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Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) in English Language Teaching

Neurolingvističko programiranje (NLP) u poučavanju engleskoga jezika

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Sažetak: *Neurolingvističko programiranje (NLP) nije službena metoda poučavanja ili učenja jezika, nego filozofski pristup komunikaciji koji uključuje niz tehnika samokontrole i samoohrabrenja. Jezik se promatra kao način opažanja svijeta koji nas okružuje i na koji utječemo putem verbalne i neverbalne komunikacije. Naime, NLP nas uči kako promjene u našem odnosu prema svijetu mogu utjecati i na ponašanje drugih ljudi. Stoga stručnjaci NLP-a vjeruju da bi to moglo postati djelotvorna metoda učenja jezika.*

Ovaj članak bavi se ključnim idejama i sastavnicama NLP-a te ukazuje na pozitivne učinke njegove uporabe u ELT učionicima.

Ključne riječi: *neurolingvističko programiranje (NLP), učenje jezika, učenje jezika, verbalna i neverbalna komunikacija*

Abstract: *NLP is not a language-teaching or language-learning strategy, but rather a philosophical approach to communication, which includes a set of useful self-control and self-assertion techniques. Language is viewed as a way of perceiving the world around us and affecting it through verbal and nonverbal communication. Namely, NLP teaches us how the*

changes in our own relation to the world can also affect the behaviour of other people. Thus, NLP experts believe that it could become an effective language-teaching or language-learning method. This article addresses the key components of NLP and demonstrates the positive effects of its use in the ELT classroom.

Key words: *neurolinguistic programming (NLP), language-teaching, language-learning, verbal and nonverbal communication*

1. Introduction

This paper is based on the current scientific research of practical communication models with special attention to neurolinguistic programming (NLP), a model created by Americans Richard Bandler and John Grinder in the 1970s, which seems to be rather effective in the field of education and applied linguistics. The basic idea of NLP is the connection of neurological processes (neurons), language (linguistics), and behavioural patterns learned through experience (programming). So, it deals with the use of primary representation systems (human senses) in acquiring and implementation of knowledge. In the following lines, we will address the definition and history of this model as well as the possibilities of applying it in language-teaching and learning.

2. Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP): Theoretical Framework

The story of NLP began in the mid-1970s in Santa Cruz, California, with Richard Bandler, a psychology student at the U.C. Santa Cruz and Dr John Grinder, an associate professor of linguistics.

The term Neuro-Linguistic Programming consists of three important words: neuro, linguistic and programming.

Neuro alludes to the brain and neural system, constructing the human mind. Neurons or nerve cells are the entities utilized by the sensory system to send, receive, and store information.

Linguistic is connected to the verbal and non-verbal information moving over and through these pathways.

Programming is the way in which these data are being manipulated and turned into valuable data. The brain may coordinate the information, sequence them and match them to our previous experiences. (Antic, 2006:123)

They were actually investigating human behaviour in order to understand why certain individuals appeared to be brilliant at what they did, while others failed similar assignments.

They dealt with the work of the three famous therapists: Virginia Satir, the unprecedented family specialist, the psychotherapist Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt philosophy, and the famous hypnotherapist Milton Erickson.

They wanted to identify the patterns that produced the results of brilliant individuals, then to create the models upon them and, finally, to teach these models to others. In addition, they found similar patterns in the works of Satir, Perls and Ericson, which were turned into the fundamentals of NLP named as follows: meta-model, submodalities, reframing, language patterns, well-formedness conditions and eye accessing clues. So, the expression Neuro-Linguistic Programming actually embodies the self-creation and self-expression of a personality.

In other words, humans consist of neurology that transfers information from their environment to the central nervous system and brain, which translates them into meanings, beliefs and expectations, making an input, which becomes more complicated due to life experience.¹

Thus, the core philosophy of NLP is based upon individual's maps or their limited internal representations of the world and not the world itself (Grinder & Bandler, 1976). This was further explained by Tosey et al. (2005), who claim that NLP deals with social dimensions of differences in people's individual world interpretations, and Moore (2009), according to whom NLP stands for the study of subjective experience appearing from individual's particular worldview.

According to Antic (2006:124), there are four main NLP principles:

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.”

¹See: “*What is NeuroLinguistic Programming? NLP explained, history, VAKOG...*“, <http://www.nlp-practitioners.com/what-is-nlp/#History> (June 8, 2018)

2. Rapport: a factor that is essential for effective communication - maximizing similarities and minimizing differences between people at the 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. ”

However, Bandler and Grinder's interest was not aimed at mere theoretical premises, but they wanted to develop a practical model based on several clearly-stated techniques. So, NLP started to be treated as a model, rather than a theory of human behaviour by some other scholars, such as Zastrow et al. (1987), Heap (2008), Tosey & Mathison (2010) etc.

A wide scope of strategies and systems offered by NLP also aim at the educational system in general (Beaver, 2002; Freeth, 2003; O'Connor and Seymour, 2000), which means that this goal-oriented and student-oriented approach offers various techniques from which instructors, educators, and students can profit. Yero (2001) and Tosey and Mathison (2003) put a special emphasis on its educational potential.

Generally speaking, NLP-techniques may improve cognitive abilities, raise self-confidence, and motivation; they may help individuals to adopt effective learning strategies, as well as to distinguish and reframe traditional educational beliefs (Dilts & Epstein, 1995; Thornbury, 2001).

