

NLP in BE

Marjorie Rosenberg finds a place for Neuro-Linguistic Programming in the business English classroom.

Shortly after NLP was established as an aid to therapists in short-term therapy, people in other fields became aware of its potential. It soon found a place in English language teaching, and businesspeople realised that it offered excellent models for communication and useful techniques for doing business. What about the business English classroom, however? Does it make sense there? I would say a resounding 'Yes!'

Ways of learning

When teaching basic NLP strategies in general English classrooms, we often start with the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) model to show how people perceive, process and store information. This is equally important in the business English context. There are innumerable ways in which general English and business English overlap, and I strongly believe that the use of NLP is one of them. When learners begin to become aware of the difference made by their choice of language and the effect this can have on other people, they become extremely interested in finding out more about the possibilities of using these techniques.

I often begin with a general explanation of these three main channels of perception, followed by a short questionnaire to find out what types of learners we have in the group.

We then move on to looking at the specific language used by a strongly visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learner. The learners receive three advertisements about an expensive investment, such as a house. These three adverts contain the type of language which appeals to the different learning types. In the visual advert, the use of images attracts the potential buyer. The design, choice of colour scheme and layout are stressed. Readers are asked to imagine themselves sitting in one of the rooms and taking in

the view. The auditory advert, on the other hand, talks about the quality of the built-in sound system and the soundproofed windows and doors. Potential buyers can imagine themselves talking to another person or just sitting and listening to music. The third advert is much more emotional and tactile. Here the reader is invited to feel the hard wood floors and enjoy the comfort of underfloor heating and a whirlpool bath. The feeling of space is emphasised, as well as the cosy atmosphere in which the buyer would feel very much at home.

The learners are asked to decide which of the houses they would buy, and are then told that the adverts all describe the same one. The learners go on to analyse the differences in language between the three adverts and begin to understand the power of using the learning channel which a customer favours. As learners in business English classes are often expected to produce sales or advertising material as practice in writing, this gives them an opportunity to work with language in a new way. Rather than merely concentrating on the language of convincing, they can learn to bring visual, auditory and kinaesthetic elements into their writing. Providing them with a list of useful words and phrases adds a new twist to the exercise and encourages them to be creative, a plus in today's increasingly competitive market place.

Rapport

Establishing rapport is a foundation of any NLP course. But how often do we get to teach this in the classroom? Using basic rapport techniques – for example, matching body language and trying to use the same VAK channel – can work very well as a way to prepare learners for conferences, job interviews, sales pitches, negotiations, and so on. The original work generally starts non-

verbally. Learners first try to match posture, gestures, breathing and even the way someone walks in order to understand more thoroughly what they are feeling. They then move on to exercises dealing with matching language. Finally, they are given roleplay cards and have the chance to try out their knowledge. The debriefing afterwards can discuss what happened. Did the listener feel that rapport had been established? Was there a feeling of trust? Did it make them more comfortable or was there a problem with it? As businesspeople well understand the importance of optimising communication, this adds an essential element to the business English class.

Presentations

One area in which the majority of business English learners feel they need practice is presentations. When teaching the language of presentations, it is important to stress that there may be visual, auditory and kinaesthetic people in the audience and if we want to reach all three types, we have to adjust our language accordingly. I have put together an exercise for expanding the language of presentations, which is based on a VAK interpretation first written for the classroom by Susan Norman and Jane Revell (see page 35). In this exercise, learners have to match 'neutral' phrases with VAK phrases which express the same idea. They can then practise putting together a presentation, making sure that they use different language to reach different listeners.

It is also possible to use NLP techniques to help learners prepare for presentations. One of the principles of NLP states that we can learn to model excellence. For this reason, I only allow positive comments after classroom presentations given by learners. I tell the other students to look for the points they would like to be able to do themselves and to give feedback in this way. By telling their colleagues what they have done well, the learners know what works in their presentations and can build on that. If they only hear what went wrong, there is the chance that they will replace one unsuccessful technique with another one that also doesn't work, which would be counter-productive.

The VAK interpretation of a presentation

Match the neutral statements 1-9 with the VAK statements in rows A-I.

Neutral

1	I would like to welcome you here today.	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	We have always considered you to be one of our most cooperative business partners.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	The topic for today is ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	We hope to increase our market share.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	I have some information for you.	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	We are all optimistic about the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	We are proud of our products.	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	Thank you for being here today.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	We know that competitive prices are important.	<input type="checkbox"/>			

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
A You can see at a glance that our prices are competitive.	You will never hear that we are overpriced.	Our prices are in sync with others in the marketplace.
B Have a look at our brochure.	I am going to tell you about some of the key points in our brochure.	I am handing around some brochures for you to take with you.
C We hope to increase our visibility in the market.	We hope to be the talk of the market.	We hope to take over more of the market.
D Today I am going to show you ...	Today you are going to hear about ...	Today you are going to get a feel for ...
E Thank you for showing interest in my presentation.	Thank you for listening so attentively.	Thank you for giving me your attention.
F We would like to focus on our positive business relationship with you.	We have found you to be ideal partners with whom we can discuss everything.	We have always been able to work hand-in-hand with you.
G I am delighted to see you all here today.	I am happy that you have come to hear me tell you about ...	It is really a pleasure for me that you have taken the time today to come here.
H If you look at this chart, I can point out some features of our products.	I would like to elaborate on the strong points of our products.	Our products have kept pace with ...
I The future looks bright.	Our future is sounding better and better.	Things are certainly looking up.



There are many books which bring NLP into the business world, so it would seem that its introduction into the business English classroom is the next logical step. The suggestions here are just the tip of the iceberg. Try them out and see what you think. NLP may change your teaching or at least your approach towards it. **ETP**

The photocopiable activity above is based on the exercise 'Equivalence' in *In Your Hands* by Jane Revell and Susan Norman.

O'Connor, J and Seymour, J *Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming* Mandala/Harper Collins 1990
 Revell, J and Norman, S *In Your Hands, NLP in ELT* Saffire Press 1997
 Rosenberg, M *Communicative Business Activities* öbvhp 2001
 Rosenberg, M 'Never the twain shall meet?' *ETP* Issue 35 2004



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