11 Neurolinguistic Programming

Background

Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) refers to a training philosophy and set of training techniques first developed by John Grindler and Richard Bandler in the mid-1970s as an alternative form of therapy. Grindler (a psychologist) and Bandler (a student of linguistics) were interested in how people influence each other and in how the behaviors of very effective people could be duplicated. They were essentially interested in discovering how successful communicators achieved their success. They studied successful therapists and concluded that they "followed similar patterns in relating to their clients and in the language they used, and that they all held similar beliefs about themselves and what they were doing" (Revell and Norman 1997: 14). Grindler and Bandler developed NLP as a system of techniques therapists could use in building rapport with clients, gathering information about their internal and external views of the world, and helping them achieve goals and bring about personal change. They sought to fill what they perceived to be a gap in psychological thinking and practice of the early 1970s by developing a series of step-by-step procedures that would enable people to improve themselves:

> NLP is . . . a collection of techniques, patterns, and strategies for assisting effective communication, personal growth and change, and learning. It is based on a series of underlying assumptions about how the mind works and how people act and interact. (Revell and Norman 1997: 14)

The NLP model provides a theoretical framework and a set of working principles for directing or guiding therapeutic change, but the principles of NLP have been applied in a variety of other fields, including management training, sports training, communications sales and marketing, and language teaching. Since NLP is a set of general communication techniques, NLP practitioners generally are required to take training in how to use the techniques in their respective fields. NLP was not developed with any applications to language teaching in mind. However, because the assumptions of NLP refer to attitudes to life, to people, and to self-discovery and awareness, it has had some appeal within language teaching to those interested in what we have called humanistic approaches –

that is, approaches that focus on developing one's sense of self-actualization and self-awareness, as well as to those drawn to what has been referred to as New Age Humanism.

Approach: Theory of language and learning

The name "Neurolinguistic Programming" might lead one to expect that it is based on the science of neurolinguistics and that it also draws on behaviorist theories of learning (see Chapter 4). However, in NLP *neuro* refers to beliefs about the brain and how it functions: The literature on NLP does not refer to theory or research in neurolinguistics. In fact, research plays virtually no role in NLP. *Linguistic* has nothing to do with the field of linguistics but refers to a theory of communication, one that tries to explain both verbal and nonverbal information processing. *Programming* refers to observable patterns (referred to as "programs") of thought and behavior. NLP practitioners claim to be able to deprogram and program clients' behaviors with a precision close to computer programming. Learning effective behaviors is viewed as a problem of skill learning: It is dependent on moving from stages of controlled to automatic processing (O'Connor and McDermott 1996: 6). Modeling is also central to NLP views on learning:

> Modeling a skill means finding out about it, and the beliefs and values that enable them to do it. You can also model emotions, experiences, beliefs and values. . . . Modeling successful performance leads to excellence. If one person can do something it is possible to model and teach others how to do it. (O'Connor and McDermott 1996: 71)

Revell and Norman offer the following explanation of the name:

> The *neuro* part of NLP is concerned with how we experience the world through our five senses and represent it in our minds through our neurological processes.
>
> The *linguistic* part of NLP is concerned with the way the language we use shapes, as well as reflects, our experience of the world. We use language – in thought as well as in speech – to represent the world to ourselves and to embody our beliefs about the world and about life. If we change the way we speak and think about things, we can change our behavior. We can also use language to help other people who want to change.
>
> The *programming* part of NLP is concerned with training ourselves to think, speak, and act in new and positive ways in order to release our potential and reach those heights of achievement which we previously only dreamt of. (Revell and Norman 1997: 14)

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 a nonconscious 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 the 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 is 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 nonconscious mind is benevolent.
9. Communication is nonconscious 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 Bandler and Grinder modeled NLP on the practices of successful therapists, so teachers are expected to model their teaching on expert teachers 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 students 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 classroom 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 as 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 how you are feeling now. Take a deep breath and gently come back to the 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 past experience of eating the biscuit with their present feelings (e.g., "I feel full," "I'm not hungry anymore," "I've got a nice taste in my mouth," "I feel fat").
6. Ask them to say again the sentence that describes the cause of the 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.
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.

(Adapted from Revell and Norman 1999)

Conclusion

NLP is not 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. NLP practitioners believe that if language teachers adopt

and use the principles of NLP, they will become more effective teachers. Workshops on NLP are hence typically short on theory and research to justify its claims and strong on creating positive expectations, bonding, and enthusiasm. 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.

