

'CONNECTING NLP AND POETRY WRITING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASS'

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ABSTRACT

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is one of the humanistic and psycho-suggestive approaches which focuses on subjective experience and internal representation of the world through our senses. NLP helps us train, speak and act in new and positive ways. NLP gives us the opportunity to explore the inner, virtual world in each of us.

We acquire a foreign language by using our five senses. Therefore, NLP is most beneficial in language learning. The main purpose of this paper is to introduce a number of ideas/examples to enable students to develop writing skills via writing descriptive poetry. By Using NLP technique English language teachers:

1- will enable students to become aware of and be prepared to articulate the qualities of their own writing in English,

2- will enable students to produce limited examples of high quality work to meet specific challenges,

3- will enable students to gain critical insights into the processes of literary production.

The students of English will gain an appreciation of the power and practice of imagination in literary creation through creative writing workshops using NLP. Additionally, the students will recognise the multi-faceted nature of writing in English, and of its complex relationship to other disciplines and forms of knowledge.

NLP is sometimes accused of being manipulative. For when you use NLP, you are bound to ask students various, and sometimes restricting, manipulating questions to give them the space, time and opportunity to look for/produce meaning in the target language through a perception within the limits of their experiences. But don't worry. CONSTRICTION LIBERATES.

'Since Feeling is First'

Since feeling is first
 who pays any attention
 to the syntax of things
 will never wholly kiss you,

wholly to be a fool
 while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
 and kisses are a better fate
 than wisdom
 lady I swear by all flowers. Don't cry
 _ the best gesture of my brain is less than
 your eyelids flutter which says

we are for each other: then
 laugh, leaning back in my arms
 for life's not a paragraph

And death I think is no parenthesis

E. E. Cummings
 (1894-1962)

Many language teachers have sought new and better ways to facilitate and accelerate language learning for years. Since the 1960s, mainstream approaches have been characterized in some of the literature as being Audiolingual which became dominant in the United States during the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's and focused on linguistics and behavioural psychology, Cognitive which emerged as rule acquisition and deductive - inductive grammar teaching and learning and an Eclectic combination of these.

In recent years, new pathways to learning have been explored and remarkably innovative ways of fostering language learning have emerged. Within this great variety of ideas, most but not all fit well into the mainstream of long established and conventional approaches. It can be argued that "innovative approaches" emerged as a reaction to conventional assumptions about the structure of language, its process in the brain, its usage in communication and also about the most effective course objectives, course content and so on. Among them are comprehension-based approaches which focus on establishing receptive skills first listening comprehension in

particular (Total Physical Response, The Natural Approach), production-based approaches which encourage learners to attempt verbal communication in particular (Silent way, Outreach learning) and humanistic and psycho-suggestive approaches (Suggestopedia, Problem solving approaches) (Murcia, 1991, p:30-32).

Humanistic and psycho-suggestive approaches dealt with not only with learner-external dimensions of the teaching environment but also with learner-internal dimensions (as a receiver and processor of input). These approaches claim that if language teachers keep the lessons pleasant, enjoyable, non threatening, and give encouragement, smile, learners may be able to process more input as intake and access more intake as output (Murcia, 1991).

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is one of these humanistic and psycho-suggestive approaches being used recently in language teaching.

What is NLP?

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), developed by a Professor of Linguistics, John Grinder, and Mathematician, Richard Bandler in the 1970s, is an attitude to life and it is a collection of techniques, models and strategies to facilitate personal growth and learning. Neuro-Linguistic Programming can also be shortly defined as follows:

Neuro; is related with the nervous system and the way in which we experience and internally represent the world through our senses.

Linguistic; is related with how the language we use influences our internal communication with ourselves as well as our external communication with other people; in other words, language shapes and reflects our experience, that is, if we change the way we speak, we can change our behaviour.

Programming; is related with our ability to change unhelpful habits and limiting beliefs and replace them with more effective behaviour and supportive beliefs. That is, we can train ourselves to think, speak and act in new and positive ways. (<http://www.teflfarm.com/teachers/reviews/winners/in-your-hands.htm>)

Neurosciences have found that our brains, in addition to taking in information from the outside through our senses, make internal models of external experience so that we can perform operations and look at results internally. In other words, our mind is like a video recorder having the capability of deleting, distorting, and generalizing information. NLP deals with figuring out how neural structures are formed and changed and how people can learn to control the structuring of their own experience for the benefit of themselves and others (Murpey, 1996).

