:** *mental illness, nomination, semantic transfer, borrowing*

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to compare the nomination of mental diseases in English, Russian and Chinese. The names of mental disorders show us the diversity of naming mechanisms in different languages and national specifics of the worldview fragment which is connected with such names. For this study, the words were selected not from special dictionaries, but only from current ones, because the general tendencies of nomination and mentality specifics are connected with common nonterminological vocabulary.

### 2. Names of mental illnesses in current English, Russian and Chinese

The specificity and importance of the concept 'soul' in the Russian linguistic worldview is well known; it has been repeatedly and variously described (here we refer only to the conference in Warsaw, dedicated to the concept 'soul', and the book published after this conference [Kapełus, Masłowska, Pazio-Wlazłowska (eds.) 2016]). It should be noted that only in Russian, mental illnesses received a generalized name *душевная болезнь* (literally 'an illness of soul'). Everyday common nominations, like *умственная отсталость* 'mental handicap', *слабоумие* 'dementia', etc. show that the Russian word *душа* is synonymous with the words *разум* and *интеллект* 'intelligence, mind', when we are talking about diseases. In other contexts the soul and heart are equated. The name *психическая болезнь* (literally 'an illness of psyche') is also used only in the Russian language: it is created by analogy with *душевная болезнь* on the basis of the derivative from borrowing (< Greek *psyche* 'soul').

In many other languages, the common names of mental and nervous diseases are based on the absence, lack, defect of the mind – a concept of "mind, intelligence" is their nominating basis. In particular, this is so in English: *mental affection, disease, illness, disorder, alienation, handicap, disability, deficiency; unsoundness of mind, illness of mind, feeble-mindedness < feeble-minded, weakness of mind, intellectual impairment, etc.*

Both in Russian and in English, there is the possibility of generalization: a particular concept can be denoted by the general one. In Russian, *умственно отсталый человек* 'mentally defective man' can be called simply *больной* 'a sick man'; Eng. *insane* (> *insanity*)

goes back to Lat. *insanus* ‘crazy, abnormal’ < *in* ‘not’ + *sanus* ‘healthy’ (> Eng. *sane* ‘healthy’) [Online Etymology Dictionary].

Semantics and compatibility of Eng. *soul* does not differ fundamentally from Rus. *душа*, except for the specificity of the Russian lexeme, which has been widely discussed.

Russian *душа* and English *soul* correspond to two words in Chinese: 心灵 [xinling] < 心 [xin] ‘heart’ + 灵 [ling] ‘spirit’; 精神 [jingshen], which was borrowed from Japanese 精神 [せいしん].

The history of the word with Japanese origin is as follows. In accordance with the Taoist tradition, three treasures are emphasized, and must be "protected" and "nourished" throughout human life. The first one is Jing (精), which can be translated as ‘semen’ or ‘essence’. It is a special substance (a kind of energy) that carries information about the structure and certain characteristics of the physical human body. On the basis of this concept of Taoism, Japanese created the word 精神 [せいしん] ‘soul’, which came into Chinese later.

The second treasure is Qi (氣) – vital energy (vital force) that circulates in the human body, and allows all organs and systems of the body to function.

Shen (神) is the third treasure. This term can be translated as ‘Spirit’. It is Shen that makes us reasonable, thinking, capable for self-improvement, and this is the third Chinese lexeme, which correlates with Rus. *душа* and Eng. *soul*.

From the above mentioned borrowing from Japanese we can trace the Chinese word 精神病 [jingshenbing] ‘mental illness’ < 精神 [せいしん] ‘soul’ + Chinese suffix 病 [bing] ‘sickness’<sup>1</sup>.

However, the following nominations are more frequent. The concept of “mental retardation” is denoted in Chinese by the lexeme 智力障碍 ‘mental retardation’ [zhilizhang'ai] (simplified 智障 [zhizhang]) < 智力 [zhili] ‘intellect’ + 障碍 [zhang'ai] ‘hindrance’. Chinese 痴呆症 [chidaizheng] ‘dementia’ comes back to 痴呆 [chidai] ‘stupidity’ + suffix 症 [zheng] ‘disease’. Its synonym is 失智症 ‘dementia’ [shizhizheng] < 失 [shi] ‘loss’ + 智 [zhi] ‘intelligent’ + suffix 症 [zheng] ‘disease’.

In all three analyzed languages, the names created by the native means of each language are only used for the general notion of “mental illness, mental retardation”. The designation of particular, specific mental diseases, as usual, are borrowed words. This general tendency is due to the fact that the nature and etiology of mental illness were usually ignored by the majority of the language speakers – their goal was to denote the fact of illness in general.

