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A critique of neuro-linguistic programming from an ethnomethodological perspective: A practical application of conversational analysis

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A CRITIQUE OF NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING FROM

AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE:

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF
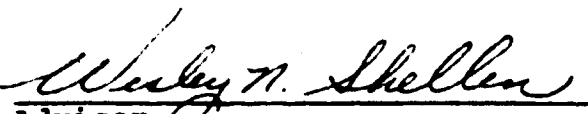
CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Neuro-linguistic programming (hereafter referred to as NLP) proposes a model of communication using linguistics, specifically transformational grammer. It has become a method for training therapists and other helping professionals in the process of behavior change. NLP was founded by Richard Bandler, a therapist and John Grinder, a linguist. They co-authored two books which describe the theory of NLP. The Structure of Magic I and II describe the theories upon which the workshops and training sessions are based. The training sessions have become popularized throughout the United States. Trainers are required to be certified by attending workshops that provide preparation to disseminate the theories and skills for interested helping professionals.

NLP has become a method of analyzing language in the process of therapy, developing communication skills and creating a meta-model for implementing change and problem solving. The meta-model analyzes the language through the use of surface structures and deep structures which are the fuller representation of personal experience. The meta-model does not rely on the content of communication to effect change in another person. Instead, by analyzing three processes of representing our world the therapist is instructed in uncovering the deep structure of the client's

representation of the world. The three processes of
representing our world are generalization, deletion and
distortion.

Generalization refers to the process whereby "elements
or pieces of a person's model become detached from their
original experience and come to represent the entire category
of which the experience is an example".[1] Generalizations
are a necessary method of representing our experience from
which we generate rules or generalizations to cope with our
world.

At this point in the explanation of generalization,
Bandler and Grinder refer to the importance of context.

> The point here is that the same rule will
> be useful or not, depending upon the context. . .
> that is, that there are no right generalizations,
> that each model must be evaluated in its context.
> Furthermore, this gives us a key to understanding
> human behavior that seems to us to be bizarre
> or inappropriate; that is, if we can see the
> person's behavior in the context in which it
> originated.[2]

From this quotation we are given a key to understanding
human behavior, i.e., by finding the context in which the
behavior originated. However, I will point out how the
theory does not use this key to its fullest advantage.

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[1]Bandler, R. and Grinder, J. The Structure of Magic,
p. 14.

[2]Ibid., p. 15.

The second process that humans use to deal with their experience is deletion. Deletion refers to the process of selective attention whereby we focus upon certain elements of the experience and exclude other elements. Deletion can be both useful and harmful depending upon the context.

Distortion allows us to make shifts in our experience of sensory data. For example a person tends to change the messages he receives from his world to fit his model of the world. If we believe that another person is uncaring then we will tend to distort the caring messages from that person into suspicious messages that the person is not being honest or that he just wants something from us, thereby enabling our model of the world to exist without contradictions.

In this paper I will discuss the importance of context in determining the meaning of messages we receive from our world. Ethnomethodology describes how contexts define the meaning we assign to our environment. Bandler and Grinder (1975) merely allude to the importance of context in analyzing language without specifying how it functions.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of taking the context into account in assigning meaning to events, situations and people, secondly to demonstrate the use of context in conversational analysis through the application of ethnomethodological theories. NLP uses a transcription between a therapist and a client to demonstrate

the application of its theory. This same transcription will
be used to demonstrate the theories of ethnomethodology
and the importance of determining the context to understand
the meaning that is assigned.

The first section of the paper discusses the theory
of ethnomethodology in contrast with NLP. The second section
describes the analysis of the transcription using both
theories (NLP and ethnomethodology).

THE THEORY

Ethnomethodology has been defined simply as the study
of common sense knowledge. And common sense knowledge has
been defined as known rules of thumb, maxims, social customs,
all of which are contradictory and ambiguous. Schutz[1]
describes the common sense world of objects and events
that members of society use to construct social reality
and its facticity as composed of three aspects: the stock
of knowledge at hand, the sense of social structure, and
the practices of common sense reasoning. These are the
components of ethnomethodology.

Garfinkel describes his use of the term ethnomethodology
"to refer to the investigation of the rational properties
of indexical expressions and other practical actions as

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[1]Schutz, A., Collected Papers II: Studies in Social
Theory, 1964.

contingent on-going accomplishments of organized artful
practices of everyday life".[1]

Both NLP and ethnomethodology describe multiple
realities of the social world. NLP postulates that each
person has their own unique experience of the world which
is represented by our personal model of the world. Bandler
and Grinder use the phrase, borrowed from Korzybski (1958),
that our model of the world is a map of the territory.
The map is not the territory but a representation of the
territory. "Each of us may, then, create a different model
of the world we share and thus come to live in a somewhat
different reality."[2]

Bois describes the map as a different order of existence.
He says that the components of the territory (reality) are
transformed into new and different elements which create
the map. Furthermore, Bois describes our structured
unconscious as the instrument which structures the outside
world for us. Additionally, Bois points out that the map
does not represent all the territory. "The map is not a
map of the territory but a map of the mapper himself in
interaction with the territory."[3]

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[1]Garfinkel, H., _Studies in Ethnomethodology_, p. 11.

[2]Bandler, R., and Grinder, J., _The Structure of Magic_,
p. 7.

[3]Bois, J. S., _The Art of Awareness_, p. 84.

To demonstrate these different maps Bandler and Grinder describe three filters that we use in making sense of reality.[1] The first set of filters are neurological constraints which are sensory limits that are genetically determined. The second set of filters are the social constraints which refer to our biography, our language and our socially agreed upon fictions. These filters correspond to the sense of social structure described by ethnomethodologists. This reality is also referred to as the common sense reality that is assumed and taken for granted by the members of society. It is assumed to be factual and independent of perception. Cicourel describes this reality as having a cognitive bias that necessarily works as an unquestioned assumption of the social world.[2]

The third filters discussed in NLP are individual constraints which refer to our life histories and unique experiences that constitute our personalities. These filters are acknowledged by the ethnomethodologists. However, Schutz suggests that the greater part of personal knowledge is socially derived.

