

## NEUROLINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING – THE LINK BETWEEN MEDICINE (NEUROLOGY) AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

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**Summary.** *Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is not just a language teaching method. It does not consist of a set of techniques for teaching a language based on theories and assumptions at the levels of an approach and a design. Rather, it is a humanistic philosophy and a set of beliefs and suggestions based on popular psychology, designed to convince people that they have the power to control their own and other people's lives for the better, and practical prescriptions on how to do so. Neurolinguistic programming practitioners believe that if language teachers adopt and use the principles of neurolinguistic programming, they will become more effective teachers.*

**Key words:** *Neurolinguistic programming, medicine, language teaching*

### **The Findings of Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics**

Psycholinguists and neurolinguists have focused their investigations with bilinguals on the use, acquisition and eventual loss of the first language (L1). However, studies of second language (L2) acquisition and use are gaining importance. Several theoretical issues, in areas such as language acquisition and performance theory are being researched into.

In the psycholinguistic field, the study of L1 acquisition has given rise to a large number of models. The parameter setting approach, in conjunction with a classical statistical learning module, has become the leading model for many investigators (Chomsky and Lasnik, 1993; Pinker, 1994). Linguistic parameters, i.e. sets of possible grammatical variations (values) within a frame of invariant principles, are considered to be part of the innate endowment of universal grammar; exposure to a specific linguistic environments results in the fixation of one of the possible values of each parameter.

Investigators such as Chomsky, Katz and Fodor (for a review, see Pinker, 1994) consider language as a characteristic faculty of humans, much as navigation by sonar is for bats and orientation by polarized light is for bees. Studies in neuropsychology have demonstrated that language processing is mediated by the left hemisphere of most speakers. This finding, as well as other observations, has been used to argue that humans can acquire language because a 'language organ' has emerged in the left hemisphere (Chomsky, 1975).

A factor that may affect the cortical representation of language is the moment in life when language is acquired. There is evidence that when L1 is learned with a delay it is impoverished. Other data supporting the notion of the existence of a critical period derives from the observed difficulty in learning L2 after puberty. Children

learn languages with greater ease than adults. The phonological and morphological components seem particularly deficient when L2 is learned after puberty. In contrast, the lexicon seems to be acquired with greater ease.

### **Neurolinguistic Programming**

The word Neuro linguistic programming can be broken down to three distinct words:

neuro

linguistic

programming

Neuro refers to the brain and neural network that feeds into the brain. Neurons or nerve cells are the working units used by the nervous system to send, receive, and store signals that add up to information.

Linguistics refer to the content, both verbal and non-verbal, that moves across and through these pathways.

Programming is the way the content or signal is manipulated to convert it into useful information. The brain may direct the signal, sequence it, change it based on our prior experience, or connect it to some other experience we have stored in our brain to convert it into thinking patterns and behaviors that are the essence of our experience of life.

### **Neurolinguistic Programming: Background**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was developed at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the 1970's. Its founders and principal authors were Richard Bandler, a student of (initially) mathematics and computer science, and John Grinder, a professor of linguistics. The emergence of NLP happened between 1972 and 1981.

NLP has since achieved popularity as a method for communication and personal development. It is used by professional practitioners of many kinds - managers, trainers, sales people, market researchers, counsellors, consultants, medics, lawyers and more.

## NLP Teaching and Learning

NLP appears to hold much potential for teaching and learning. There are, for example, profound implications of adopting an underlying cybernetic epistemology in the practice of education. There are many possible examples of applications at the level of technique in education and training. NLP is commonly used to offer solutions to problems encountered in teaching, for example to do with classroom management.

Briefly, we might characterise an NLP approach to teaching and learning as follows:

- The teacher- learner relationship is a cybernetic loop, a dynamic process in which meaning is constructed through reciprocal feedback; not a transmission of information from one individual to another, separate, individual.
- People act according to the way they understand and represent the world, not according to the way the world 'is' (i.e. 'the map is not the territory').
- Of prime interest in NLP are the ways in which people represent the world internally, through sensory imagery (principally visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) and language. NLP is particularly interested in the way internal representations are structured, both in themselves (e.g. the location, size, brightness etc. of visual imagery), and dynamically (e.g. as sequences). NLP assumes that the structure of internal representation shows regularities for, and is unique to, each individual.
- NLP also assumes that there are systematic relationships between this structuring and that individual's language and behaviour. A learner's internal representations and processing are reflected, in various ways, in their language- and their external behaviour (e.g. non-verbal behaviour). (NLP courses train participants to observe and utilise these aspects).
- Skills, beliefs and behaviours are all learnt (e.g. skills have corresponding sequences of internal representation, often referred to as 'strategies'). Learning is a process through which such representations and sequences are acquired and modified.
- An individual's capacity to learn is influenced strongly by their neuro-physiological 'state' (e.g. a state of curiosity rather than a state of boredom), and by their beliefs about learning and about themselves as learners (rather obviously, beliefs that one is capable of learning and that learning is worthwhile and fun are considered more useful than their opposites). Such states and beliefs are also learnt and susceptible to change.
- Such modification happens through communication between teacher and learner, which takes place through verbal and non-verbal channels, both consciously and unconsciously. The functioning of which human beings are conscious, and which can be con-

trolled consciously, represents only a small proportion of total functioning.

