Methods Acronyms – The Witty Side of Science

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The name of a method usually contains its basic principles. To simplify the name of a method and make it easier to remember, an acronym is often used. However, sometimes the name of a method and its acronym are formed in such a way that the result often has quite a different or even humorous meaning. Here we have sorted out acronyms of scientific methods that have unusual or humorous meaning. The summation is a list of representative methods that represent the true face of science: an interesting, skillful and joyful human activity.

Key words: *Acronyms, methods, nuclear magnetic resonance, computational chemistry*

Introduction

Scientists are often portrayed in the public as spectacle-wearing nerds in white lab-coats with no sense of humor, while science is generally perceived as a boring human activity. In some cases this might be true, but the majority of scientists are often frolicking with their jobs. This results in naming new techniques and methods with a sense of humor.

Usually the names of different techniques are acronyms or abbreviations derived from the initial letters of the full name that gives it its description (e. g. **NMR** stands for ***N****uclear* ***M****agnetic* ***R****esonance*).[1] In order to make it catchier and easier to pronounce and remember, sometimes an acronym can be formed from not only the initial letters of the full name. As a result, sometimes unintentionally, but most often deliberately, techniques and methods are given funny abbreviations and acronyms. An example is the method the acronym of which is **NOESY**,[2] representing a nuclear magnetic resonance method – ***N****uclear* ***O****verhausser* ***E****ffect* ***S****pectrocop****Y***. This acronym is read [nou:zi] which is very similar to the English word *nosey* meaning *one who has a big nose*. Further, "nosey" is commonly used to describe a person who pries into other people's affairs (this makes NOESY a particularly good acronym for an investigative technique). Some acronyms are in fact well-known words as the acronym **FISH** (***F****luorescent* ***I****n-****S****itu* ***H****ybridization*)[3] which is the cytogenetic technique that can be used to detect and localize the presence or absence of specific DNA sequences in chromosomes.

Although probably the largest number of new method acronyms can be found for resonance techniques, in other fields of science this kind of play is also used. In mass spectroscopy, one of the examples is the method whose acronym is **MALDI** (**M**atrix **A**ssisted **L**aser **D**esorption/**I**onization)[4] which is read as [moldi]. Mold is a type of earth that is friable and suitable for plant growth. Therefore, the meaning of the acronym **MALDI** can be interpreted as *earthy*. In the domain of instrumental analytical methods, specifically infra-red spectroscopy, there is a method **SNIFTIRS** (**S**ubtractively **N**ormalized **I**nterfacial **FT-IR** **S**pectroscopy).[5] A *snifter* is the name of a glass used to drink spirits such as brandy designed to allow the drinker a good sniff of the drink. Often a method has its acronym formed according to a personal name. An example in astronomy is **LISA** (**L**aser **I**nterferometer **S**pace **A**ntenna)[6] or in imunoanalytical methods **ELISA** (**E**nzyme-**L**inked **I**mmunoSorbent **A**ssay)[7]. Sometimes an acronym gives a method a powerful name, like **BLAST** (**B**asic **L**ocal **A**lignment **S**earch **T**ool)[8] which is an algorithm used in bioinformatics for comparing primary biological sequence information, such as the amino-acid sequences of different proteins or the nucleotides of DNA sequences.

This paper summarizes some of the funniest and most interesting acronyms used in different fields of science. The purpose of the paper is to extract the acronyms of scientific methods that were the most impressive, and to inspire and encourage readers to exercise playfulness and imagination when creating their own acronyms.

Acronyms

The most interesting acronyms, which are accidentally or purposely funny, come from the youngest techniques. These are usually methods of the nuclear magnetic resonance, computational chemistry and different methods and techniques used in astronomy and similar sciences.

Acronyms of nuclear magnetic resonance methods

Beside the already mentioned, other amusing acronyms used in techniques of nuclear magnetic resonance are:

– **BIRD** (**BI**linear **R**otation **D**ecoupling)[9]

– **BURP** (**B**nad-selective, **U**niform-**R**esponse, pure-phase **P**ulses).[10] Burp has a meaning of the act of belching.[11]

– **CAMELSPIN** (**C**ross-relaxation **A**ppropriate for **M**inimolecules **E**mulated by **L**ocked **SPIN**s).[12] This acronym can be divided into two words: camel and spin. Camel is an animal and spin is rotation. So, this acronym could have a meaning of a camel that is rotating (spinning).

– **CHESS** (**CHE**mical **S**hift selective **S**uppression.[13] Chess is a board game.[11]

– **CIDNP** (**C**hemically **I**nduced **D**ynamic **N**uclear **P**olarization).[14] CIDNP is phonetically equivalent to the English word "kidnap" which has a meaning of seizing and detaining or carrying away by unlawful force.

