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Author's Response: Evolution of a Word (Megrim) and Language Impoverishment—A Response to Mr. Grzybowski and Mr. Larner's Comment

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I read with great interest Andrzej Grzybowski and A. J. Larner's comment on my 2012 article about the relations between the terms "migraine" and "megrim." Mr. Grzybowski and Mr. Larner state that "it is perhaps worth pointing out that the word megrim has been used in other senses" and conclude that megrim is synonymous with migraine.

First of all, I would like to make it clear what my objectives were in this article, namely: (a) to shed light on the complexity of the French term "migraine" and on the complexity of the derived English term "megrim" (of which hemicrania was, naturally, one of the senses, but not the only one); (b) to indicate the various steps through which the French word "migraine" was itself modified, at one specific time (most probably around 1830), inflected by the separate evolution of the word "megrim," so that it eventually came to encompass meanings formerly held by the word megrim (notably in the field of veterinary medicine). In the final part of the article, I indeed chose to examine the influence that veterinary treatises might have had on both Piorry and Liveing. For the latter, the influence is obvious, but, as far as Piorry is concerned, one may only elaborate conjectures, noting however that "ophtalmic migraines," a term that he invented (Piorry, 1831), are in his view of the same nature as vertigo (Piorry, 1875).

In other words, my purpose was not to draw a general history of the English term "megrim," or of the French word "migraine," but to analyze some of the special (inter)relations that these terms, from different languages and of varied uses, have had— bearing in mind that neither the French migraine nor the English megrim belonged solely to medical vocabulary. My purpose was not to limit either megrim or migraine to a single one of their respective senses (or naturally to confuse one with the other), which would have constituted a historical mistake. One may, however, be surprised that Grzybowski and Larner, who wish to evidence other senses of megrim, finally only establish one: migraine.

On this final point, precisely, let me add that one cannot have the same understanding of the word megrim after the publication of Liveing's famous treatise *On Megrim, Sick- Headache, And Some Allied Disorders* (Liveing, 1873). And this is where the synonymy of the uses of megrim observed by Grzybowski and Larner calls for vigilance: The examples they provide, except that of Paré—which illustrates the use of megrim understood as hemicrania— are indeed posterior to this famous publication (the lesser known 1872 Living article did not have the same effect). What could be described, in the post-1873 Englishspeaking medical world, as a "fashion" for the word megrim (as might be evidenced by a keyword research on IndexCat) is indicative of the success of a treatise rather than a linguistic decision. It does not at any rate attest to the emergence of a new meaning but, on the contrary, to the reduction of homonymy to synonymy and to the disappearance of multiple meanings.

References

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