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[1]Bandler, R., and Grinder, J., The Structure of Magic, 1975.

[2]Cicourel, A., Cognitive Sociology.

> Only a very small part of my knowledge
> originates within my personal experience. The
> greater part is socially derived, handed down
> to me by my friends, my parents, my teachers
> and teachers of my teachers.[1]

The ethnomethodologist describes the interaction of

personal knowledge and social knowledge. Whereas NLP

describes the three filters and not their interaction.

For example, if part of a person's knowledge includes the

notion that what other people think of him is important to

take into account, then the person would be sensitive to

opinions of others. This notion would be given to the

person by his parents and teachers when they offered

criticisms and suggestions of his actions. According to

ethnomethodologists this sensitivity to others is an example

of how personal knowledge is socially derived. According

to NLP this sensitivity to others is an example of the person

using his individual constraints in processing information

from others.

The ethnomethodologist describes multiple realities

in a different manner. He begins with the natural reality.

This reality is the major reality while scientific reality

and mythical-religious reality are alterations of the natural

reality. Scientific reality uses context-free concepts,

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[1]Schutz, A., Collected Papers II: Studies in Social
Theory, 1964, p. 13.

and the scientist suspends his own biography, unique
experiences and personal views of the world in order to
observe the natural reality. The religious person uses a
belief system to derive the stock of knowledge at hand.
The natural reality deals with social objects and events
that are context-dependent, continually in flux and equivocal
until the context is supplied. The context-dependent nature
of social objects and events is a concept that is ignored
in NLP. In trying to understand how persons assign meaning
to objects and events NLP would benefit by including the
context-dependent nature of social reality. As Denzin
points out, social objects do not contain a meaning unto
themselves. "Man's environment does not consist of objects
which carry intrinsic meaning. Social objects are constructs
and not self-existing entities with intrinsic natures."[1]

Stock of Knowledge

Ethnomethodology delves into detail regarding the
stock of knowledge at hand. The first property is that the
knowledge is socially derived which was discussed above.
The second property is that the stock of knowledge is socially

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[1]Denzin, N., "Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology:
A Proposed Synthesis". American Sociological Review, p. 23.

distributed. What we know is contributed by everyone and everyone has a different quantity of the stock of knowledge. This property would enhance NLP theory by explaining deficiencies in a member's stock of knowledge. Deletion and distortion are not the only explanation of miscommunication as suggested by NLP theory. The social distribution of knowledge offers another source of insufficient communication. The Neuro-Linguistic Programmers could use the social distribution of knowledge to account for the influence of others upon our experience. By locating the source of the knowledge NLP can increase the choices available for changing one's stock of knowledge. If one's teachers are found to be the source of the knowledge, then change involves a re-evaluation of the relevance of that knowledge. If the source of the knowledge comes from individual constraints, then an internal assessment of the relevance is more appropriate.

The social constraints are described by NLP as unable to be changed or integrated into the person's common sense reality. The ethnomethodologist views the social aspect of one's knowledge as the most pervasive and changeable.

The third property of the stock of knowledge is reflexive in nature, in that the social distribution of knowledge is itself a part of the stock of knowledge at hand. This property further amplifies NLP's explanation

of the lack of communication. As a person increases their
stock of knowledge at hand, they simultaneously increase
their knowledge which is socially interdependent with other
members of society. Rather than the narrow focus of
individual constraints affecting their knowledge, a person
becomes more aware of the influence of others upon his stock
of knowledge. The person who is sensitive to others opinions
could determine that his parents and teachers gave him this
personal knowledge which was important in growing up and
learning in school. Now he can evaluate others' opinions
and decide their importance or lack of importance for himself,
depending upon the context, the person offering the criticisms,
and his own self-concept.

The fourth property of the stock of knowledge is that
it is based upon language. Schutz explains this property
by saying, "The typifying medium par excellence by which
socially derived knowledge is transmitted is the vocabulary
and the syntax of everyday language."[1] This property is
included in NLP theory and agreed upon by both NLP and
ethnomethodology.

. The fifth property is that the elements within the stock
of knowledge, i.e., maxims, definitions, rules, all are

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[1]Schutz, A., Collected Papers K: The Problem of Social
Reality, 1962, p. 14.

potentially equivocal. They have multiple meanings and are context dependent. This property is ignored by NLP theory. Without a particular context the elements of the stock of knowledge contribute to contradictory meanings due to their inherent ambiguity. NLP theory must consider this property in attempts to understand the meaning of conversations.

The final property is that the stock of knowledge is heterogeneous and varies in its degree of clarity and specificity. This property is due to the context-dependent nature of the elements of knowledge. Since NLP theory does not take into account the context-dependent property of knowledge, another explanation of contradictory, incongruity, and lack of clarity is missing from the theory.

Miscommunication

Garfinkel found in an experiment that listeners when confronted with incomplete communication (deletion in the terms of NLP), were willing to wait for later answers to decide the sense of previous ones. In other words the listener would postpone understanding and expect that further ·communication would clarify unanswered questions. Furthermore, Garfinkel states that "waiting for something later in order to see what was meant before" is a property of everyday conversation.[1] Other properties of talk include the specific

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[1]Garfinkel, H., Studies in Ethnomethodology, 1967.

vagueness of references, the occasionality of expressions,

and the expectation of being understood. To quote Garfinkel:

> Persons require these properties of
> discourse as conditions under which they are
> themselves entitled and entitle others to
> claim that they know what they are talking
> about, and that what they are saying is
> understandable and ought to be understood.[1]

We expect others to be vague and still be understood and we

expect that our communication can be vague, incomplete,

and contradictory and yet be understood. Garfinkel's

observations of how persons handle contradictory communication

suggests that the listener selects a question that answers

the contradiction, or imputes knowledge and intent to the

question and questioner. The contradiction is resolved in

the listener's mind by resolving the contradiction with his

own resources.