– **CRAMPS** (**C**ombined **R**otation **A**nd **M**ultiple **P**ulse **S**pectroscopy).[15] Cramps are sharp abdominal pains.[11]

– **CYCLOPS** (**CYCL**ically **O**rdered **P**hase **S**equence phase cycle).[16] Cyclops are one-eyed creatures or giants from Greek mythology.

– **DANTE** (**D**elays **A**lternating with **N**utations for **T**ailored **E**xcitation).[17] Dante is the name of the Italian poet from Florence in the 13rd and 14th century (Dante Alighieri is the author of The Divine Comedy).

– **DISCO** (**DI**fferences and **S**ums within **CO**SY).[18] Disco is a night club for dancing to live or recorded music.

– **DOUBTFUL** (**DOUB**le Quantum **T**ransitions for **Fi**nding **U**nresolved **L**ines).[19] Doubtful has a meaning of lacking of definite opinion, conviction or determination.

– **DRYCLEAN** (**D**iffusion-**R**educed Water Signals in SpectroscopY of Mole**C**ules Moving s**L**ow**E**r th**AN** water).[20] "To dry clean" has a meaning of cleaning with chemicals other than water.[11]

– **DRYSTEAM** (**DRY ST**imulated **E**cho **A**cquisition **M**ode).[21]

– **ENDOR** (**E**lectron-**N**ucleus **DO**uble **R**esonance).[22] Endor is the name of the planet in the Star Wars movie serial. It is inhabited with Ewoks.

– **FLOPSY** (**FL**ip-Fl**OP S**pectroscop**Y**).[23] In English language "to flop" means to fall down suddenly, especially with noise.

– **FUCOUP** (**FU**lly **COUP**led C,H Correlation).[24] This acronym can be phonetically pronounced as [fak ap], which in a slightly vulgar way has the meaning of ruining or spoiling especially through stupidity or carelessness.

– **GRASP** (**GR**adient-**A**ccelerated **SP**ectroscopy).[25] "To grasp something" means to take or seize it eagerly.[11]

– **GROPE** (**G**eneralized compensation for **R**esonance **O**ffset and **P**ulse Length **E**rrors).[26] "To grope" to search for something blindly or uncertainly11.

– **HEHAHA** (**HE**teronuclear **HA**rtmann **HA**hn spectroscopy).[27] This acronym imitates human laughter.

– **HOHAHA** (**HO**monuclear **HA**rtmann **HA**hn spectroscopy).[28] Same as the previous.

– **INADEQUATE** (**I**ncredible **N**atural **A**bundance **D**oubl**E** **QUA**ntum **T**ransfer **E**xperiment)[29]. Inadequate means not adequate.[11]

– **INDOR** (**IN**ternuclear **DO**uble **R**esonance).[30] This refers to something that is inside, *indoor*.

– **INEPT** (**I**nsensitive **N**ucleus **E**nhancement by **P**olarization **T**ransfer).[31] The word inept has its origin in Latin *ineptus*. It refers to something generally incompetent.[11]

– **JUMPRET** (**JUMP**-and-**RET**urn Water Suppression).[32] This acronym is made up of two words: jump and ret. Ret can be pronounced like the word rat, therefore this acronym has the meaning of *a jumping rat*.

– **PASADENA** (**P**arahydrogen **A**nd **S**ynthesis **A**llow **D**ramatically **E**nhanced **N**uclear **A**lignment)[33]. Pasadena is a city in California, USA.

– **POMMIE** (**P**hase **O**scillations to **M**axi**MI**ze **E**diting).[34] In Australia and New Zealand pommie is a derogatory term for a British person, especially a recent immigrant.

– **SEDUCE** (**SE**quence for selective composite pulse **D**ecoupling **U**sing shaped pulses).[35] Seduce means to lead astray, as from duty, rectitude.[11] The most common meaning of the word "seduce" in English is to tempt one into sexual contact. This is an example when all the letters in the acronym of the method are not present in the description of that method.

– **SECSY** (**S**pin-**E**cho **C**orrelation **S**pectroscop**Y**).[36] This acronym is read like the word *sexy*.

– **SIMPLTN** (**SIM**ulation of **P**u**L**se and **T**wo-dimensional **N**MR).[37] Phonetically, this acronym is read like the word simpleton, meaning a person lacking common sense.

– **STEAM** (**ST**imulated **E**cho **A**cquisition **M**ode).[38] Steam is a vapor rising from the heated substance (liquid).

– **TANGO** (**T**esting for **A**djacent **N**uclei with a **G**yration **O**perator).[39] Tango is a Latin-American dance.

– **TOE** (**T**runcated driven n**OE**)[40]. Toe is one of the digits of the human foot.[11]

– **WALTZ** (**W**ideband **A**lternating-Phase **L**ow-power **T**echnique for **Z**ero residual splitting)[41]. Waltz (or in German *waltzer*) is a ballroom dance.