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12 The lexical approach

Background

We have seen throughout this book that central to an approach or method in language teaching is a view of the nature of language, and this shapes teaching goals, the type of syllabus that is adopted, and the emphasis given in classroom teaching. A lexical approach in language teaching refers to one derived from the belief that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions, or some other unit of planning and teaching but lexis, that is, words and word combinations. Lexical approaches in language teaching reflect a belief in the centrality of the lexicon to language structure, second language learning, and language use, and in particular to multiword lexical units or "chunks" that are learned and used as single items. Linguistic theory has also recognized a more central role for vocabulary in linguistic description. Formal transformational/generative linguistics, which previously took syntax as the primary focus, now gives more central attention to the lexicon and how the lexicon is formatted, coded, and organized. Chomsky, the father of contemporary studies in syntax, has recently adopted a "lexicon-is-prime" position in his Minimalist Linguistic theory.

The role of lexical units has been stressed in both first and second language acquisition research. These have been referred to by many different labels, including "holophrases" (Corder 1973), "prefabricated patterns" (Hakuta 1974), "gambits" (Keller 1979), "speech formulae" (Peters 1983), and "lexicalized stems" (Pawley and Syder 1983). Several approaches to language learning have been proposed that view vocabulary and lexical units as central in learning and teaching. These include *The Lexical Syllabus* (Willis 1990), *Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching* (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992), and *The Lexical Approach* (Lewis 1993). Advances in computer-based studies of language (referred to as corpus linguistics) have also provided a huge, classroom-accessible database for lexically based inquiry and instruction. These studies have focused on collocations of lexical items and multiple word units. A number of lexically based texts and computer resources have become available to assist in organizing and teaching the lexicon.

Lexical approaches in language teaching seek to develop proposals for syllabus design and language teaching founded on a view of language in which lexis plays the central role.

Approach: Theory of language and learning

Whereas Chomsky's influential theory of language emphasized the capacity of speakers to create and interpret sentences that are unique and have never been produced or heard previously, in contrast, the lexical view holds that only a minority of spoken sentences are entirely novel creations and that multiword units functioning as "chunks" or memorized patterns form a high proportion of the fluent stretches of speech heard in everyday conversation (Pawley and Syder 1983). The role of collocation is also important in lexically based theories of language. Collocation refers to the regular occurrence together of words. For example, compare the following collocations of verbs with nouns:

do my hair/the cooking/the laundry/my work
make my bed/a promise/coffee/a meal

Many other lexical units also occur in language. For example:

binomials: clean and tidy, back to front
trinomials: cool, calm, and collected
idioms: dead drunk, to run up a bill
similes: as old as the hills
connectives: finally, to conclude
conversational gambits: Guess what!

These and other types of lexical units are thought to play a central role in learning and in communication. Studies based on large-scale computer databases of language corpora have examined patterns of phrase and clause sequences as they appear in samples of various kinds of texts, including spoken samples. Three important UK-based corpora are the COBUILD Bank of English Corpus, the Cambridge International Corpus, and the British National Corpus, the latter of which contains more than 300 million words. These and other corpora are important sources of information about collocations and other multiword units in English.

Lexis is also believed to play a central role in language learning. Nattinger commented:

> Perhaps we should base our teaching on the assumption that, for a great deal of the time anyway, language production consists of piecing together the

ready-made units appropriate for a particular situation and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations. Our teaching, therefore, would center on these patterns and the ways they can be pieced together, along with the ways they vary and the situations in which they occur. (Nattinger 1980: 341)

However, if as Pawley and Syder estimate, native speakers have hundreds of thousands of prepackaged phrases in their lexical inventory, the implications for second language learning are uncertain. How might second language learners, lacking the language experiential base of native speakers, approach the daunting task of internalizing this massive inventory of lexical usage?

Krashen suggests that massive amounts of "language input," especially through reading, is the only effective approach to such learning. Others propose making the language class a laboratory in which learners can explore, via computer concordance databases, the contexts of lexical use that occur in different kinds of texts and language data. A third approach to learning lexical chunks has been "contrastive": Some applied linguists have suggested that for a number of languages there is an appreciable degree of overlap in the form and meaning of lexical collocations. Bahns (1993: 58) suggests that "the teaching of lexical collocations in EFL should concentrate on items for which there is no direct translational equivalence in English and in the learners' respective mother tongues." Regardless of the learning route taken, a massive learning load seems an unavoidable consequence of a lexical approach in second language instruction.