This process of handling contradictions, ambiguities,

and incongruity drastically alters the application of NLP

theories in understanding how we understand others. We

expect to be understood even though we are vague, present

contradictions and talk in an ambiguous way. The other's

understanding of what we are trying to say is accomplished

through his own resources. When we present contradictions

it is up to the other person to resolve them using their

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[1]Garfinkel, H., Studies in Ethnomethodology, 1967.

own resources. Thus ethnomethodology presents
miscommunication (vagueness, ambiguity, contradiction)
as an expected phenomena of normal discourse. This
perception of everyday conversation makes the problematic
a common occurrence in conversation and enables us not to
get upset about our miscommunication. Even though
miscommunication is the norm we expect to be, and are,
understood.

Bandler and Grinder mention the importance of context
only briefly. They admit that they have not developed an
explicit structure for the whole range of human experience.
However, they mention three components of a person's
reference structure of the world, namely the context, the
person's feelings about what is happening in the world and
the person's perceptions of what others are feeling about
what is happening in the world.[1]

Sense of Social Structure

Leiter points out the synonomous terms used by
ethnomethodologists to describe the sense of social structure,
such as, common sense reality, the natural attitude of
everyday life, the everyday world.[2] The sense of social

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[1]Bandler, R., and Grinder, J., The Structure of Magic,
1975.

[2]Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology, 1980.

structure is important in analyzing NLP theories. The
contribution by ethnomethodologists of an understanding
of how this mundane reality operates serves as the foundation
for critiquing the theory of NLP. The accomplishment of
this common sense reality will be explained, then applied
to NLP theories.

Ethnomethodologists explain that the sense of social
structure is a perception and an assumption that a natural
order exists which is not a product of perception but rather
independent of perception. Common sense reality exists
without any dependence upon subjects to perceive its
existence. Additionally, we assume that the objects and
events within the common sense reality are known in common
by everyone, or at least they are "out there" for everyone
to see. Thirdly, the objects and events of common sense
reality are factual; they are as they appear to us. These
assumptions or properties of common sense reality are the
standards upon which everything is judged to be real.
Garfinkel describes six values of "normative orders of
social structures presumed to be subscribed to and known
between subject and adviser.[1]

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[1]Garfinkel, H., <u>Studies in Ethnomethodology</u>. 1967,
p. 94.

1) typicality - an object can be assigned to a class
   of events

2) likelihood of occurrence - objects and events can
   be viewed as likely to happen

3) comparability - an object can be compared to past
   and future events

4) causal texture - objects and events exist in a
   cause-effect relationship

5) technical efficacy - objects and events exist in
   means-end relationship

6) moral requiredness - events are required to possess
   these properties or values

When NLP analyzes an event it uses the linguistic
approach of transformational grammar. By understanding the
assumptions within the process of establishing the everyday
reality and the presumed values of objects and events the
Neuro-Linguistic Programmer would be able to create more
choices to explore in uncovering the deficiencies of
communication. For example, when an event cannot be compared
·to past or future events it stands alone unable to be
understood in relation to other events. In such instances
a person becomes stuck without resources to make sense of
the event according to NLP.

Occasioned Corpus

The occasioned corpus is a method for analyzing a social situation or event in order to understand how a member of society has generated the problem.[1] Ethnomethodologists use the occasioned corpus to change the events within a situation, that are taken for granted, into events that pose problems and questions in order that the events within the situation may be studied.

The occasioned corpus is a method for analyzing events that are problematic. There are two parts to the corpus: those elements that compose the particular event, and the set of practices that the person uses to put together the elements. For example, the intake hearing in a juvenile probation office is a situation in which an occasioned corpus can be used to explain the events within the situation. At this hearing a parent and their teenager appear before a probation officer. All the parties assume that the teenager will be placed on probation. One element that comprises this situation is the alleged commission of an offense by the juvenile. The assumptions are that the juvenile must be held accountable for the offense and that he or she must be placed on probation to accomplish the accountability.

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[1] Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology. 1980.

Placing the youth on probation only shifts the responsibility for the youth from the parent to the probation officer. Now the parent is relieved of the burden of handling the law-breaking juvenile. The probation officer determines rules that the parent must enforce or, if unable to enforce, then inform the probation officer of the rule infractions. Another assumption is that the parents are unable to control their teenager so a social agency is needed to control the rule-breaking behavior of the juvenile. These elements are the first part of the corpus: loss of parental control, law and rule breaking behavior on the part of the juvenile, necessity for accountability, necessity for probation to establish rules for the juvenile. The second part of the corpus is the practices that define the event which is described as the determination of guilt or innocence of the juvenile, signing an agreement of probation rules and describing the consequences for breaking the rules. By examining the elements of the corpus and the practices of the parties within the situation the ethnomethodologist turns the assumptions into problems. Is probation the best method to restore the parental loss of control? Does probation render the juvenile accountable? When the elements of an event are examined from the point of view of the person, and how the person produces the elements of the event, the closure the person creates around the event is

the person's method of handling the event. The elements
of an occasioned corpus do not form a fixed or closed status.
The elements of the corpus can be indefinitely modified.
Such a strategy for dealing with problematic events allows
a person, an adviser, a helper, a Neuro-Linguistic Programmer
to produce new elements or take away other ones. NLP uses
a type of an occasioned corpus in describing the person who
gets stuck when they change a process into an event by using
nominalizations.[1] Again the Neuro-Linguistic Programmer
only focuses upon a linguistic feature of an event which
is like getting stuck without choices. When the client
represents his world as an event, such as the example below,
he loses control over the on-going process which is changed
into an event. The event is seen as fixed and finished,
as something which nothing can be done about.

