

NLP Linguistic Patterns in the Communication Between a Teacher and a Student

Wzorce językowe NLP w komunikowaniu między nauczycielem a uczniem

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Keywords

neurolinguistic programming, communication strategies, communication at school

Słowa kluczowe

programowanie neurolingwistyczne, strategie komunikacyjne, komunikacja w szkole

Abstract

The article discusses two exemplary strategies applied by the NLP specialists which may be used by teachers in schools. These strategies are questions implying the apparent and the limited as well as the reframing. The aim is to show that the quality of communication between the teacher and the student may be improved by the enrichment of the collection of linguistic patterns in communication. They are the tool allowing to influence the behaviour and attitude of the children but they often open a different perspective of looking at the relations between the main subjects of the school discourse.

Abstrakt

W artykule omówiono dwie przykładowe strategie, wykorzystywane przez specjalistów od programowania neurolingwistycznego, możliwe do zastosowania przez nauczycieli w szkole. To pytania implikujące pozorny lub ograniczony oraz przeramowanie. Celem było pokazanie, że można poprawić jakość porozumiewania się między nauczycielem a uczniem poprzez wzbogacenie zasobu językowych wzorców w komunikacji. Są one nie tylko narzędziem pozwalającym wpływać na zachowania i postawy wychowanków, ale niejednokrotnie otwierają inną perspektywę patrzenia na relacje między głównymi podmiotami szkolnego dyskursu.

NLP Linguistic Patterns in the Communication Between a Teacher and a Student

Introduction

Communicative skills of teachers as an open collection of competences require constant completing in view of the continually changing realities in the contemporary school. One of the key issues is disposal of various strategies and applying them in a certain situation. For it is not enough to use only one model harnessing the trained and intuitive patterns, usually reproduced on the basis of one's own experiences¹.

It seems like the chosen patterns of linguistic behaviour which apply the theory by Milton Ericson would be a certain broadening of the collection of teachers' communicative strategies. They were created by the NLP practitioners for marketing specialists, politicians etc². One can state that they may not only increase the effectiveness of teaching and influencing students but also allow to optimize the communication at school.

The article discusses the chosen aspects of the neurolinguistic programming and shows the practical examples of the application of certain linguistic patterns (questions implying the apparent and the limited as well as reframing) in practice of communication between a teacher and a student.

The Matter of NLP

Neurolinguistic programming assumes that thanks to certain linguistic patterns it is possible to significantly improve interpersonal relations through changes in the way of communicating. It occurs thanks to the modification through phrases and expressions of individual patterns of cognition of an individual, helping those who experience problems with self-esteem through increasing the satisfaction with one's life and motivating other to self-fulfilment³. NLP includes among other things a collection of strategies which aim at creating and changing of people's cognition and thinking patterns. A composition of elements of neurological cognition process with language and behaviour patterns which orient people are used here. R. Bandler and

¹ P. Zbróg, *Wojna o kształcenie językowe*, Kielce 2005.

² R. Bandler, J. Grinder, *Z żab w książniczki*, Gdańsk 1995.

³ J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *NLP. Wprowadzenie do programowania neurolingwistycznego*, Poznań 1998.

J. Grinder⁴ developed this method as an effective form of psychotherapy (Bradbury, 2004). Nowadays the extent of its application is broadened. NLP is used in the motivation trainings, negotiations, in marketing and political campaigns. It was believed that the skills increasing the effectiveness of communication with other people can be learned. Neurolinguistic programming offers techniques enhancing the possibility of persuasion and manipulation also within the scope of conflict solving and raising one's self-esteem⁵.

The researchers studying the issues of interpersonal communication raised the question of the lack of proof confirming the optimistic assumptions of NLP. Its influence on the increasing of the quality of impact on other people for the acquisitive using of the Brandler's thought by pseudospecialists for remuneration purposes was also undermined⁶.

The possibility of application of certain phrasal structures from neuro-linguistic programming in the school communication is worth considering despite these reservations. Model communication patterns inspired by the research by Milton Ericson include linguistic tools for the characteristic, hypnotherapeutic influence on the recipient allowing for example guiding the processes of free thinking using hidden questions, commands, presuppositions, quotations, implications and conversational demands⁷.

The following expression illustrates the fact that the subconsciousness of the recipient may be influenced properly built linguistic constructs: Do not think about trees. The majority of participants in the process of communication will think about trees in spite of the surface structure. The sentence opens the following process in the mind – firstly, it creates the construction: Think about trees. It evokes a paralinguistic representation in order to negate it – *Do not (think about trees)*. A representation of an object which is unwanted in the surface structure will appear as first. Such an elaborate command may result in a situation where the sender may obtain the manipulative effect of hiding the real intention, e.g. having the decorum of objectivity. During the negotiations the following can be said: *I will not talk about the low price and high efficiency of the powder* (yet this is what is discussed). *Attention should be paid to the client's expectations towards this powder*⁸.