Lewis (2000) acknowledges that the lexical approach has lacked a coherent learning theory and attempts to rectify this with the following assumptions about learning theory in the lexical approach (Lewis 2000: 184):

- Encountering new learning items on several occasions is a necessary but sufficient condition for learning to occur.
- Noticing lexical chunks or collocations is a necessary but not sufficient condition for "input" to become "intake."
- Noticing similarities, differences, restrictions, and examples contributes to turning input into intake, although formal description of rules probably does not help.
- Acquisition is based not on the application of formal rules but on an accumulation of examples from which learners make provisional generalizations. Language production is the product of previously met examples, not formal rules.
- No linear syllabus can adequately reflect the nonlinear nature of acquisition.

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

The rationale and design for lexically based language teaching described in *The Lexical Syllabus* (Willis 1990) and the application of it in the Collins COBUILD English Course represent the most ambitious attempt to realize a syllabus and accompanying materials based on lexical rather than grammatical principles. (This may not, however, have been the reason for the lack of enthusiasm with which this course was received.) Willis notes that the COBUILD computer analyses of texts indicate that "the 700 most frequent words of English account for around 70% of all English text." This "fact" led to the decision that "word frequency would determine the contents of our course. Level 1 would aim to cover the most frequent 700 words together with their common patterns and uses" (Willis 1990: vi). In one respect, this work resembled the earlier frequency-based analyses of vocabulary by West (1953) and Thorndike and Longe (1944). The difference in the COBUILD course was the attention to word patterns derived from the computer analysis. Willis stresses, however, that "the lexical syllabus not only subsumes a structural syllabus, it also indicates how the structures which make up syllabus should be exemplified" since the computer corpus reveals the commonest structural patterns in which words are used (Willis 1990: vi).

Other proposals have been put forward as to how lexical material might be organized for instruction. Nation (1999) reviews a variety of criteria for classifying collocations and chunks and suggests approaches to instructional sequencing and treatment for different types of collocations. Nattinger and DeCarrico propose using a functional schema for organizing instruction:

> Distinguishing lexical phrases as social interactions, necessary topics, and discourse devices seems to us the most effective distinction for pedagogical purposes, but that is not to say that a more effective way of grouping might not be found necessary in the wake of further research. (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992: 185)

Nattinger and DeCarrico provide exemplification of the lexical phrases that exemplify these categories for English and several other languages.

Specific roles for teachers and learners are also assumed in a lexical approach. Lewis supports Krashen's Natural Approach procedures and suggests that teacher talk is a major source of learner input in demonstrating how lexical phrases are used for different functional purposes. Willis proposes that teachers need to understand and manage a classroom methodology based on stages composed of Task, Planning, and Report. In general terms, Willis views the teacher's role as one of

creating an environment in which learners can operate effectively and then helping learners manage their own learning. This requires that teachers "abandon the idea of the teacher as 'knower' and concentrate instead on the idea of the learner as 'discoverer'" (Willis 1990: 131).

Others propose that learners make use of computers to analyze text data previously collected or made available "free-form" on the Internet. Here the learner assumes the role of data analyst constructing his or her own linguistic generalizations based on examination of large corpora of language samples taken from "real life." In such schemes, teachers have a major responsibility for organizing the technological system and providing scaffolding to help learners build autonomy in use of the system. The most popular computer-based applications using corpora are built on the presentation of concordance lines to the learner that illustrate the contexts of use of some words or structures. However, learners need training in how to use the concordancer effectively. Teaching assistance will be necessary in leading the learner, by example, through the different stages of lexical analysis such as observation, classification, and generalization.

Materials and teaching resources to support lexical approaches in language teaching are of at least four types. Type 1 consists of complete course packages including texts, tapes, teacher's manuals, and so on, such as the Collins COBUILD English Course (Willis and Willis 1989). Type 2 is represented by collections of vocabulary teaching activities such as those that appear in Lewis's *Implementing the Lexical Approach* (Lewis 1997). Type 3 consists of "printout" versions of computer corpora collections packaged in text format. Tribble and Jones (1990) include such materials with accompanying student exercises based on the corpora printouts. Type 4 materials are computer concordancing programs and attached data sets to allow students to set up and carry out their own analyses. These are typically packaged in CD-ROM form, such as Oxford's Micro Concord, or can be downloaded from sites on the Internet.