- All communication potentially influences learning. Crucially, teachers' language and behaviour influence learners on at least two levels simultaneously; both their understanding of the topic in question (e.g. the dynamic structure of their internal representations), and their beliefs about the world, including about learning.
- It follows that awareness of choice about one's own language patterns and behaviour as a teacher, and sensitivity to and curiosity about their influence on and interaction with learner's internal representations, are crucial to effective teaching and learning.

In essence, teaching is a process of (a) creating 'states' that are conducive to learning; and (b) facilitating learners' exploration and/or enhancement of their internal representations; (c) to lead towards the desired goal or outcome of the context.

### Design: Objectives, syllabus, learning activities, roles of learners, teachers, and materials

Four key principles lie at the heart of NLP (O'Connor and McDermott 1996; Revell and Norman 1997).

1. *Outcomes*: the goals or ends. NLP claims that knowing precisely what you want helps you achieve it. This principle can be expressed as "know what you want."

2. *Rapport*: a factor that is essential for effective communication - maximizing similarities and minimizing differences between people at unconscious level. This principle can be expressed as "Establish rapport with yourself and then with others."

3. *Sensory acuity*: noticing what another person is communicating, consciously and nonverbally. This can be expressed as "Use your senses. Look at, listen to, and feel what is actually happening."

4. *Flexibility*: doing things differently if what you are doing is not working: having a range of skills to do something else or something different. This can be expressed as "Keep changing what you do until you get what you want."

Revell and Norman (1997) present thirteen presuppositions that guide application of NLP in language learning and other fields. The idea is that these principles become part of the belief system of the teacher and shape the way teaching is conducted no matter what method the teacher using:

1. Mind and body are interconnected: They are parts of the same system, and each affects the other.
2. The map is not the territory: We all have different maps of the world.
3. There is no failure, only feedback . . . and a renewed opportunity for success.
4. The map becomes the territory: What you believe to be true either is true or becomes true.
5. Knowing what you want helps you get it.

6. The resources we need are within us.
7. Communication is nonverbal as well as verbal.
8. The unconscious mind is benevolent.
9. Communication is unconscious as well as conscious.
10. All behavior has a positive intention.
11. The meaning of my communication is the response I get.
12. Modeling excellent behavior leads to excellence.
13. In any system, the element with the greatest flexibility will have the most influence on that system.

Revell and Norman's book (1997) on NLP in English-language teaching seeks to relate each of these principles to language teaching. For example, in discussing principle 7 - "Communication is nonverbal as well as verbal" - they discuss the kinds of nonverbal messages teachers -consciously or unconsciously communicate to learners in the classroom.

As noted earlier, modeling is also central to NLP practice. Just as Handler and Grinder modeled NLP on the practices of successful therapists, so teachers are expected to model their teaching on expert teacher they most admire. Similarly, learners are expected to find successful models for that person they themselves are striving to become:

If you want to be an excellent teacher, model excellent teachers. Look at that they do, how they act, what sort of relationship they have with their student and colleagues. Ask then how they feel about what they do. What are their beliefs? Second, position them. Imagine what it's like to be them. As you learn techniques and strategies, put them into practice. Share modeling strategies with students. Set the project of modeling good learners. Encourage them to share and try out strategies they learn. If you want to speak a language like a native speaker, model native speakers. (Revell and Norman 1997: 116)

What do NLP language teachers do that make them different from other language teachers? According to NLP, they seek to apply the principles in their teaching and this leads to different responses to many class room events and processes. For example, one of the four central principles of NLP centers on the need for "rapport":

Rapport is meeting others in their world, trying to understand their needs, their values and their culture and communicating in ways that are congruent with those values. You don't necessarily have to agree with their values, simply recognize that they have a right to them and work within their framework, not against it. (Rylatt and Lohan 1995: 121)

Rylatt and Lohan give the following example of how a teacher might apply rapport in responding to the following statements from students:

- a) I hate this stuff. It's such a waste of time.
- b) Everyone says that. It makes me sick.
- c) I can't do it.
- d) This is all theory.

In establishing rapport, the teacher could respond:

- a) Is a part of you saying that you want to be sure your time is well spent today?
- b) Who says that?

- c) What, specifically, can't you do?
- d) Are you saying you want practical suggestions?

Likewise, principle 10 above - "All behavior has a positive intention" - would lead the teacher to seek for a positive intent in the following situations:

- a) A learner disagrees strongly with the teacher.
- b) A student frequently comes late to class.
- c) A student seeks to dominate discussions.