– **WATERGATE** (**WATER** suppression by **G**r**A**dient **T**ailored **E**xcitation).[42] Watergate is the well-known political scandal that happened in the USA in 1972 and 1973. Water gate is a regulator or gate that controls the rate of water flow through a sluice.

– **WURST** (**W**ideband, **U**niform **R**ate, and **S**mooth **T**runcation).[43] Wurst is the German word for sausage.

One interesting acronym that occurs in other spectroscopic methods is **STICS** (***S**pace-**T**ime **I**mage **C**orrelation **S**pectroscopy*),[44] which is read like the English word sticks.

Acronyms of computational chemistry methods

Numerous software, methods and algorithms used in computational chemistry, a young and developing field of science, are named with interesting acronyms. A good example is **CHARMM** (**C**hemistry at **HAR**vard **M**acromolecular **M**echanics)[45] – a widely used molecular simulation program with broad application in many-particle systems – which is read as charm (chärm).

Other interesting acronyms used in computational chemistry:

– **BOSS** (**B**iochemical and **O**rganic **S**imulation **S**ystem).[46] Boss is a person who makes decisions, exercises authority, dominates.[11]

– **COMBINE** (**COM**parative **BIN**ding **E**nergy).[47] Combine means to bring into or join in a close union or whole.

– **COMPASS** (**C**ondensed-phase **O**ptimized **M**olecular **P**otentials for **A**tomistic **S**imulation **S**tudies).[48] Compass is an instrument for determining directions, as by means of a freely rotating magnetized needle that indicates magnetic north.[11]

– **CORINA** (**CO**o**R**d**INA**tes).[49] Corina is a personal name.

– **FADE** (The **F**ast **A**tomic **D**ensity **E**valuator).[50] Fade means to lose brightness or vividness of color.[11]

– **FANTOM** (**FA**st **N**ewton-Raphson **TO**rsion Angle **M**inimizer).[51] Fantom is an appearance or an illusion without material substance, as a dream image, mirage, or optical illusion.[11] The term "phantom" (pronounced identically) is also often used to refer to ghosts.

– **GAMESS** (The **G**eneral **A**tomic and **M**olecular **E**lectronic **S**tructure **S**ystem).[52] This acronym is read like the plural of the word game.

– **GRAMM** (The **G**lobal **RA**nge **M**olecular **M**atching).[53] This acronym is read like a metric unit of mass; one thousandth of a kilogram.

– **MICE** (**M**olecular **I**ntera**C**tiv**E**).[54] The word "mice" is plural of the word mouse.

– **PADRE (P**airwise **A**tomic **D**ensity **R**everse **E**ngineering)[55]. Padre is the Spanish, Italian and Portuguese word for father.

Acronyms of other scientific methods

As previously mentioned, the most funny and interesting acronyms are found in the younger fields of science. Astronomy is an ancient science that flourished and grew with the development and use of spectroscopic methods. In astronomy there are many acronyms that represent personal names like **ADONIS** (**AD**aptive **O**ptics **N**ear-**I**nfrared **S**ystem)[56] and **DENIS** (**DE**ep **N**ear **I**nfrared Survey of the Southern **S**ky) [57].

Other acronyms in astronomy that are personal names:

– **ALEXIS** (**A**rray of **L**ow **E**nergy **X**-ray **I**maging **S**ensors).[58]

– **AMANDA** (**A**ntarctic **M**uon **A**nd **N**eutrino **D**etector **A**rray).[59]

– **ARIES** (**AR**izona **I**nfrared Imager and **E**chelle **S**pectrograph).[60] Aries is the first sign of the Zodiac in astrology pictured as a ram.

– **DEBRA** (**D**iffuse **E**xtragalactic **B**ackground **RA**diation).[61]

– **MICHELLE** (**M**id-**I**nfrared e**CHELLE** spectrograph).[62]

There are also acronyms of the systems and procedures in studies of different effects and occurrences:

– **2D-FRUTTI** (2-D Photon Counting System).[63] This is an example when the acronym is not made according to the rule of using the letters of the full name (the letter F in this acronym is not present in the full name of the system). This acronym resembles the Italian term *tutti frutti* (all fruits). In addition, *tutti frutti* refers to the ice-cream that contains bits of candied fruits.

– **BOOMERanG** (**B**alloon **O**bservations **O**f **M**illimetric **E**xtragalactic **R**adiation **an**d **G**eophysics).[64] A boomerang is a bent or twisted throwing club that is characteristic to Australian Aborigines.

