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Getting to Grippe With Influenza: An Investigation of Why the Disease Is Called That

We investigated two competing terms for influenza in English, Spanish, German, French, and Italian: “influenza” and “grippe” to determine what may have driven the choice in disease name under these competing options. Of the two, “grippe” is more commonly used in Indo-European languages. Using minimum edit distance (Levenshtein distance) we determined the available space in each language for an incoming disease name from a justification of if one term is too similar to words already in use, the other may be preferred. This explains partially why influenza is called what it is in the European languages considered.

Research type

Basic research

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