Such hidden suggestions may be introduced into everyday messages because communication proceeds simultaneously on the conscious and uncon-

⁴ A. Bradbury, *NLP. Wpływ na siebie i innych*, Gliwice 2004.

⁵ H. Retter, *Komunikacja codzienna w pedagogice*, Gdańsk 2005.

⁶ Por. W. Walker, *Przygoda z komunikacją*, Gdańsk 2001; H. Retter, *Komunikacja codzienna w pedagogice*, Gdańsk 2005.

⁷ Por. R. Dilts, J. Grinder, R. Bandler, J. DeLozier, *NLP. Studium subiektywnych doświadczeń*, Gliwice 2006.

⁸ A. Batko, *Sztuka perswazji, czyli język wpływu i manipulacji*, Gliwice 2007.

scious level. This is conscious communication with the unconscious part of the interlocutor's mind. In order to urge someone to the action expected by the sender, it does not necessarily have to be expressed directly. Thanks to the NLP strategies this intention is hidden – the effect will be the same. The sender gains at least two things in such a situation:

- his communicative patterns become more affluent; one experiences the comfort resulting from the knowledge that it can be freely used;
- if they are appropriately applied in practice, the chances of success connected with obtaining the desired effect increase.

The article presents two strategies in detail: implicators of the apparent and limited choice as well as reframing. The linguistic patterns may contribute to obtaining a higher quality of school communication. They may inspire one's own search for other NLP strategies and their creative application in didactic practice of teachers.

Implicators of apparent/limited choices

Because of generally negative associations with persuasion and, for some, synonymous manipulation in the formulations of Milton Ericson terms convincing and disposing were used. One's own and other people's needs constituted the liminal points. Teacher's own needs in the context of increasing the effectiveness of influence on students would be: comfort at work, enhancing the chance of pedagogical success, better quality of influence on students' attitudes through broadening the collection of communicative skills. To students' needs, satisfied thanks to the optimization of communication in class, belong: better state of being, trust, the possibility of speaking freely during class, feeling of respect or even partnership. The NLP assumes that thanks to the introduction of new linguistic structures a significant improvement in communication with other people will occur⁹.

With respect to what was stated above what is formulated, is the demand of avoiding the direct orders and questions about the settlement for the direct disposing. This allows to influence the subconscious part of the mind by means of specifically built phrases. The questions creating an apparent or limited choice belong to the primary strategies¹⁰. Their matter is illustrated by the following example.

⁹ R. Bandler, *Magia w działaniu. Sesje NLP Richarda Bandlera*, Gliwice 2008.

¹⁰ R. Dilts, J. Grinder, R. Bandler, J. DeLozier, *NLP. Studium subiektywnych doświadczeń*, Gliwice 2006.

During the class the teacher asks the question:

- *Will you do this exercise?* (usually it is synonymous to command: *Do this exercise* – the use of presupposition in the form of a question often results from the purpose of mitigation of the direct order. The teacher relies on the students understanding his intention).

This settlement question can be answered in two ways: *Yes* (desired by the teacher) or *No* (not desired by the teacher but usually expected). Having received the answer *No* in such circumstances, the NLP practitioners say that the only thing that would be worse, would be hearing the question *Why?* The verbalization or writing down the taken position in the given issue entrenches the belief in the recipient¹¹.

In the school reality it is easier to change the pattern of question. It requires empathizing with the students' situation and the knowledge of their action frames. It may be assumed that students may be more willing to accept a suggestion if they are given a choice. The awareness of even limited freedom within this scope fosters the completion of the desired activity. The aim of the chosen group of strategies created by Ericson was, among other things, to increase the number of possible choices for recipients¹². The change of sender's frame of thinking is necessary. A question-command should be formulated for the effect of action to be satisfying independently from the choice of one of the presented possibilities. The knowledge about the frames of actions of the recipients of such questions and their consideration during the formulation is necessary, e.g.:

- Do you prefer to do this exercise *now or in five minutes/after the break?* (Students prefer to delay some actions).
- Do you want to do this exercise *alone or in groups?* (Often it is better to work in group, there is community of interests).
- Do you want to do this exercise *in notebook or on a piece of paper/with pen or pencil?* (Usually it makes no difference but students like to have a choice and make decisions for themselves).

The implied appearance of choice in the above mentioned patterns is obvious. The recipient can move within the frame marked quite accurately by the sender. As a consequence they have to do the exercise. Yet the influence of the apparent questions on the unconscious part of mind is important. They are used to move students from the level of decision making, from *Yes, I will do it/No I will not do it* to *What will I chose, how will I do it? (But I will do it)*. Some freedom and self-government is allowed.

¹¹ A. Batko, *Sztuka perswazji, czyli język wpływu i manipulacji*, Gliwice 2007.

¹² H. Retter, *Komunikacja codzienna w pedagogice*, Gdańsk 2005.