Since it is primarily a communication methodology, NLP-strategies may be very useful in learning and teaching languages, which was confirmed by Revell and Norman (1997), who presented “13 underlying NLP assumptions for language teachers to complement their belief system:

1. Mind and body are interdependent. Each impacts the other one.
2. The map is not the territory.
3. There is no failure.
4. The map becomes the territory. That is, what you consider to be true turns out to be true.

5. Be aware of what you want.
6. Our required resources are within us.
7. Communication is an amalgam of verbal and non-verbal behaviour.
8. The unconscious mind is superior.
9. Communication in both conscious and unconscious.
10. There is a positive intention behind all behaviours.
11. The meaning of my communication is the response I receive.
12. Modelling excellent behaviour leads to excellence.
13. Flexibility is a core component of the system.“ (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2014:2097)

Recent findings (Wang, Wang & Huang, 2008; Isazadeh, Makui, Ansarian, 2016; Farahani, 2018) have shown that NLP strategies may be effective in terms of general language acquisition and reading comprehension, especially if educators pay attention to learners' preferences and learning styles.

3. NLP in the EFL classroom

NLP is based on the appreciation of cognitive processes, that is, the diversity of human perception of individual contents and differences in learning styles. In connection to these processes, Bandler and Grinder state the connection between the emotional states and eye movements of an individual as one of the most important factors of the human cognitive processes:

“At the core of NLP is the belief that, when people are engaged in activities, they are also making use of a representational system; that is, they are using some internal representation of the materials they are involved with, such as a conversation, a rifle shot, a spelling task. These representations can be visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or involve the other senses. In addition, a person may be creating a representation or recalling one. For example, a person asked to spell a word may visualize that word printed on a piece of paper, may hear it being sounded out, or may construct the spelling from the application of a series of logical rules.” (Siddiqui, 2018:182)

The aforementioned representational systems include five senses to learn a language: Visual (looking and seeing), Auditory (hearing and listening), Kinesthetic (feeling externally and internally; feeling movement), Olfactory (smelling) and Gustatory (tasting).

The task of the teacher in a successful learning process is to engage all those senses. The teacher should create such a learning environment to enhance the integration of the four basic language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

The most important step in the creation of motivational learning environment is to build Rapport, defined as “A close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well, e.g.:

‘she was able to establish a good rapport with the children’

‘she had an instant rapport with animals’²

In the EFL classroom, Rapport may be built by introducing oneself, team-work activities, negotiations and communication gap activities.

The successful Rapport may be enhanced by Mirroring the behaviour of our interlocutors, which includes imitation of their gestures, facial expressions, posture and speaking styles in order to achieve mutual confidence. This is included in the communicative activities consisting of the combination of verbal and non-verbal aspects.

The next step is the Creation of the Positive Attitude and Anchoring of positive feelings. The technique is based upon the creation of the positive mental image and recalling it by a certain gesture, expression or characteristic body movement (the Anchor). For example, a guided fantasy, a characteristic movement or a sound are used to recall and keep the state of the positive mental for a while. A few teachers, frequently subliminally, settle on various positions in the classroom in order to complete certain activities. For example, give guidelines, show language structure or recount to a story. In ELT, this is a kind of anchor by means of which the students consequently realize what will occur next in an exercise, and are ready for it.

The Flow Theory, according to which the learning process acts as the flow of water - steady and uninterrupted-is in a great connection with NLP. Effective learning happens when students feel interested in the content and get positive feedback from one another and the

²See: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rapport>

teacher, so that time appears to pass rapidly. This may be achieved through clear messages, interactive activities, teacher's flexibility and capability of creating a relaxing atmosphere.

Pacing and leading include “a set of strategies requiring the listener to 'tune in', accept and correctly state the speaker's point of view (pacing) before suggesting an alternative point of view (leading).”³ This should be accompanied by the mirroring of the interlocutor's behaviour and include the learning activities such as turn-taking, decision-making, planning and listening without giving a response.

Another technique called Perceptual positioning refers to dealing with conflicts and the role of the mediator- a neutral third party resolving a problematic situation, which may be achieved through storytelling or reading activities.

Finally, the NLP teaching strategies usually encompass the Modelling of Good Practice, which refers to following the positive examples and accepting the good learning strategies developed by the students themselves.

4. Conclusive Remarks

This article refers to just a couple of ideas of NLP. There are a lot more things that could be referenced or examined further. We have tried to address the key components of NLP and demonstrate the positive effects of its use in the ELT classroom.

Regardless of whether one is an NLP practitioner or not, the aforementioned findings suggest that NLP and ELT techniques may be combined into a teaching-and-learning process of high quality.

There is nothing in NLP that is in opposition to modern ELT methodology. On the contrary, NLP has a lot to add to the officially extensive collection of language learning methods.

Actually, NLP enables us to understand things from the other point of view and realise that our own “maps“ (attitudes, behaviour, gestures, emotions) are not necessarily shared by our

³Neuro Linguistic Programming in ELT: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/neuro-linguistic-programming-elt>

students or other people around us. In order to enhance the learning process, we should adapt our teaching techniques by “mirroring“ the students' feedback.

The NLP methods NLP will make the English language learning a fascinating and interesting activity. According to that, English language teachers, as moderators of the learning process, may improve the students' language skills and people skills, but also help them confront the world with a high amount of self-esteem.

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