"My marriage is a failure." This statement is an
example of a process being changed into an event. The
elements that compose the marriage need to be examined.
The status of being married is an on-going process that is
accomplished through conduct of both partners. It is
achieved through the way the other person in the marriage

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[1]Bandler, R., and Grinder, J., <u>The Structure of Magic</u>,
1975.

views the process as well as others in society view this
on-going process of being married. Without a broader focus
of the event we may be persuaded to change only the
nominalization and ignore the other features of the event.
Nominalizations are only one type of practice that structures
the event. Other features of a failing marriage are the
perceptions of one's parents about the marriage, the
significant others within the marriage social circle, and
offspring of the marital union. These features need to
be examined in the process of changing the perception of
the person's marriage.

Interpretative Procedures

Interpretative procedures of ethnomethodology provide
a significant illumination of the process of understanding
one another, or communicating meaning between persons and
more adequately explaining the pitfalls and miscommunication
that NLP attempts to eradicate. The difficulty of
communicating with another person lies in the problem of
making one's own concepts, which are derived from our personal
experience, into objects which exist independent of us so
that the other person can understand them. Interpretative
procedures are the method for accomplishing this task.

Cicourel and Garfinkel describe four methods of interpretation.[1,2]
The first method is the reciprocity of perspectives. Two
parties in an interaction assume that if they could change
places, each one would see what the other sees. Furthermore,
each one assumes that the differences between them are
expected but not so great as to impede understanding. And
when significant differences exist, they serve to document
how one person can have such a different interpretation of
objects and events. In other words when differences do
exist and present incongruities, our unique biographies and
personalities (individual constraints in NLP terms) serve
to explain the differences.

The second interpretative procedure is called normal
forms. It enables each person in an interaction to assume
that the other will communicate bits and pieces of conversation
that are understandable and part of the common sense reality
or what everyone knows. There is the expectation that the
other will understand and be understood. The third part
is called the et cetera principle which states that both
parties within an interaction expect vague references,
ambiguities and that the other can fill in the unstated

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[1] Cicourel, A., Cognitive Sociology. 1973.

[2] Garfinkel, H., Studies in Ethnomethodology. 1967.

but intended meanings of the message. Furthermore, the
listener assumes that the speaker will fill in the
ambiguities later in the conversation. This assumption
is also called the retrospective-prospective sense of
occurrence. Denzin explains the et cetera principle as
an on-going process of interaction. "What Garfinkel calls
the 'et cetera clause' refers to this tendency of persons
to fit events into a pattern that compliments their
on-going action."[1]

The fourth method is called indexical expressions.
This method assumes that each listener in an interaction
will supply the context of the interaction which includes
the individual constraints of the speaker, the purpose
and the intent of the speaker, the setting in which the
interaction takes place and the relationship between the
two parties.

Of these four interpretative procedures NLP discusses
only a part of one procedure, the indexicality of the
communication and a part of the first procedure in resolving
differences between two parties of an interaction. Examples
of NLP's process of "deletion" in using the interpretative
procedures are provided in the section entitled "The
Application".

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[1]Denzin, N., "Symbolic Interactionism and
Ethnomethodology: A Proposed Synthesis". 1969, p. 928.

NLP needs to recognize that the acknowledgment of our unique personalities does not preclude understanding of each other and the expectation of being understood and understanding the other, works as a self-fulfilling prophesy which accomplishes understanding. The miscommunication that is the focus of NLP needs to be recognized as a normal, expected occurrence of everyday conversation and that the strategies for its clarification transcend the language and transformations of linguistics. NLP also needs to recognize the indexicality of expressions and the importance of the context of the interaction to include the affect of the relationship of the two parties of the interaction.

Indexicality & Reflexivity

Other contributions of ethnomethodology to the enhancement of NLP theory are the terms indexicality and reflexivity. Indexicality describes the contextual nature of objects and events. Without a supplied context, objects and events have multiple meanings. I have discussed this property in other sections of this paper but now I will mention some additional features of indexicality. Leiter describes the function of indexical expressions as the word or expression indicating or pointing to a particular context which is necessary for the expression to make sense.[1] Contexts

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[1] Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology, 1980

refer to the setting in which the interaction takes place, the relationship between the interactants, the purpose and intent of the speaker, the speaker's personality as well as the non-verbal elements that exist in the interaction. Not only does the listener take into account the context but the speaker attempts to supply bits and pieces of the context.

Leiter points out that indexicality is an "essential, unavoidable property of talk".[1] Cicourel points out that the elements of the context do not form a fixed or bound set of features. The context continues to possess an open characteristic that provides for flexibility as well as the potential for misunderstanding. Supplying a context for assigning meaning to an interaction is a continuous, ongoing task.

> Indexical expressions force all members to
> retrieve by recall or invention particular
> ethnographic features from context-sensitive
> settings that will provide acceptable normative
> meanings to present activities and accounts of
> past activities.[2]

We notice that Cicourel suggests that we supply contexts by "recall or invention". If we cannot recall the particular

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[1]Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology. 1980. p. 111.

[2]Cicourel, A., Cognitive Sociology. 1973. p. 85.

context we could resort to inventing the context. Notice also that both present and past activities and accounts may be used in recalling a context to assign meaning.

Reflexivity can be described by defining accounts. Accounts reveal the features of the context to the listener. Accounts are defined by Scott and Lyman as "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry".[1] Leiter defines accounts in a more general way. He calls them mini-ethnographies. Their function is to "organize and render observable the features of society and social settings".[2] When people use accounts they are making the social situation observable and understandable to themselves as well as others. This process is an example of the principle of reflexivity. Since accounts are composed of indexical expressions, they need a context in order to be understood. So the account and the context need each other to make sense. The account contains the particular features of the context while it makes those features observable both to the speaker and listener in a social interaction.

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[1] Scott, M., and Lyman, S., "Accounts". 1968. p. 46.

[2] Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology. 1980. p. 161.

Another term that helps define reflexivity is interdependence. Interdependence describes the necessary connection between accounts and context. Both concepts rely on each other for their meaning. In a sense one cannot exist without the other. Accounts, talk, conversation are meaningless without a context and a context is devoid of meaning or rather contains many meanings until accounts specify the meaning of the context.