– **CANGAROO** (**C**ollaboration between **A**ustralian and **N**ippon for a **GA**mma **R**ay **O**bservatory in the **O**utback).[65] Cangaroo can be read as the word kangaroo which is any of various herbivorous leaping marsupial mammals (family Macropodidae) of Australia, New Guinea, and adjacent islands.

– **CHIPS** (**C**osmic **H**ot **I**nterstellar **P**lasma **S**pectrometer).[66] Chips usually refer to thin pieces of food (e.g. potato chips). In this case they can mean the plural of a piece of an electronic circuit, a chip.

– **COBRAS/SAMBA** (**CO**smic **B**ackground **R**adiation **A**nisotropy **S**atellite/**SA**tellite to **M**easure **B**ackground **A**nisotropies).[67] Cobra is a well-known venomous family of snakes. Samba is one of the most popular forms of dance in Brazil. Therefore, this acronym can have a meaning of samba dance of cobras.

– **DEIMOS** (**D**eep **E**xtragalactic **I**maging **M**ulti **O**bject **S**pectrograph).[68] According to Greek mythology Phobos (Fear) and Deimos (Dread) accompanied Ares, god of war, into battle. Deimos is also a satellite of the planet Mars (in Greek mythology Mars is Ares).

– **EROS** (**E**xpérience de **R**echerche d'**O**bjects **S**ombres).[69] Eros in Greek mythology is the god of love.

– **FIFI** (**F**ar **I**nfrared **F**abry-perot **I**nterferometer).[70] Fifi is short for the name Josephine. It is often used stereotypically (or insultingly) as a name for a small, cute, harmless dog.

– **HAWAII** (**H**gCdTe **A**stronomical **W**ide **A**rea **I**nfrared **I**mager).[71] Hawaii is a chain of hundreds of volcanic islands in the Pacific Ocean.

– **MACHO** (**MA**ssive **C**ompact **H**alo **O**bjects).[72] A halo is a visible glowing ring that encompasses a celestial object (e. g. Sun, Moon, etc). In this case, Halo refers to the outermost portion of our galaxy, a spherical region that extends beyond the galactic disk, and whose composition is unknown. Macho means someone being aggressively virile.

– **WIMP** (**W**eakly **I**nteracting **M**assive **P**articles).[73] WIMPS are hypothetical objects that might make up the halo. A wimp is a weak and/or cowardly person.

Sometimes methods are named after cities. The **MONTE CARLO**[74] method enables approximate solutions for a wide range of mathematical problems with the aid of computers. It is widely implemented in biophysics and modelling of macromolecules. Similar examples can be found in different fields of sciences, other than chemistry and physics. **CREMONA**[75] transformations in mathematics are well known. They are named after Italian mathematician Luigi Cremona. In architecture, Cremona's method for graphical calculus of forces in equilibrium shortened **CREMONA**. In psychology there is a scale **WAIS** (The **W**echsler **A**dult **I**ntelligence **S**cale)[76] that is frequently used for assessment of general or global intelligence. This acronym can be read as the word *ways* (plural of *way*). In archeology there is a simple acronym **CLIMAP** (paleo**CLI**matic **MAP**s)[77] that defines

a project aimed at making paleoclimatic maps showing temperatures on sea surfaces in different locations in different periods. **CLIMAP** has a similar pronunciation as *climb map* (to climb on the map). It is evident that playing with acronyms is not specific to natural sciences although it is most abundant in them.

Conclusion

The featured acronyms are just a small sample, but we chose them because they were the most impressive, whether they are unusual or humorous. Acronyms can be formed simply from the initial letters of a method's description or by combining the letters from the description. Most often, a depiction is made deliberately to obtain a funny acronym. Almost all the presented examples show science in its true light – as a playful and luxuriant human activity. Every scientist finds satisfaction in his own field and only a scratch is seen in mentioned acronyms. Humor is a characteristic of the human race as is inexhaustible thirst for knowledge. Finally, we hope that our summation of funny acronyms will be a motivation and inspiration to scientists around the world to continue coming up with witty, unusual and imaginative acronyms that will brighten the often tedious scientific work.

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SAŽETAK

Imena metoda i akronimi – duhovita strana znanosti

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Ime metode najčešće sadrži opis njenih osnovnih načela. Kako bi se pojednostavio naziv metode, a samim time i olakšalo pamćenje naziva, redovito se upotrebljavaju akronimi. Međutim, često se događa da su ime metode i njezin akronim osmišljeni tako da dobiveni naziv ima potpuno drugačije značenje te ponekad i humorističnu konotaciju. Izdvojeni su akronimi znanstvenih metoda koji imaju neuobičajena i često humoristična značenja. Pregled ovih akronima je zbir reprezentativnih metoda koje prikazuju znanost u njezinom pravom svjetlu kao zahtjevnu, zanimljivu i zabavnu ljudsku aktivnost.

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