
At the threshold of psychoanalysis in 1891, Freud wrote his book on aphasia. This work is increasingly recognized as Freud’s declaration of independence from some of his teachers, and the meeting place of his ways of thinking about the brain with a nascent psychoanalytic theory of mind. In moving away from direct involvement with neurology in the years following publication of the aphasia book, a number of fundamental ideas about brain organization and the language/speech apparatus served Freud as the model of mental organization.

Freud's book on aphasia has had a curious history in both neurology and psychoanalysis. The book was a critique of the major points of view on aphasia and of their proponents, and some of the ideas expressed in it have continued to find their place in the neurological literature. However, Freud has been mentioned rarely, even in connection with the term "agnosia", which he coined.

On the psychoanalytic side, there were some notable discussions of the aphasia book, but until the last 15 years or so, the work has received less attention from psychoanalysts than others interested in the background of Freud's work. More recently, its importance as a step in the development of psychoanalytic thought has been recognized by psychoanalytic authors.

Among the factors contributing to this relative psychoanalytic neglect is the fact that only a couple of selections from the aphasia book were included in the Standard Edition. There was no English translation until Stengel's appeared in 1953. It is generally regarded as unsatisfactory because it is not complete and sometimes inaccurate in ways that are significantly misleading. Until recently, the only available edition of the book in German was the edition of 1891 which went out of print not long after its publication. These factors may have contributed to the eclipse of the aphasia book by the Project which was quickly recognized as the important source of psychoanalytic ideas that it is. The situation has changed now that there is a good German edition, a French edition and a new, complete English translation, with editorial notes, expected to appear soon. The availability of these texts is timely since increasing numbers of neuroscientists are interested in psychoanalytic ideas while many psychoanalysts are finding the researches of neuroscientists of interest and significance.
The excellent book by Valerie Greenberg is a welcome and useful contribution to the study of the aphasia book, providing a unique look at the background of this work. Greenberg has taken on the task of tracing the development of Freud’s argument in his book, considering various aspects of his style of selecting and analysing the observations of others, and the rhetoric of his presentation. Any careful reader of Freud’s later writings, as well as those of Mahoney and others, will readily recognize many of the features she discusses. On the basis of these considerations alone, the book would be interesting enough to those who are interested in Freud’s ways of thinking and the evolution of his ideas. However, the greatest value of Greenberg’s contribution lies in her exploration of what she refers to as Freud’s intellectual network. To this end, she presents in some detail the ideas of the writers that Freud cited. She not only sets Freud’s own quotations from various works in their contexts in the works cited, but also discusses other works by those authors. From this extensive examination of the literature associated with the aphasia book, we can get a much better picture of the issues of brain, language and associations that Freud was addressing. With this goes a richer sense of the complexity of the intellectual world of that time, more complex and sophisticated than is usually acknowledged. Her presentation allows us to glimpse the overlap in thinking of Freud’s contemporaries and the controversies that seemed important. In this way, Greenberg offers some further insight into the growth and acceptance or rejection of scientific ideas. She enlarges this aspect of the subject at the end of the book by examining a recent book on aphasia that presents some ideas similar to Freud’s, one hundred years later, without its author recognizing the intimacy of the conceptual connections.

Because of the broad and varied range of Greenberg’s explorations, observations, hypotheses and conclusions, it is difficult to convey the intricacy of her numerous lines of argument. Greenberg says of her book: "I have taken Freud’s aphasia book as a point of departure for branching out in several directions. By tracing Freud’s references to his sources, I was able to reconstitute at least part of the intellectual network within which he was operating and arrive at some suggestive conclusions about how he may have read and thought, his evolving views on language, how the aphasia text connects to the development of psychoanalysis, and why the text and its fate tell us something about the history of science." (p. 7) She does not claim that the book is exhaustive, but it goes a long way to fulfilling its aims.
As Greenberg says, the question of sources and influences is a difficult one. If "influence" is a dangerous term, which she tries to avoid, the term "source" is, as she says, also problematic. Discussing the literature to which Freud referred still leaves the question of what those "sources" did for him. As she notes, there is a similar problem involved in tracing the usage of terms from the aphasia book to later terms in psychoanalysis. For example, Freud uses terms like projection, representation, cathexis (Besetzung) and transference with different meanings than those they acquired later in psychoanalytic writings. However, it is also true that some of the early usages are conceptually and importantly related to the later ones. They are similar in the evolution of their meaning to other terms used in analysis that were coined later.

