

Do the words we use count?

Neuro-Linguist Programming

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Flexibility of approach is demanded when attempting to conduct more effective communication in the classroom

The co-founders of neuro-linguistic programming in the early 1970s are two Americans, John Grinder, a linguist and Richard Bandler, then a student of computer science and mathematics. They began to observe common patterns of behaviour and attitudes of people who excelled in the field of psychotherapy. The discipline is defined as an attitude to life, the aim of which is to help achieve intra-personal and inter-personal brilliance.

The 'neuro' part is concerned with how we experience the world through our five senses and represent it in our consciousness. The "linguistic" part is concerned with the way the language we use shapes and reflects our experience of the world. The programming part is concerned with training ourselves to think, speak and act in new and positive ways, in order to realize our full potential as human beings. As a discipline it has begun to find its way into the teaching of EFL and also teacher training over the last number of years (Revell and Norman 1997, 1999).

Metaprograms

The notion of meta programs is based on work originally conducted by Bailey in the 1960s and re-presented later, Rose Charvet 1996. Following this framework we all have preferred and individual ways of expressing ourselves (output) and also of receiving information (input). Therefore flexibility of approach is demanded when attempting to conduct more effective communication in the classroom. The following is framework proposed by Rose Charvet (1996)

1. Internal vs. External

Internal characteristics – people with this preference use their own standards to make decisions and evaluate. They are self-motivated and may resist others telling them what to do. They need time to assimilate information before they put it into practice so that they can judge its value.

External characteristics – people with this preference rely on other people's judgment and require direction. They know how they have done through feedback from others. They take information as orders have difficulty in deciding on quality in an independent way, and have trouble starting or finishing an activity without outside feedback.



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2. Proactive or Reactive

Proactive characteristics – a person with this preference takes the initiative, jumps into things, bulldozes ahead at times and goes out and gets things done.

Reactive characteristics – this person waits for others to act, considers and analyses indefinitely, needs to fully understand and assess before acting. S/he believes in chance and luck. The chances are that they will wait and respond with caution.

3. Towards or Away from

Towards characteristics – people with this preference move towards their objective or goal. They focus on what they want and like, are motivated by achievements and are good at managing priorities. They have problems recognizing difficulties and negative consequences.

Away from characteristics – people with this preference move away from problems, to be prevented from being attracted to problems that need solving and are motivated to do so. They act in order to avoid negative consequences, are energized by threats.

4. Options or Procedures

Options characteristics – these people are motivated by opportunities and possibilities. They love to create procedures but have difficulty following them. Unlimited ideas thrill them.

Procedure characteristics – these people like to follow set ways and believe that there is a right way to do things. They are interested in how to do things and once they have started something the most important thing is to finish it.

5. Similarities or Differences

This group of people prefers things to stay the same or to change, either progressively or dynamically over time. This is what I like to term the evolution or revolution distinction.



People with away from characteristics move away from problems

A person with proactive characteristics takes the initiative, jumps into things, bulldozes ahead at times and goes out and gets things done

How does all this relate to classroom practice?

We have two paths to follow. We could both profile each student and match their preferences in terms of the language we subsequently use when speaking to them. Or possibly a more realistic approach is to adapt a more balanced approach whereby the language used would take account of and cater for all possible preferences and variations that exist among our students. A series of utterances/phraseology suitable for the teaching contest is suggested below;

1. Internal/External

- I would strongly recommend X. What do you think?
- As your language improves you'll make up your own mind about X many teachers think that...
- It is a well known fact, so now you have the information you need to think about it.



- Get going on that and analyze the results to see where it takes you.
- If you feel lucky, why wait?
- Go for it. You'll have time to think about it before our next lesson.

2. Proactive/Reactive

- It is not perfect but you are accomplishing a lot.
- There shouldn't be any difficulty with X if you put more Y into your speech/writing
- By including this in your English you'll reduce difficulties at a later stage.

3. Towards/Away from

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- By including this in your English you'll reduce difficulties at a later stage.

4. Options/Procedures

- There are always many opportunities and you are in a position to choose the right one.
- Describe the procedures you followed and the choices you made along the way in your writing etc.
- After the first two steps in your writing/reading/listening procedure can you think of an alternative direction you might have taken?

5. Sameness/Difference

- Compare your progress this week with last week's. Talk about the similarities and differences.
- Keep doing what you're doing well and try to approach X in a totally different way next time.
- How have you improved since our last lesson?

The above are in no way an exhaustive list of utterances. It would be best if you identified your preferred styles initially so that you are aware from the outset the type of teacher language you are likely to use more naturally and more frequently at an unconscious level. When this has been done it requires special care and attention to cater for other and all styles that exist among our students. The implementation of the above strategies, though simple and basic, may provide the key to unlocking that part of the affective filter wall caused by poor communication and rapport between teacher and students. My experience has taught me that it is well worth the effort.

References

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