Here are some examples of the names of specific mental or neurological diseases in English and Russian, which come back, as a rule, to Latin or Greek roots – they are often internationalisms. As a rule, such names are medical terms, for example, Eng. *oligophreny* ‘congenital mental retardation, dementia’, different degrees of which are denoted by words *idiotcy*, *imbecibility*, *debility* – its Russian equivalents are *олигофрения*, *идиотизм*, *имбецилизм*, *дебилизм*. This list is very long: Eng. *dementia* (< Lat. *dement-*, *demens* ‘crazy’ < *de-* + *ment-*, *mens* ‘mind’) - Rus. *деменция* ‘degradation of mental functions, resulting from brain damage’; Eng. *hypomania* – Rus. *гипомания* ‘an easy degree of mania’; Eng. *bipolar disorder* – Rus. *биполярное расстройство* (calque of the Latin expression) ‘maniac-

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese 病 [bing] ‘illness’ is treated in this article as a suffix, because in modern Chinese it can not be used alone. Independent use of 病 [bing] is possible as a shortened variant of 疾病 [jibing] ‘illness’ or as an archaism.

depressive psychosis'; Eng. *kleptomania* – Rus. *клетомания*, and many others. There are also a series of international disease names which origins can be traced back to proper nouns, for example, Eng. *Lou Gehrig's disease* – Rus. *болезнь Лу Герига* (Henry Lou Gehrig was a famous American baseball player who suffered amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) [Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary]. Eng. *Munchausen syndrome* – Rus. *синдром Мюнхгаузена* is named after the literary character of Baron von Munchausen, who liked to draw long bow. Eng. *Parkinson's disease* – Rus. *болезнь Паркинсона* (> Eng. *parkinsonism* – рус. *паркинсонизм*) is named after English physician James Parkinson. The French neurologist Jean Charcot suggested this name in honor of the British doctor and author of “An essay on the shaking palsy”, whose work was not properly appreciated during his life.

In Chinese, the general trend of denoting specific concepts by borrowing remains, but it is realized differently – often through loanwords from Japanese. For example, Chinese 白痴 [baichi] ‘idiocy’ was borrowed from Japanese.

There are many other Japanisms among Chinese medical terms. Chinese (simplified) 洁癖 [jiepi], traditional 潔癖 ‘misophobia’ = ‘a pathological fear of contamination and germs, avoidance of contact with surrounding objects’ < Japan. 潔癖症 [けっぺきしょう]. The hieroglyph 洁 [jie] has the meaning ‘cleanliness’, and 癖 [pi] means ‘eccentricity, strangeness’. The productive Chinese suffix 癖 [pi] with the semantics of ‘eccentricity, strangeness’ is often used for the terminology of mental illnesses; it often appears as a part of terms like 窃盜癖 ‘kleptomania’, 藏书癖 ‘compulsive hoarding’, or ‘hoarding disorder’, 异食癖 ‘picacism’ = ‘the desire to eat something inedible’.

Chinese (simplified) 神经病 [shenjingbing] ‘psychosis’, traditional Chinese 神經病 ‘psychosis’ consists of word 神经 [shenjing] ‘nerve’ + 病 [bing] ‘sickness’. The meaning of ‘psychosis’ was borrowed from Japanese 神經症 [しんけいしょう] ‘psychosis’. The very word from the traditional Chinese 神經 can be traced back to the Chinese 神 ‘the god, the spirit’ + 經 ‘a book, a text’, and in archaic Chinese it meant ‘the mysterious book or text’, i.e. it was not related to medicine. The medical meaning of 神經 ‘nerve’ was created by Japanese doctor Sugita Genpaku (Japan. 杉田玄白 [すぎたげんぱく]) by means of a semantic translation of Dutch *zenuw* [黄河清 1996]. In the early twentieth century, the word with this new meaning came into Chinese medical terminology – at that time the dictionary of the Chinese language was actively replenished with Japanese lexemes. A number of other Chinese psychiatric terms are also connected with the word 神经 [shenjing] ‘nerve’.

Chinese 神经官能症 [shenjingguannengzheng] ‘neurosis’ is a compound word consisting of 神经 [shenjing] ‘nerve’ (semantic borrowing from Japanese) + 官能 [guanneng] = 功能 ‘function’ + Chinese suffix 症 [zheng] ‘syndrome / illness’. The term 神经官能症 ‘neurosis’ is most often used in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, and on the mainland of China they prefer to use the word 神经症 [shenjingzheng] ‘neurosis’, which has the same meaning.

Simplified Chinese 神经过敏 [shenjingguomin] ‘hyperesthesia’ = ‘high sensitivity’, traditional Chinese 神經過敏 < 神經 [shenjing] ‘nerve’ + 过 [guo] = 过于 [guoyu] ‘excessively, overly, overmuch’ + 敏 [min] = 敏感 [mingan] ‘sensitive’ is borrowed from Japanese. In modern Chinese 神經過敏 is polysemantic: the first meaning of it is the medical term ‘hyperesthesia’, and the second one is ‘skeptical (person)’, ‘paranoid (person)’.