The principle of reflexivity reinforces the importance of supplying a context for conversation to be meaningful, a process that NLP theory overlooks. These properties of talk, indexicality and reflexivity, elaborate the accomplishment of assigning meaning in social interaction and suggest a theory of the explanation of miscommunication that goes beyond deletion and distortion of NLP theory.

Transformational Grammar

Ethnomethodology has borrowed from linguistics the foundations for its interpretative procedures. Linguistics recognizes the use of rules or syntax to generate the many different sentences from a deep structure. The transformations are the rules which are employed to develop the surface structure which is the utterance, the verbal or written sentence that is produced. Ethnomethodology recognizes this use of rules but uses them to produce an infinite set

of meanings to a particular utterance. Both theories accept the existence of a set of linguistic rules which are employed to produce the meaning of utterances. The difference is that ethnomethodology goes beyond the finite set of transformations and linguistic devices to produce meaning while the linguist relies upon the transformations to produce meaningful sentences. The linguist is concerned with the structure of meaning at a micro-level of analysis while the ethnomethodologist is concerned with the macro-level of analysis of meaning.

Leiter points out that Cicourel used the findings of transformational grammar to begin his study of interpretative procedures.[1] Cicourel suggests that a person uses the context to generate the meaning of a sentence as well as the semantics and syntax. He also says that linguistic rules have been given an existence of their own.[2] This position tends to overlook the importance of the context in assigning meaning. In fact, the rules of linguistics need a context in order to become operable. In short, ethnomethodologists analyze meaning as based upon the context while transformational linguists analyze meaning as based upon the rules of syntax.

Another criticism of transformational grammar involves the differences between a heuristic and an empirical nature.

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[1]Leiter, K., A Primer on Ethnomethodology, 1980.

[2]Cicourel, A., Cognitive Sociology. 1973.

Cicourel says that deep structure is a heuristic concept which is useful in creating theory and hypotheses, while interpretative procedures are empirically based.[1] Another difference between these two theories is the basic unit of analysis. For the linguist the sentence is the basic unit of analysis while the ethnomethodologist uses an account for the basic unit of analysis. Accounts are used when an actor is expected to explain his behavior out of the ordinary. Accounts are like justifications or excuses for behavior which restores the equilibrium of a relationship. In this sense Scott and Lyman describe the function of accounts. From this description we can see that accounts are composed of several sentences and contain a composite of meanings which justify or excuse the untoward behavior. In an interesting description of accounts, Scott and Lyman report that, "every account is a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities".[2] From this description we understand that accounts are more than simple sentences.

THE APPLICATION

In this section of the paper a verbatim transcription between a therapist and a client will be analyzed to contrast

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[1]Cicourel, A., Cognitive Sociology. 1973.

[2]Scott, M., and Lyman, S., "Accounts". American Sociological Review, 33, p. 59.

the NLP analysis with an ethnomethodological analysis. The
transcription appears in The Structure of Magic, by Bandler
and Grinder. The transcript is printed in its entirety in
the appendix. The numbers in parenthesis refer to a specific
communication exchange by the client (odd numbers) and by
the therapist (even numbers). Using the theory of
ethnomethodology from the first section of the paper the
importance of discovering the context, in which the expression
originated, will be demonstrated. The purpose of this section
is to show that the therapist is actually attempting to get
the client to specify the context even though NLP does not
describe this process in its analysis.

NLP uses two of the three processes of representing
reality in its analysis, namely generalization and deletion.
Additionally, NLP uses several transformations in the analysis.
Nominalization, in which a process verb is used as a noun,
is described in the analysis. Mind reading is another process
that is used extensively. This process involves the "belief
on the part of the speaker that one person can know what
another person is thinking and feeling without a direct
communication on the part of the second person".[1]

Another process that is used extensively in the NLP
analysis is a type of generalization called referential
indices. In the surface structure the therapist identifies

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[1]Bandler, R., and Grinder, J., The Structure of Magic.
1975, p. 104.

the words and phrases that do not indicate a reference to a specific event or person. The therapist attempts to elicit the reference from the client in order to connect the expression to the client's experience. According to the ethnomethodological perspective this process is one method of specifying the context.

The implied causative process is pointed out once in the analysis. The client wants something and there is something that is preventing him from getting it.

The ethnomethodological analysis uses the interpretive procedures, the occasioned corpus, the six elements of talk and indexicality and reflexivity to explain how the client and therapist attempt to understand the process of assigning meaning to the client's experiences. The elements of the theory of ethnomethodology point out the importance of the context in assigning meaning to experience which becomes the primary focus of the ethnomethodological analysis and its contribution to the enhancement of the NLP analysis.

As discussed in the theory of ethnomethodology the context is composed of each person's personality, the relationship between the interactants and the situation in which the interaction takes place. These three elements will be used in discovering the context. The personalities

of the interactants will be determined using metaperspectives as described by Wilmot. The relationship will be analyzed using relational dimensions,[1] and relational stages.[2] The situation will be open ended and dependent upon person A's description of the interaction, such as a discussion, an argument, a negotiation of roles or duties, or any other description supplied by person A.

In (1) NLP points out the process of deletion in the surface structure. The deep structure is not fully represented in the surface structure. The ethnomethodologist points out the vagueness of the reference. There is ambiguity and equivocality in the expression. Until the context is specified by the client the meaning remains ambiguous. In (2) the therapist asks for specification of the context. NLP refers to this question as asking for the missing portion of the deep structure. In (3) the missing portion of the deep structure is supplied in the word helpful. But as NLP points out a referential index is still not supplied by the client. The ethnomethodologist explains that three of the interpretative procedures are in operation in statement (3).

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[1]Wilmot, W., Dyadic Communication. 1979.

[2]Knapp, M., Social Intercourse. 1978.

