

Carl Wernicke and the Origin of Neurolinguistics in Breslau: A Case Study in the Domain of the History of Linguistics

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Abstract : The subject of the study is the exploration of the origins and dynamics of the development of language studies, which have been labelled as neurolinguistics. It is worth mentioning that the origins of neurolinguistics are to be found in the research conducted by German scientists before the Second World War in Breslau Universität (presently Wrocław). The dominant figure in these studies was professor Carl Wernicke, whose students continued and creatively developed projects of their master within this area. Professor Carl Wernicke, a German physician, anatomist, psychiatrist, and neuropathologist, is primarily known for his influential research on aphasia. His research, as well as those conducted by professor Paul Broca, has led to breakthroughs in the location of brain functions, particularly speech. Years later the theses of the pioneers of cognitive neurology (Carl Wernicke and Paul Broca) were developed by other neurolinguists. The main objective of the investigation is the reconstruction of the group of scientists –the students of Carl Wernicke– who contributed to the development of neurolinguistics. The scholars were mainly neurologists and psychiatrists and dealt with the branch of science that had not been named neurolinguistics at that time. The profiles of the scholars will be analysed and presented as the members of the group of researchers who have contributed to the breakthroughs in psychology and neuroscience. The research material consists of archival records documenting the research of professor Carl Wernicke and the researchers from Breslau (presently Wrocław) which is one of the fastest growing cities in Europe. In 1870, when Carl Wernicke became the medical doctor, Breslau was full of cultural events: festivals and circus shows were held in the city center. Today we can come back to these events due to 'Breslauer Zeitung (1870)', which precisely describes all the events that took place on particular days. It is worth noting that those were the beginnings of antisemitism in Breslau. Many theses and articles that have survived in the libraries in Wrocław and all over the world contribute to the development of neuroscience. The history of research on the brain and speech analysis, including the history of psychology and neuroscience, areas from which neurolinguistics is derived, will be presented.

Keywords : Aphasia, brain injury, Carl Wernicke, language, neurolinguistics

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