Chinese 神经衰弱 [shenjingshuairuo] ‘neurasthenia’, consisting of the word 神经 [shenjing] ‘nerve’ + 衰弱 [shuairuo] ‘weak’, also was borrowed from Japanese 神経衰弱 [しんけいすいじゃく].

The name of the concept “autism” was borrowed from Japanese, too. Simplified Chinese 自闭症 [zibizheng] ‘autism’, traditional Chinese 自閉症 ‘autism’, which includes characters 自 [zi] ‘self’ + 闭 [bi] ‘close’ + 症 [zheng] ‘disease’ go back to Japanese 自閉症 [じへいしょう] ‘autism’.

Chinese 恐高症 [konggaozheng] ‘acrophobia’ = ‘irrational fear or phobia of heights’ is not related to Japanese. The word goes back to the Chinese character 恐 [kong] ‘fear’ + 高 [gao] ‘height’ + 症 [zheng] ‘syndrome / disease’, it is the semantic calque of the internationalism *acrophobia* (< Greek ἄκρον ‘peak, summit, edge’ and φόβος ‘fear’ + Chinese suffix 症 [zheng] ‘syndrome / disease’).

There are also some special names of mental illnesses in Chinese that can be traced back to the traditional Chinese medical terms, for example, 癔病 [yibing] ‘hysteria’ = 癔症 < 癔 [yi] ‘hysteria’ (the term from traditional Chinese medicine) + suffix 病 [bing] ‘sickness’. The other term from traditional Chinese medicine is 谵妄 [zhanwang] ‘delirium’ < 谵 [zhan] ‘to rave’ + 妄 [wang] ‘ludicrous, absurd’, i.e. the disease is named metonymically according to the characteristic symptom – the patient’s incoherent speech.

Other metonymic transfers are also commonly used: mental diseases are nominated not only as problems with the mind and intelligence (Russian *сумасшедший* ‘crazy’), but also as problems with organs ‘containing’ the intelligence: Russian expressions *на голову больной* ‘with a sick head’, *на голову хромает* (verbatim ‘his head is limp’), *с головой не дружит* (verbatim ‘not friendly with one’s head’); English *go out of one’s head*, *crack one’s brains*. Obviously, this is due to the metonymic nomination of the mind through the name of the organ that is “responsible” for it.

Often a mentally ill person or a person with inadequate behavior or a fool is designated by the same lexeme: Rus. *сумасшедший* ‘crazy’, colloquialism *псих* ‘psychopath’, Eng. *crazy* ‘mentally ill person’ → ‘person with inadequate behavior’. Examples of the same semantic development also exist in Chinese: 神经不正常 [shenjingbuzhengchang] ‘nervous, troubled, abnormal (person)’ can be traced back to 神经 [shenjing] ‘nerve’ + 不正常 [buzhengchang] ‘abnormal’. The Chinese colloquialism 疯子 [fengzi] ‘madman, loco, loony’ contains both meanings: ‘mentally ill person’ and ‘person with inadequate behavior’ (< 疯 [feng] ‘crazy’, ‘inadequate behavior’ + 子 [zi] Chinese suffix without semantics).

Semantic transfer ‘mentally ill person’ → ‘a fool’ is represented in Russian names of patients suffering from specific types of mental illnesses: *идиот* ‘idiot’, *дебил* ‘moron’; Eng. *idiot*, *imbecile*; Chinese 傻子 [shazi] ‘imbecile’, 傻瓜 [shagua] ‘moron’. In Chinese, this semantics may also be transferred by lexemes like 白痴 [baichi] ‘idiocy (sickness)’, ‘stupid’ (Japanism); 弱智 [ruozhi] ‘mental handicap (illness / disability)’, ‘stupid’ (< 弱 [ruo] ‘weak’ + 智 [zhi] ‘intelligence, mind’); 智力障碍 [zhilizhang'ai] (often abbreviated as 智障 [zhizhang]) ‘mental handicap’, ‘retard, moron’ < 智力 [zhili] ‘intelligence’ + 障碍 [zhang'ai] ‘hindrance’. The shortened word 智障 [zhizhang] ‘mental handicap, intellectual incapacity’ (→ ‘a fool’) came into Chinese through semantic translation from English *intellectual disability*.

### 3. Conclusion

There are several common trends in the nomination of mental illnesses in languages of different types.

Firstly, the native nominative means of a particular language are used for the nomination of mental illness in nonterminological names, but when naming specific mental diseases, usually, borrowing is preferred. This statement is not as true for English as for Russian and Chinese, because some of English general terms for mental disorders are loanwords from Latin (*insane*) or French (*disease*).

Secondly, in all analyzed languages there are such semantic metonymic transfers as: 1) the genus-species synecdoche – mental illness can be nominated through naming a concept of "disease"; 2) mental illness can also be nominated as a problem with the organ which is responsible for intelligence.

Thirdly, there are other frequent semantic transfers: ‘mentally sick person’ → ‘person with inadequate behavior’; ‘mentally ill person’ → ‘fool, stupid’.

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