

How Neuro-Linguistic-Programming can serve language learners and teachers

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To Jim
To Nick
To Jim

Abstract

This report opens with an outline of what Neuro-Linguistic Programming is. The second part of the paper deals with ways this area of psychology has helped me in my work as a language teacher. In the final part of the article you will find two simple exam preparation exercises that derive from NLP.

1. What is Neuro-Linguistic-Programming?

NLP is a theory and practice of human communication that was originally developed in the early 1970's by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. They came up with the ideas that underpin NLP while minutely analyzing the communication patterns of outstanding therapists at work with their clients and also by intensive investigation of the therapists' own convictions and beliefs.

One way of introducing you to NLP's systems is to dissect the term "NLP".

Let us take "neuro". Every time a person speaks to you they offer you a wealth of neurological and physiological information that seriously enriches the bare semantic message which they are transmitting to you.

As they speak you can observe the way they are breathing, shallow or deep, fast or slow.

As they speak you can observe the tension of the muscles in their neck, around their mouth and eyes.

As they speak you can observe the paleness or pinkness of their neck and cheeks (if you are dealing with white, Western people)

As they speak you can observe their whole body posture and their gestural patterns

As they speak you can observe the tempo (speed) of their words.

As they speak you can observe the pitch (high or low) and volume (loud or quiet) of their voice.

As they speak you can observe their eye movement patterns which will give you a fairly clear idea of the sensory part of their minds they are communicating from. So, a speaker who is thinking in a visual way will tend to offer you upward eye movements. They will also tend to use "visual" words in their oral messages.

NLP is vitally interested in the whole message when a person speaks and not just in their words as bare semantic representations. This is part of the "neuro" aspect of NLP.

Let me move on to "Linguistic".

Whenever we open our mouths we are making unconscious decisions about sensory words that we use. If I decide to say *I have understood what you mean* I have opted for an abstract form of expression. However I may say: *I see what you mean*

or I may say: *What you're saying sounds clear*

or I may say: *I think I've grasped your meaning*

If I want to give a really clear description of my house I am going to appeal to your eyes, your ears, your nose and your overall body sense. One of the many things that makes Shakespeare a great poet is his ability to evoke the kinaesthetic, the auditory and the visual equally powerfully.

The above is one part of what NLP includes in "Linguistic"

And now for Programming".

NLP has identified a number of areas in which our behaviour follows a program or pattern that is usually hidden from the conscious mind.

One of these is the GENERAL versus SPECIFIC metaprogram. When you learn something do you prefer to start with an overview or do you prefer to start with a detail and from there work up to an overview? There are some people who understand best when shown the whole wood while there are others cannot understand the idea "wood" before they have examined each tree. The proverb "*he can't see the wood for the trees*" comes from the mouth of "generalist" complaining about the ways of the "detailist".

When students in a seminar say to the teacher "*Professor X, please give us an example of that*" they are detailists who struggle with overview thinking, which they find hard to grasp.

I hardly need explain how important this metaprogram is when you are teaching grammar. You have to make sure you satisfy the people who need the specifics without losing the people who need to see the whole picture.

2. The Ways in which NLP has helped me in my work as a language teacher

a) NLP has offered me awareness of aspects of language that I had not seen, felt or appreciated before. Before working with NLP I had been unaware of the intensely sensory nature of words, unaware of the myriad sensory decisions I make as I speak my own or any other language.

b) NLP has made me aware of the power and explicitness of the verb in contrast to the purposeful vagueness of the noun. There is a big difference between these two book titles: *INTRODUCTION TO CYBERNETICS* and *INTRODUCING CYBERNETICS*. The second is sharper, more direct and more dynamic.

c) NLP has made me aware of the huge amount of **distortion**, **generalization** and **deletion** that are necessary and normal in everyday conversation. When I say "*somehow it got done*" I am deleting the subject of the action... and so on.

d) NLP has supplied me with the tools I need to manage my own emotions better than used to be the case. I am better at getting and maintaining rapport even with people I don't like and this of course influences them positively, though below the level of consciousness. I am now better at mentally role-reversing into the other person's way of seeing things and I am a little better at looking at myself and the other person from a distanced, over there, third position, though I have to admit I still find this very hard.

e) NLP has allowed me to realise that some students are highly self-referenced and only want to be corrected when they ask for it while others benefit greatly from teacher-initiated correction which they accept as an act of love because they are pretty other-referenced, they are the sort of people who like to receive suggestions and advice.

f) Slowly bringing myself to learn some of the insights that NLP has to offer has made me aware of the antagonistic, highly critical style of learning that is mine.