The same problem arises in evaluating the sources of Freud's concepts. Freud deliberately chooses ideas from some writers, but also uses ideas similar to other ideas of these same writers without attribution. At other times, Freud quotes inaccurately, shaping the quote to his own purposes. A striking example is his attributing to Hughlings Jackson the phrase "dependent concomitance" to describe the relationship between mind and brain. Greenberg observes that Hughlings Jackson refers only to the "doctrine of concomitance". It seems that Freud created the phrase because he believed in the reciprocal dependence. In other instances, it is quite possible that Freud has ideas from other sources as well as the ones he mentions since the issues of localization and critiques of localization, mind-brain and mind-body relations, association psychology and so on were lively topics. It is difficult to be sure of the origins of thought in an intellectual community. Thus, Greenberg's idea of sketching Freud's intellectual network is a safer approach than trying to claim too much for the source of a particular idea. Perhaps this accounts for what appears to be an oversight in Greenberg's illuminating discussion of Hughlings Jackson's contributions to Freud's thought. Greenberg explains that in refuting Meynert's views on localization, Freud writes that the spinal cord contains a projection of points on the periphery and the cortex contains a representation. Neither Freud nor Greenberg mentions that this idea is an important one in Hughlings Jackson's writings, associated with a conception of representation, re-representation and re-re-representation, repeated many times in building the multiple cortical representations and their connections. The importance of this model for Freud's ideas on the construction of the mental apparatus and of thought is evident, leading to the idea of editing and re-editing of mental content (Grossman, 1992). It
is this editing and re-editing that Freud refers to in a letter to Fliess, where he says that the idea was expressed in the aphasia book. Although Greenberg mentions the letter for its mention of the aphasia book, this point is overlooked. As for Freud, this may be a case of his citing an author for one thing but not for other important ideas. Although these ideas are evident in papers Freud read, it is also possible that he drew on other writers with similar ideas. It is just this kind of complexity, and the appreciation of the complexity of the thinkers she describes, that Greenberg conveys so well.

The value of the book lies in its detailed accounts of the works to which Freud refers. Greenberg gives sufficient detail regarding important works for us to follow the trains of thought of these writers. In this way, we have more of a context for their ideas than Freud gives. She points to ways in which Freud may have utilized some of the implications that he didn't spell out. In particular, as her subtitle indicates, she is interested in the ideas about language, particularly those of Delbrück, that were available, but not fully utilized by Freud, at the time. Greenberg raises and explores the answer to the question of why and how Freud brings up the work of Delbrück, a linguist, in the midst of his discussion of neurological arguments. She sees the problems of conceptualizing language and language functions as an underlying theme of the book.

She also points out some correspondences between the aphasia book and some other works of Freud’s both before and shortly after it. These discussions of Freud’s writings of that period describe a useful set of relations in his work. There is more connection between Freud’s ideas on hysteria and the aphasia book at this time than would be apparent from Greenberg’s account alone. The connections to later work, other than Studies on Hysteria, are not developed to any significant extent, although she cites some other relevant studies. A notable omission is the extent to which Freud’s ideas in Aphasia about the organization of the nervous system and of associations, carried over to the Studies, are expanded and elaborated in the Interpretation of Dreams. Another example is Greenberg’s mention of Freud’s single negative reference to Salomon Stricker in the aphasia book. This does not accurately convey the significance of Stricker’s ideas for Freud. Kuhn (1983), in his introduction to the French translation of the aphasia book, states that Freud referred to Stricker's books and ideas with approval in the Interpretation of Dreams. Freud quotes twice a "shrewd observation" of Stricker’s to the effect that the affect of fear in the dream is real, and uses this idea to emphasize the importance of the affect and
it’s separate significance from the other content of the dream. In addition, according to Kuhn, Stricker’s book on association discusses the idea of complexes of ideas at length.

However, Greenberg’s book is about intellectual history and the origins of Freud’s thought, "language and the sources of psychoanalysis," in the aphasia book. It is rich in material related to this. Freud’s place in the context of the period of the aphasia book, rather than the further evolution of his ideas is emphasized in this book. It seems that for those interested in the place of the aphasia book in the later developments of psychoanalytic thought, the expanding psychoanalytic literature on the subject is the place to look.

It is not surprising that, as a professor of German, Greenberg has a particular interest in the linguistic questions associated with the study of aphasia, and in the role that Freud’s multilingual abilities may have played in his own thinking and analysis of aphasia. These speculations are interesting pointers to potentially fruitful lines of inquiry. However, as she acknowledges in her introduction, a good deal of interpretation goes into the process of reading and explaining Freud’s ideas, and deciding what links to other ideas are and whether they are links at all.

Translation, too, presents problems of interpretation, as we know from the extensive discussion of Freud translation in the recent psychoanalytic literature. The aphasia book is loaded with translation traps since the way things are translated often depends on the way the concepts are understood. Greenberg is helpful in this regard and discusses some of the important issues. The most obvious one is the problem of translating Freud’s "Sprache" and its derivatives. This word is used to refer both to speech and language. Anyone who translates, or reads, the aphasia book has to make decisions at every turn as to whether Freud is saying "speech" or "language" or means both.

Greenberg’s book is an interesting and valuable study for those who are interested in knowing more about the work of the people Freud studied, whose ideas he used, or might have used, to construct his own theories, and whose ideas were foils for his own views. Following the paths of the discussion is not always easy, which is also the problem in reading the aphasia book.
This book is full of interesting information, observations and conjectures for those interested in a detailed exploration of the ideas on neuroscience, language, consciousness and so on, at the time of Freud’s book on aphasia. It is a major addition to the study of the early Freud, and is likely to elicit at least some controversy regarding its interpretations.

References


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