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HISTORICAL NOTE

Aphasia or aphemia

I remember reading the ancient use of the word aphemia instead of aphasia when a young student. Aphemia, I felt was a mellifluous, romantic word and wondered about its origin. Trousseau in his seventh lecture given

at the Hôtel-Dieu, Paris, *On Aphasia* gives an interesting footnote.¹

“The affection which I am about to describe was, in 1841, termed *alalia* by Professor Lordat*; and in 1861, Mr Broca changed this name for that of *aphemia*. But Mr Chrysaphis, a very distinguished Greek scholar, and a Greek himself, although accepting the term *alalia*, proposed, however, as a better one that of *aphasia*, derived from a privative and, *φασις* speech. Mr Littré, whose authority is so great, and Dr Briau have likewise preferred the word *aphasia*, and all three concur in rejecting *aphemia*. I had at first adopted the name

of *aphemia* after Mr Broca, but I have now, on the authority of the savants whom I have mentioned, substituted for it that of *aphasia*.”

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¹ Del'aphasie, maladie d'élite récemment sous le nom impropre d'aphémie. *Gaz Hôp Paris* 1864;37:13–14; 25–6; 37–9; 49–50.

* Lordat was himself a victim of aphasia; his experience are detailed in Trousseau's chapter.