"I'm not sure" indicates the ambiguity of the expression.
So the et cetera principle implies that the listener will
fill in the vagueness of the reference. The reference to
"this" is an example of an indexical expression. Without
a specific context "this" remains ambiguous. Normal forms
procedure is employed by the client in assuming the therapist
will fill in the missing pieces of the expression. In (4)
the therapist attempts to clarify the context by asking the
client to specify a reference to helpful. In (5) the client
further expands the context of helpful. The expanded context
points to a connection between an experiment and needing
help. NLP discusses the presence of an implied causative
in (5). The client wants something (help) but the experiment
is preventing him from getting help (causation). In (5)
the ethnomethodologist observes several of the normative
orders of social structures in operation, the elements of an
expression. Typicality is being used to assign helpful to
a class of events, i.e., helpful is negatively assigned to
an experiment which is a class of events. Likelihood of
occurrence is in operation in a negative way. There is a
possibility that the client will not get help by participating
in an experiment. The causal texture exhibits the causal
relationship between getting help and an experiment. All the
interpretative procedures are in operation in this expression.

The reciprocity of perspectives exists by the client assuming that the therapist would understand the clients uncertainty about getting help for himself by participating in an experiment. Normal forms assumes the therapist will understand the client's concern about not getting help that he really needs. The et cetera principle leaves the intended meaning unstated. The connection between really getting help and participating in an experiment is left unstated because it is assumed that the therapist can fill in the connection between the two events. The expression is indexical because the client has not specified the context of getting help and the specific context of the experiment has not been specified in enough detail to the client for him to be sure that he can or cannot get help. He remains unsure; the ambiguity continues.

In (9) NLP describes the client as appearing to be mind reading. Ethnomethodology suggests that the client imputes knowledge from situations in which the equivocality of events remains unspecified. From ambiguous contexts the client imputes that he was unable to form a good impression on people. When a situation remains ambiguous in the sense that the client is unsure how to interpret the reactions of other people, he imputes the meaning of the reactions of others based upon his socially derived personal knowledge.

His personal knowledge is derived from his mother not noticing what he has done for her. Therefore, he imputes that he cannot make a good impression upon women.

The therapist continues to try to find the referential index in (14), (16, (18), (20), (22), until the client supplies a person for the referential index -- Janet in (23). Once the referential index is supplied we find out other elements of the context. In (25) we find out that the setting in which Janet and the client interact is the work environment. Notice how this information continues to specify the particular elements of the situation. This knowledge answers some questions about the relationship between Janet and the client. It is not a friendship relationship; it is not a lover relationship; it is not a husband-wife relationship; it is not a mother-son relationship. So the context further defines the relationship. Without knowing the particulars of the interaction between Janet and the client we are missing some important clues in understanding how the client assigns the meaning of not making a good impression on Janet. At this point the therapist could choose to explore the interaction which took place between Janet and the client in order to help the client understand how he arrived at the conclusion of not making a good impression.

In this transcript the therapist chooses to continue exploring the unspecified referential index. In (28) and (30) the therapist asks how the client knows that Janet did not like him. The client has difficulty specifying his knowledge. If the therapist would have the client reconstruct the context of the interaction the client would be able to describe the other elements of the situation that would reveal the practices that the client used in the construction of his assigned meaning.

After (36) the therapist would have the client reconstruct an interaction that Ralph and Janet had in which Ralph concluded that Janet did not like him, was not interested in him, did not listen to him, and did not pay attention to him. Once the interaction was described the therapist would then ask Ralph what is his view of Janet (the direct perspective), what he thinks Janet thinks of him (the metaperspective) and then his view of what Janet thinks of him (the meta-metaperspective).[1]

A hypothetical example of this dialogue follows:

    T: What do you think of Janet?
    R: She is an interesting and attractive person.
    T: What does Janet think about you?
    R: She doesn't even notice me

From the reconstructed interaction the therapist could

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[1]Wilmot, W., Dyadic Communication, 1979.

challenge the client's statement that Janet doesn't notice
him. The therapist may need to pursue Ralph's metaperspective
of Janet until he provides one. Ralph needs to connect his
meaning to the specific element of the context which enables
him to supply that meaning.

T: What did Janet do that made you think she
    didn't notice you?
R: She never even looked up when I asked her
    if she could get this report typed by
    4:00 P.M.
T: O.K., what do you think Janet thinks about
    not noticing you?
R: I think that Janet does not want to become
    involved with any men in the office. She
    has only been working for two weeks. I
    guess she hasn't had a lot of time to get
    to know all the employees.

Metaperspectives and meta-metaperspectives border
upon mind reading in which person A attempts to figure
out what person B thinks or feels about a social object,
event or person. In this transaction Ralph is unable to
form a clear meta-metaperspective about Janet's view of
him being interested in her. Several more conversations
would need to be analyzed to clarify Ralph's meta-
metaperspective. As Ralph re-creates more episodes of
of conversation with Janet the metaperspectives will be
clarified.

R: She probably is the type of person who
    takes time getting to know people.
T: And how do you know that?
R: I saw Bill getting the same kind of response
    from Janet when he was talking to her.

Now we are provided with more contexts that connect the meaning with the specific elements within the transaction between Ralph and Janet. Once the therapist develops this direction of analyzing the contexts of the interaction the many ambiguous meanings will be clarified. We can see the use of an occasioned corpus in operation here. The elements that are used to form the meaning that Ralph assigns to his interaction with Janet are being specified. One element is Janet's reaction to Ralph, i.e., she doesn't look at him. Another element is observing another worker's interaction with Janet. Another element is the short period of time Janet has been working. The practices, the second part of the occasioned corpus, whereby Ralph uses these elements to obtain the meaning he assigns to the transaction, reveal how Ralph obtains his meaning of the transaction. Ralph uses his own biography in the belief that he cannot impress women which stems from his inability to impress his mother. Ralph uses his observations of other transactions that involve Janet and the other employees to reinforce his obtained meaning. The other practice that Ralph uses is called mind reading by NLP. When we do not know the meaning of another's response we tend to impute the meaning using our best guess work. If the therapist is able to connect the meaning with a particular response within the interaction, then the meaning

remains ambiguous and Ralph needs to wait for future interactions to clarify the meaning.