The other frame is the structure implying the limited choice. This message is slightly more complicated mentally and logistically. It requires sender's flexibility and anticipation that the recipient may offer a solution that cannot be accepted. The message with limited choice should be formulated in an informed manner in order to avoid a possible answer which significantly diverges from teacher's expectations.

The question *Are we going to organize the desks now?* may be reformulated in the following way using the limited choice:

- *With what in your opinion* should we start organizing the desks? (the issue of starting the action is not important because of the fact that the entire desk must be organized).
- *Which part of the desk in your opinion* should be ordered most urgently for the next task?
- *Where will we throw away the rubbish* after organizing desks?

Such questions put the students in the situation of limited choice – the task has to be completed, what can be determined is for example only the place of its beginning. In this type of syntactic structures words supporting recipient's feeling of independent decision making may be applied, e.g.: *in your opinion, according to you.*

Attention should be paid to the fact that the question should not imply negative consequences, e.g. *When do you want to start organizing the desks? – In a year.* Unfortunate constructions should be avoided but the experience of the teacher will allow to gradually improve the ability to formulate questions with the limited choice.

Questions implying the apparent and the limited choice may be developed (more possibilities) or semantically complicated (they are more difficult to unravel) e.g.:

- *Will you organize the desk in five minutes, ten minutes or right after the break?*
- *What will you gain if you organize the desk now?*

Finally attention should be paid to the connection of both types of questions, see:

- *What do we start organizing the desks with? What do we organize first: crayons or notebooks?*
- *Where would you like to do the exercise? By the table or by dad's desk?*
- *When will you organize the desk? Now or when you finish writing?*

The application of the types of questions discussed above increases the collection of possibilities of influencing the recipient. Sometimes sentences formulated in this way may be surprising for students. They should foster the

increasing effectiveness of influence. Yet it should be noticed that the presupposed intentions are easy to unravel because they interfere rather shallowly in the subconsciousness. There are more complex structures in NLP which allow modification of the previously presented questions e.g.:

- *What do you want to do when you finish this exercise?*
- *What music should I play when you organize your desk?*
- *What do you want to play on the computer after you organize your desk?*

Reframing in NLP

Reframing consists in the change of context of utterance which does not influence its logical content but modifies the conclusions¹³. It is not difficult to imagine a student saying: *Studying makes no sense*. Parents' and teachers' typical responses include:

- *What are you saying! Studying is the most important thing.*
- *How can you say that? Do you want to end up like...*

They signal disapproval and contradiction. They aggressively dispose to the change of position. Advices or questions with *Why?* particle also appear. The latter are especially inadvisable in the Milton Model. They encourage validating one's own position with appropriate proofs¹⁴. The aim of the sender should be in such a case the establishment of the reason of the heard statement and diffusion of tension connected with it. The situation may be reframed in order to establish a rational conversation, express respect for student's views allowing the possibility to rethinking the position, e.g.:

- *Maybe you are not feeling well. Studying is useful (generalization).*
- *Maybe you elicit such reluctance towards studying in yourself by saying so (application to oneself).*
- *What should you study in order to start seeing the advantages (extracting value).*
- *Studying is like Cinderella – in the beginning she was poor and then she married a prince (metaphor).*
- *What in your opinion is especially lacking sense in studying? (a step down).*
- *This means that you study but you would like to change something about it (positive intentions).*
- *It may seem so now but it will pass (time frame).*

¹³ J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *NLP. Wprowadzenie do programowania neurolingwistycznego*, Poznań 1998.

¹⁴ J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *NLP Szkolenie menedżerów i trenerów*, Poznań 1998.

Reframing does not significantly improve the situation of the sender of the message but allows to look on the problem from a different perspective. The more points of view there are, the easier it is to talk about the problem and diagnose it. Usually such reframing may turn out surprising for the student who expects nervous and moralistical comments. Therefore maybe he will allow a factual discussion either about the problem or about the psychic state of the recipient. The real problem lies sometimes somewhere else and words *Studying makes no sense* mean for example *Something went wrong at school, I have a problem at school, I am afraid of something at school*.

Conclusions

The quality of communication between teacher and students and satisfaction of both subjects of school reality are in direct proportion to the collection of the applied patterns in the process of communication. The more there are, the easier it is to adjust them to the situation. Neurolinguistic programming provides new patterns of strategies and structures which can be used in school communication.

Using questions implying apparent or limited choice may contribute to increasing the power of influence through giving students an illusory choice.

The purposeful reframing by means of a determined linguistic structure resulting in creation of a new perspective of looking on the problem. This fosters showing the student that the teacher supports him, searches for an escape from a troublesome situation for him, shows other possibilities of thinking about it.

The presented strategies can be a starting point for reinforcing the work on improvement of communicative competences of the teacher. The awareness that it is possible to freely use new linguistic structures increases pedagogue's confidence in the educational process.