I may wish it were otherwise but I have realised that this way of learning often retards my ability to take things on board.

g) NLP has offered me ready-made exercises and has inspired me to come up with such exercises to use in my EFL classroom.

3. Two NLP inspired classroom exercises

3.1 Dancing with the examiner

Pair the students. Take the B people out of the room with you and give them these instructions:

ask your partner to choose the topic they would like to talk with you about for 4 minutes

notice the speed at which your partner speaks and adopt the same speed, varying the tempo when she does

take up the same lower body posture as your partner.

The B people go back into the room and carry out the exercise. Time the four minutes and then ask the people who came out with you to tell the others what they were doing and how well they reckon they did it. Learning to pace the speech rhythms of the examiner or of the co-candidate is a vital skill in preparing for oral exams and leads to better rapport which will often lead to better marks.

3.2 Success stories

To build up student confidence before an exam tell your class a story of a

success of yours, a success away from school.
Group the students in 6's to tell each other as many success stories as they can. These may be exam successes, school life successes or success of any sort and of any "size".

Tell the students they are to bring the success story they told their group back to mind as they walk into the examination room. Their store of past successes are a treasure hall, a vast psychological resource they can draw on so they start the exam in a powered and powerful state of mind.

If you would like to read more NLP inspired exercises for EFL teaching then have a close look at Judy Baker's book, mentioned below. Have deep NLP fun!

4. References

O'Connor and Seymour. 1990 *Introducing Neuro-Linguistic-Programming*. Thorsons

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Language for Business & Tourism: an innovative approach

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Abstract

TT2007 is the latest version of the Tick-Tack language software, which is used in universities, colleges and schools - and by firms and individuals - in many countries. It offers over 20 programs and covers 50 languages. The two programs that have caught the imagination of teachers are those for Business and Travel & Tourism. These have been developed in depth for French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English. They can be accessed and used in a further 30 languages including Lithuanian.

The programs are project-based and provide a realistic and authentic environment. Everything is in the target language, with multilingual word-lists and voice recordings of all the material. A wide range of practical tasks, with model answers, are innovative and challenging. They are based on an International Sports Group with a separate company in each of the 5 countries. Each company has a travel department and an associated hotel. The student takes the part of a trainee employed in the relevant company.

Working in each of the main departments, and then in the hotel assisting the hotel manager, the trainee has to carry out a wide range of tasks. These involve handling incoming letters, faxes and e-mails, replying to them following instructions from their manager, answering the telephone, listening to voice-mail messages, drafting replies and then recording them using the microphone. The trainee has to deal with angry customers, handle complaints from agents and hotel guests, draft staff adverts & create web-pages - and much more.

Detailed lesson plans are included created by dedicated teachers who use the programs in class. Needs Windows 2000 or XP. A network version is available. Teachers can buy a personal copy for use at home for a nominal price. Free help by e-mail is provided by the authors. Workshops are run throughout the year. Some programs are available on-line. Great emphasis is placed on clarity of expression and creative writing.

The CD also includes programs in a variety of languages for Finding a job, Using the telephone, Writing e-mails, Finding your way around on an exchange visit, Shopping, Teaching - and much more. Programs for Engineering and Technology are being developed.

I run a small software house near Cambridge in England. I have a team of about a hundred dedicated linguists around the world working with me developing programs for teaching and learning languages. They all work independently, part-time, "at arms length".

I have been developing these programs for over twenty years. As language and needs are constantly changing so the programs have to be regularly updated and new ones created. As the technology advances so our software has to develop to keep in step in order to exploit the latest possibilities.

Unique approach

The software is called Tick-Tack. It works in a unique way making it very quick and easy for the user to create impressive and relevant text in the foreign language. It offers over twenty programs and covers fifty languages, though not all languages are available in all the programs. We are constantly adding new ones. The latest version of the Tick-Tack software is called TT2007. It is still



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