The next step in clarifying contexts and meanings involves the therapist exploring the nature of the relationship between Ralph and Janet. The nature of the relationship will be determined through analyzing the various stages of relationships and the several relational dimensions. Knapp describes five developmental stages within relationships: "1) initiating 2) experimenting 3) intensifying 4) integrating 5) bonding".[1] The initiating stage is involved with small talk, greeting behavior and opening remarks. This stage is the beginning of the relationship. The next stage involves "trying to discover more about the unknown".[2] During this stage a lot of topics of conversation are introduced in an effort to find commonalities and topics of mutual interest. The third stage involves both interactants revealing and disclosing more of their intimate aspects of their personalities. In the fourth stage interactants manifest a togetherness in which each person accepts their own personality and the other's personality, recognizing that there is a "we-ness" that is created by their interaction. The final stage involves a commitment or a contract mutually agreed upon by both persons.

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[1]Knapp, M., Social Intercourse, p. 238.

[2]Ibid., p. 241.

Ralph's relationship with Janet is concentrated in
the initiating stage.   Ralph might be anticipating a faster
progression through the stages than Janet.   Without knowing
the nature of the interaction between Ralph and Janet it is
difficult to determine the stage of their relationship.
The therapist would explore their interaction in order to
determine the stage of the relationship.   The second aspect
of analyzing the relationship involves relational dimensions.[1]
These dimensions are summarized by the polarities of dominance/
submission and love/hate.   The former dimension enables the
opposite dimension to arise.   For example, if a person is
being submissive, then a dominant person tends to interact
with the submissive person.   The latter bi-polar dimension
produces more of the same action in the other.   For example,
hostility on the part of one person will tend to produce
hostility within the other person.   The relational dimensions
provide a method of describing the relationship of the
interactants.

From the recreated interaction the therapist would be
able to help Ralph determine the relational dimensions that
are structuring his relationship with Janet.   Since the
therapist chooses not to reconstruct the interaction, he

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[1]Wilmot, W., Dyadic Communication, 1979.

must continue to probe for the referential indices of the client's expressions. The occasioned corpus could be employed in determining the relationship between Ralph and Janet. Additionally, Ralph would become aware of practices that he uses in assigning meaning to situations and reactions of other people. He would be able to evaluate these practices across situations. The context of his interaction with his mother is different than the context of his interaction with Janet even though he sees similarities between these contexts and assigns similar meanings to them.

In (47) another missing link is added to the context. NLP describes this expression (47) as providing the final referential index that explains the clients assigning the meaning of not making a good impression. However, we still do not know how this personal knowledge was obtained. According to the ethnomethodologist we are being supplied with the particulars of the context in which the client obtained the meaning of not being able to make a good impression. In (49) we are supplied the connection between caring and noticing. In (51) we see the connection between caring and doing things for someone. In (53) the "things" are specified. In (55) the connection between being noticed and being interested in another is made. These connections describe the elements of the occasioned corpus. One element

is that the client's mother did not notice when he tried to show her that he cared about her. Another element is that he did things for her, specifically cleaning the living room, washing the dishes. His mother never noticed nor said anything. In (54) the therapist points out the specific element that the client attaches the meaning of not being interested. Here we see how the client put the elements together to make sense out of them. This practice of fitting all the elements into a meaningful whole is the second part of the occasioned corpus. The use of the occasioned corpus is summarized below.

Elements

> 1) doing things
>   caring/loving

Practices

> 2) no acknowledgment, not saying anything,
>   not noticing that the things were done means
>   that the person does not care/love the other.

Schwartz and Jacobs suggest that understanding what another person means is not totally dependent upon syntax or language.

> "What is meant is always more than what is
> said, in that background knowledge and
> social contexts are continually used to fill
> in the gaps in messages, to pass back and
> forth from what is being said to what is
> meant."[1]

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[1]Schwartz, H. & Jacobs, J., Qualitative Sociology, p. 228.

Like Garfinkel, Schwartz and Jacobs see the acquisition of meaning as guess work, as creating new meaning, as waiting to see later what was meant before. The occasioned corpus provides a method for determining the background knowledge and the social context which fills in the gaps in messages and meanings.

The client's use of nominalizations reveal how he gets stuck and remains uncertain about his problem. In (5) the client uses the nominalization "experiment" which is derived from the verb to experiment. The process of experimenting or conducting an experiment is transformed into an experiment which is static, pre-determined and unchangeable. A second nominalization occurs in the same account (5). The noun, help, is used which is derived from the verb help. There is no reference to the person helping or the person being helped. Once again the process of being helped is transformed into a static entity, called help.

Indexicality is evident throughout the transcript. As the specific context is revealed we begin to understand the meaning of not making a good impression upon women. The occasioned corpus reveals how this meaning is connected to the interactions between the client and his mother.

Indexicality points out that meanings are equivocal until a specific context is supplied. Ralph's meaning assigned to the interaction between himself and Janet remains

potentially equivocal until the therapist enables Ralph
to reconstruct the specific context of their interaction.
In other words, Ralph has decided to assign the meaning
of not making a good impression upon Janet. When the
specific context of the interaction is revealied there
will be other meanings to choose from.

Reflexivity points out how the client assigns meaning
to another context which is similar to the context of
mother-son. The accounts that Ralph chooses in the trans-
cription reveal the meaning that Ralph assigns to his
experiences. The accounts reveal the elements of the context
and the context reveals the meaning within the accounts.
In other words the context gives meaning to the conversation
and behavior described within the conversation, while the
context exists within the conversation and described behavior.
Ralph creates the meaning he assigns to his interaction
with Janet by explaining his account of that interaction.
By recreating the context of the interaction Ralph could
assign several equivocal meanings to the interaction until
the context is further specified to reveal a more specific
meaning of the interaction. To be sure Ralph must share
this meaning with Janet for verification which is a verification
of the meta-meta perspective. The therapist ends the
transcript by suggesting that Ralph begin the process of

verification by taking the first step and informing Janet how he feels about her.