An example of the kinds of displays that appear in text materials and in the concordancing displays from which the printout materials derive is illustrated below. The difference between how the vocabulary items "predict" and "forecast" are used and how they collocate is not easy to explain. However, access to these items in context in the computer corpus allows students (and their teachers) to see how these words actually behave in authentic textual use. Corpus samples are usually presented in the limited context form exemplified here.

Some contexts of PREDICT

1. involved in copper binding. Our findings *predict* that examples of selective editing of mitocho

2. the stratosphere. The present models *predict* that a cooling of the winter polar vortex by
3. analysis of this DNA we are able to *predict* the complete amino-acid sequence of the polyp
4. or this problem use the survey data to *predict* values on the vertical profile; by contrast,
5. the calcium-voltage hypothesis would *predict* an increase in release, locked in time to the

Some contexts of FORECAST

1. calculations a second. The center makes *forecasts* 10 days ahead for 18 national meteorological
2. any action whose success hinges on a *forecast* being right. They might end up doing a lot
3. stands up in the House of Commons to *forecast* Britain's economic performance for the next
4. vice labor of its people. This gloomy *forecast* can be better understood by looking closely
5. But three months earlier the secret *forecast* carried out by Treasury economists suggested

Procedure

Procedural sequences for lexically based language teaching vary depending on which of the four types of materials and activities outlined in the preceding section are employed. However, all designers, to some degree, assume that the learner must take on the role of "discourse analyst," with the discourse being either packaged data or data "found" via one of the text search computer programs. Classroom procedures typically involve the use of activities that draw students' attention to lexical collocations and seek to enhance their retention and use of collocations. Woolard (2000) suggests that teachers should reexamine their course books for collocations, adding exercises that focus explicitly on lexical phrases. They should also develop activities that enable learners to discover collocations themselves, both in the classroom and in the language they encounter outside of the classroom. Woolard (2000: 35) comments:

> The learning of collocations is one aspect of language development which is ideally suited to independent language learning. In a very real sense, we can teach students to teach themselves. Collocation is mostly a matter of noticing and recording, and trained students should be able to explore texts for themselves. Not only should they notice common collocations in the texts they meet, but more importantly, they should select those collocations which are crucial to their particular needs.

Hill (2000) suggests that classroom procedures involve (*a*) teaching individual collocations, (*b*) making students aware of collocation, (*c*) extending what students already know by adding knowledge of collocation restrictions to known vocabulary, and (*d*) storing collocations through encouraging students to keep a lexical notebook. Lewis (2000: 20–21) gives the following example of how a teacher extends learners' knowledge of collocations while giving feedback on a learner's error.

S: I have to make an exam in the summer.
(T indicates mistake by facial expression.)
S: I have to make an exam.
T: (Writes 'exam' on the board.)
What verb do we usually use with "exam"?
S2: Take.
T: Yes, that's right. (Writes "take" on the board.)
What other verbs do we use with "exam"?
S2: Pass.
T: Yes. And the opposite?
S: Fail.
(Writes "pass" and "fail" on the board.)
And if you fail an exam, sometimes you can do it again.
What's the verb for that? (Waits for response.)
No? OK, retake. You can retake an exam.
(Writes "retake" on the board.)
If you pass an exam with no problems, what can you say? I . . . passed.
S2: Easily.
T: Yes, or we often say "comfortably." I passed comfortably.
What about if you get 51 and the pass mark is 50?
What can you say? I . . . (Waits for response.)
No? I just passed. You can also just fail.

Conclusion

The status of lexis in language teaching has been considerably enhanced by developments in lexical and linguistic theory, by work in corpus analysis, and by recognition of the role of multiword units in language learning and communication. However, lexis still refers to only one component of communicative competence. Lewis and others have coined the term *lexical approach* to characterize their proposals for a lexis-based approach to language teaching. However, such proposals lack the full characterization of an approach or method as described in this book. It remains to be convincingly demonstrated how a lexically based theory of language and language learning can be applied at the levels of design and procedure in language teaching, suggesting that it is still an idea in search of an approach and a methodology.

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