How do you describe a person with aphasia?

Is it important to you how people with aphasia are described?

Do you say, for instance, that -

- John is an aphasic, or
- John has aphasia, or
- John is an aphasic person, or
- John is a person with aphasia?

The issue has been discussed many times in the history of aphasia. Originally, in 1861, Paul Broca called the condition he described for the first time, 'aphemia', taken from the Greek for 'speechless'. But the word 'aphasia' became more popular in the following years.

In some countries (United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand) some professionals call it dysphasia because aphasia means literally a complete loss of language and 'dysphasia' means only some loss of language.

You may agree that this is not very important.

But to describe someone as 'an aphasic' is using the word as a noun - an object word, rather than an adjective - a describing word.

The argument is that it is grammatically incorrect to use the word 'aphasic' as a noun. So to say John is an aphasic man is therefore OK.

But you may agree that this is also too trivial to worry too much about it.

Perhaps more important is that some professionals believe that to describe someone with aphasia as 'an aphasic' is degrading and demeaning. What is your opinion?

Many professionals prefer to ensure that when they use the word 'aphasic' they always use it with a noun like 'aphasic speaker, aphasic client, aphasic patient, aphasic person'. Whichever is appropriate for the context. For example, 'aphasic patient' for someone receiving medical treatment.

This may all seem rather unimportant to many people, but for others it is important because, as we know, language is very powerful and changes the way people perceive things and think about them.

Post a message on our aphasia related forum and let us and others know your opinion!