In summary, the ethnomethodological perspective would enhance the techniques of NLP by examining the context which exists in the conversation already. Since talk is both indexical and reflexive the data exist to analyze the context. So while the Neuro-Linguistic Programers are using unique and interesting transformations and processes to analyze the talk, they should analyze the context to take advantage of the additional insights of the ethnomethodological perspective.

Appendix

(1) Ralph: Well. . . I'm not really sure. . .

(2) Therapist: You're not sure or what?

(3) R: I'm not sure that this will be helpful.

(4) T: You're not sure what, specifically, will be helpful to whom?

(5) R: Well, I'm not sure that this experiment will be helpful. You see, when I first went to Dr. G., he asked me if I'd be willing to participate in this experiment. . . and well, I feel that there's something I really need help with but this is just an experiment.

(6) T: How will this just being an experiment prevent you from getting the help you need?

(7) R: Experiments are for research, but there's something I really need help with.

(8) T: What, specifically, do you really need help with?

(9) R: I don't know how to make a good impression on people.

(10) T: Let me see if I understand you. You are saying that this being just an experiment will necessarily prevent you from finding out how to make a good impression on people. Is that true?

(11) R: Well. . . I'm not really sure. . .

(12) T: (interrupting) Well, are you willing to find out?

(13) R: Yeah, O.K.

(14) T: Who, specifically, don't you know how to make a good impression on?

(15) R: Well, nobody.

(16) T: Nobody? Can you think of anybody on whom you have ever made a good impression on?

(17) R: Ah, mmm. . .yeah, well, some people, but. . .

(18) T: Now then, whom, specifically, don't you know how to make a good impression on?

(19) R: . . .I guess what I have been trying to say is that women don't like me.

(20) T: Which woman, specifically?

(21) R: Most women I meet.

(22) T: Which woman, specifically?

(23) R: Well, most women really. . .but as you said that, I just started to think about this one woman--Janet.

(24) T: Who's Janet?

(25) R: She's this woman I just met at work.

(26) T: Now, how do you know that you didn't make a good impression on Janet?

(27) R: Well, I just know. . .

(28) T: How specifically, do you know?

(29) R: She just didn't like me.

(30) T: How, specifically, do you know that Janet didn't like you?

(31) R: She wasn't interested in me.

(32) T: Interested in what way?

(33) R: She didn't pay attention to me.

(34) T: How didn't she pay attention to you?

(35) R: She didn't look at me.

(36) T: Let me see if I understand this. You know that
         Janet wasn't interested in you because she didn't
         look at you?

(37) R: That's right!

(38) T: Is there any way you could imagine Janet not looking
         at you and her still being interested in you?

(39) R: Well. . .I don't know. . .

(40) T: Do you always look at everyone you're interested
         in?

(41) R: I guess. . . not always. But just because Janet
         is interested in me doesn't mean that she likes me.

(42) T: How, specifically, do you know that she doesn't
         like you?

(43) R: She doesn't listen to me.

(44) T: How, specifically, do you know that she doesn't
         listen to you?

(45) R: Well, she doesn't ever look at me (beginning to
         get angry). You know how women are! They never let
         you know if they notice you.

(46) T: Like who, specifically?

(47) R: (angry) Like my mother . . . ah, God damn it?
She was never interested in me.

(48) T: How do you know that your mother was never
interested in you?

(49) R: Everytime I tried to show her that I cared about
her, she never noticed it (begins to sob). . . why
didn't she notice?

(50) T: How, specifically, did you try to show her that
you cared about her?

(51) R: (sobbing softly) Like all the time I used to
come home from school and do things for her.

(52) T: What things, specifically, did you do for her?

(53) R: Well, I always used to clean up the living room
and wash the dishes . . . and she never said anything.

(54) T: Ralph, does your mother's not saying anything to
you about what you used to do mean that she never
noticed what you had done?

(55) R: Yeah, since she never noticed what I did for her,
she wasn't interested in me.

(56) T: Let me get this straight. You're saying that
your mother's not noticing what you did for her means
that she wasn't interested in you?

(57) R: Yes, that's right.

(58) T: Ralph, have you ever had the experience of someone's
          doing something for you and you didn't notice until
          after they pointed it out to you?

(59) R: Well. . . yeah, I remember one time. . .

(60) T: Did you not notice what they had done for you because
          you weren't interested in them?

(61) R: No, I just didn't notice. . .

(62) T: Ralph, can you imagine that your mother just didn't
          notice when . . .

(63) R: No, it's not the same.

(64) T: It? What's not the same as what?

(65) R: My not noticing is not the same as my mother not
          noticing--see, she NEVER noticed what I did for her.

(66) T: Never?

(67) R: Well, not very many times.

(68) T: Ralph, tell me about one specific time when your
          mother noticed what you had done for her.

(69) R: Well, once when . . . yeah (angrily), I even had
          to tell her.

(70) T: Had to tell her what?

(71) R: That I had done this thing for her. If she had
          been interested enough she would have noticed it herself.

(72) T: Interested enough for what?

(73) R: Interested enough to show me that she loved me.

(74) T: Ralph, how did you show your mother that you
         loved her?

(75) R: By doing things for her.

(76) T: Ralph, did your mother ever do things for you?

(77) R: Yes, but she never really . . . never let me
         know for sure.

(78) T: Never let you know what?

(79) R: She never let me know for sure if she really
         loved me (still sobbing softly).

(80) T: Did you ever let her know for sure that you
         loved her?

(81) R: She knew. . .

(82) T: How do you know she knew?

(83) R: I. . .I. . .I guess I don't know.

(84) T: What prevents you from telling her?

(85) R: umm. . . umm, maybe nothing.

(86) T: MAYBE?

(87) R: I guess I could.

(88) T: Ralph, do you guess you could also tell Janet how
         you feel about her?

(89) R: That's a little scary.

(90) T: What is a little scary?

(91) R: That I could just go up and tell her.

(92) T: What stops you?

(93) R: Nothing, that's what's so scary. (laughing)[1]

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[1]Bandler, R., & Grinder, J., The Structure of Magic, pp. 112-134.

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