The possible positive intents here could be:

- a) wanting to have expertise acknowledged
- b) having other important priorities
- c) needing to vocalize thoughts in order to internalize them

## Procedure

NLP principles can be applied to the teaching of all aspects of language, according to Revell and Norman. For example, the following suggested lesson sequence is "to help students become aware at a feeling level of the conceptual meaning of a grammatical structure." The primary focus of the sequence is awareness (and, indeed, production) of instances of the present perfect in English. The lesson begins with a guided fantasy of eating a food item and then reflecting on the experience.

1. Students are told that they are going on an "inner grammatical experience as you eat a biscuit."

2. Check that they understand vocabulary of the experience (smell, taste, chew, swallow, bite, lick, etc.).

3. Students are asked to relax, close their eyes, and "go inside." Once inside, they listen to the teacher-produced fantasy, which is given is the following:

4. (An abbreviated version of the teacher text) "Imagine a biscuit. A delicious biscuit. The sort you really like. Pick it up and look at it closely. Notice how crisp and fresh it is. Smell it. Notice how your mouth is beginning to water. In a moment you are going to eat the biscuit. Say the words to yourself: 'I am going to eat this biscuit.'

"Slowly chew the biscuit and notice how delicious it tastes on your tongue and in your mouth. . . . Say the words to yourself, 'I'm really enjoying eating this biscuit.'

"Take another bite. Chew it. Taste it. Enjoy it. . . . And then swallow. Lick your lips, move your tongue all around the inside of your mouth to catch any last bits of biscuit, and swallow them.

"Notice how you feel now. Notice the taste in your mouth. Notice how your stomach feels with a biscuit inside it. Notice how you feel emotionally. You have eaten a biscuit. Say the words to yourself, 'I've eaten a biscuit.'

"How are you feeling now? Think of the words to describe you are feeling now. Take a deep breath and gently come back to room, bringing the feeling with you. Open your eyes."

5. Ask the students to describe how they are feeling now — "the feeling of the present perfect." Listen for any statements that link the raw experience of eating the biscuit with their present feelings (e.g. feel full, "I'm

not hungry anymore," "I've got a nice taste in mouth," "I feel fat").

6. Ask them to say again the sentence that describes the cause of way they feel ("I've eaten a biscuit").

7. Put a large piece of paper on the wall with the words "I've eaten a biscuit" at the top. Have students write how they feel underneath.

8. On other pieces of paper, write sentences such as: I've painted a picture. I've had a row with my boy/girlfriend. I've finished my homework. I've cleaned my teeth.

9. Ask students to stand in front of each sentence, close their eyes, and strongly imagine what they have done in order to be saying that sentence now.

10. Students write on the paper how they feel now about these sentences.

11. Leave the papers on the wall as a reminder of the feeling link to the grammatical structure.

12. As follow-up, contrast the feeling of the present perfect with the feeling of the simple past. Ask students to remember the things they did in the last lesson ("I ate a biscuit"). Ask them to close their eyes and notice how they are feeling now. Contrast this feeling with the feeling they remember from the last lesson and which they wrote down on the papers.

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## NEUROLINGVISTIČKO PROGRAMIRANJE – VEZA IZMEĐU MEDICINE (NEUROLOGIJE) I UČENJA JEZIKA

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Kratka sadržaj: *Neurolingvističko programiranje (NLP) nije samo metod u nastavi jezika. On se ne sastoji od tehnika nastave jezika baziranim na teorijama i pretpostavkama na nivou pristupa i dizajna. Umesto toga, to je humanistička filozofija i set verovanja i sugestija postavljenih na osnovama popularne psihologije, stvorenih da ubede ljude da imaju sposobnost da bolje kontrolišu sopstvene i tuđe živote, kao i praktične ideje kako to raditi. Zastupnici neurolingvističkog programiranja veruju da ako nastavnici jezika prihvate i koriste principe neurolingvističkog programiranja mogu da postanu bolji nastavnici.*

Ključne reči: *neurolingvističko programiranje, medicina, nastava jezika*

13. Ask them to say the sentence "Yesterday, I ate a biscuit."

14. Discuss the comparison between the feelings ("I remember the taste, but I can't actually taste it").

15. You can do similar exercises to exemplify other tenses using different tastes and sensory experiences.

## Conclusion

NLP is not simply a language teaching method, but a holistic approach to intellectual and psychological potentials. NLP practitioners believe that if language teachers adopt and use the principles of NLP, they will become more effective teachers. As Revell and Norman comment, the assumptions on which NLP are based "need not be accepted as the absolute truth, but acting as if they were true can make a world of difference in your life and in your teaching" (1997: 15). In language teaching, the appeal of NLP to some teachers stems from the fact that it offers a set of humanistic principles that provide either a new justification for well-known techniques from the communicative or humanistic repertoire or a different interpretation of the role of the teacher and the learner, one in harmony with many learner-centered, person-centered views.