NLP also explains the science behind the teaching tools of accelerated learning using brain to learn faster, to motivate yourself, enjoy daily life and to achieve goals easier

(<http://esl.about.com/library/lessons/braingym.htm>)

The assertions of this approach are;

- firstly know what you want, have a clear idea of your goal in each situation.
- secondly, be alert and keep your senses open to know what you are getting.

- thirdly, be flexible and change your behaviour until you get what you want (<http://www.xtec.es/~jmaguire/nlp>)

NLP is used in many disciplines such as counselling, health, care, sports, and personal development. In this study, the impact of NLP on education and namely language teaching will be described.

NLP in Education

NLP in education tells us about how we think and learn. It shows how to explore the structure of our own subjective experience, that is, how we construct our view of the world, submerging into the inner, virtual world in each of us. Using NLP techniques may enable students to discover their own inner learning process. Discovering their rich internal software, feelings, sounds, images they learn, how to control the way they think, shortly they learn how to learn by being aware of themselves.

Classroom, undoubtedly, is a place where various variables meet. We, as teachers, are one of these variables because we are unique in our classes with different students with our communication style -voice tone, posture, eye movements, gestures, breathing, choice of words. At least learning to recognise these in ourselves and in others, that is awareness, helps us to choose appropriate behaviour and to avoid being locked into arguments. It gives us flexibility in how we handle the classroom and respond to whatever might emerge in the course of our teaching day.

NLP IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The influence of language on our lives and achievements is central to NLP and it can be therefore easily adopted to the teaching environment. Indeed, some NLP techniques such as using stories and guided fantasies to affect the non-conscious mind are already familiar elements in many language courses.

NLP claims that the sensory channels (ears, eyes, hands) are related to different learning systems. As education is a multi-sensory experience it should feed all learning preferences taking all learning styles into consideration. One should remember that slow learners are just, in fact, different learners and that they find the current teaching system difficult for themselves. Therefore, teaching language requires the use of all representative systems motivating different learning styles.

Visual learners receive information and learn better when they can read or see the information. Auditory learners learn better when the informa-

tion primarily comes through the ears while the kinaesthetic learners learn best through physical involvement. These 3 learning styles show different reactions to environment. Visual learners need attractive surroundings and are easily distracted by visual disorders. Auditory learners need continual auditory stimuli even when it is silent they make their own whistling, singing, and humming. Kinaesthetic ones need space to move. Even their eye movements show characteristics. Visual learners tend to look up towards the ceiling when thinking. They need eye contact with the speaker when listening. Auditory learners tend to look left and right in the direction of their ears with only brief eye contact with the speaker while kinaesthetic ones tend to look down and away, with little eye contact (<http://www.lsci.com.ar/novedad.htm>).

Some learners prefer using one sensory channel over the others, while some prefer using a mixture of all three channels. Students with greater learning style flexibility are also greater achievers as they are able to process information in whatever way it is presented. No matter what your preferred sense is, language educators believe that the best learning environment is the one in which all the senses are involved. So, if we base our teaching environment on these learning styles making the students aware of their own feelings we can achieve more fun and attractive lessons.

In addition to learning styles, psychology of learning is also essential for satisfactory learning. No matter how prepared you are for your teaching, no matter what teaching methodology you use, the most important question is how prepared your student is for learning, that is, the psychology of learning. To create the psychology of learning is one of the most important tasks of a teacher. NLP has a vision that everybody can learn (O' Connor & McDermott).

NLP helps the student be aware of his feelings, his thoughts, considering students having different learning styles such as auditory, kinaesthetic, visual as well as preparing them for learning.

In this study, developing writing skill through NLP has been taken as an example. However, one should never forget that the other skills can be taught through NLP as well, depending on teacher's creativity, eagerness, flexibility.

Creative Writing as a Teaching Strategy

So far we have argued that the main objective of using NLP in teaching is to make the students be aware of their learning styles by using their sensory channels. Language learning, indeed, should involve all three learning styles. NLP technique is most beneficial in creative writing especially in poetry, as NLP and descriptive poetry both explore personal, inner worlds through sensory channels.

Poetry is made of words and writing poetry is something rather personal and it requires sensitivity to sound, images, emotions. Both the students and the teachers have the opportunity to review what has been

learned in terms of grammar and vocabulary. Creative writing and especially writing poetry through NLP in English is quite pragmatic for the teacher to analyse what she has taught so far. The teacher has the opportunity to justify, enforce and make a closer survey of what has been learned. And it is quite enjoyable and fun for the students as writing poetry is a simple, passionate activity. The students have the chance to express their emotions directly and simply, they have the opportunity to discover their inner worlds and create their inner dream-worlds. Creative writing through NLP in the language class is useful especially in producing descriptive poems by thinking and writing in the target language as the students will pay the greatest attention in choosing the most appropriate words and expressions. The students will go through a constipation process and as an old saying says 'Constipation in small dogs is a sign of good health'.

Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of feelings and by writing poetry through NLP students will be able to express their feelings with a spontaneity of response. NLP offers a chance of knowing oneself, therefore writing poetry through NLP gives the chance of knowing oneself as the tone and the mood of the poem actually reflect its author's.

Much can be gained from creative writing using NLP if we think of it as a practical resource in the EFL teacher's tool kit. The writing of short, descriptive pieces can have a beneficial effect on the use of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in students' writing. Furthermore, if the method is applied regularly and often, students will become quite skilled in the production of short, but evocative, pieces of written English.

The making of a descriptive poem through our senses resembles to a sausage machine, we want the students to work with the words to create a poem from their simple descriptions. But first, the words themselves must be "spiced up." Another resemblance between writing poetry and a sausage machine is that poetry is like condensed soup or undiluted fruit cordial. Descriptive poetry is a "condensed language"; it is so concentrated and intense that it needs our own interpretations to "dilute" the language and make it intelligible.

First steps

First we introduce the students the writing of these pieces as a class activity with the teacher in control. Then we choose an interesting subject, or a descriptive scene, and write it on the board: such as funfair at night; a storm in the desert; a family barbecue in the woods; a busy marketplace; a birthday party; a trip to the zoo; a circus performance; a day at the races, etc. Then we divide the board into three equal columns, headed as follows:

HEAR SMELL SEE

We are now going to encourage responses from students. A favourite subject might be "a family barbecue in the woods". We need, first of all, to list the various sense impressions that can be recorded under the three headings. These will be fairly obvious: Under HEAR we'll get the sounds of

birds, sound of burning wood, perhaps sound of music, the children's laughter. From SMELL we'll get the smell of woodsmoke, scent of meat and vegetables being barbecued, the odour of nature: trees and flowers, we will feel the warmth of sun on our backs. SEE has the most to offer with the bright colours of nature, the colourful leaves and flowers, the blue sky.

In their first attempts at creating something out of 'A Family Barbecue in the Woods', we suggest that the students be restricted to writing a poem that is only nine lines in length (three lines each from HEAR, SMELL, and SEE). During the first lesson, the items under each should be brief and should be restricted to nouns. The teacher then asks the class for adjectives to describe these nouns.

For example, under HEAR, someone may have given you 'birds'. You ask the students what these birds sound like? Are they quiet on the trees, or flying up in the sky? You will get words like fluttering, twittering, chirping, singing.

When you have enough adjectives for a given noun, you ask the class to help you make a descriptive phrase to go on the board in place of the single word. Instead of just birds, we might now get: fluttering, twittering, chirping, singing birds.

In this first session, the teacher is very much in control. S/he helps the students build up these phrases until the board is full. In the next part, students must individually choose their own favourites from the ones on display, and arrange them in any order they like. You can suggest, for example, that there's no need to have three HEAR phrases, followed by three from SMELL and three from SEE; the nine lines may be in random order. Once a given time has passed, you then get students to read out their examples to the whole class.

Development

On a purely practical level, it's a good idea to limit the number of words they can put in one line (no more than twelve, for example). This prevents the length and complexity of a line or a phrase. But there is no need to restrict the students with concepts like rhyme and rhythm and it is up to the teacher and the level of students to introduce figurative language such as similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, or different styles, moods, genres and techniques. This will depend largely on the class and how much time you wish to devote to this kind of work.

Conclusion

What you make out of writing descriptive poems using NLP, is largely up to you. Some teachers may find it's a useful addition to their writing skill courses. Others may wish to use it as an introduction to teaching literature (particularly poetry) in the language class. One of the best ways of understanding how poets work is to try and produce a poem of your own. But as

a gentle introduction to structured creative writing it can be very rewarding, while on the syntax level, it has proved useful practising word order in sentences, particularly if you get students to use adverbs as well as adjectives in their poems.

Here are some simple techniques or rather styles for writing descriptive poems using NLP in the language classes.

1- INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIAMOND-SHAPED POEMS

Students work individually - in pairs - small groups of 3-5.

Students and the instructor choose a topic or a starter word and write a sausage poem together.

Students write their own poems completely "from scratch" or with starter words suggested by the instructor.

Description: Diamond-shaped poems with 5 lines. Incorporates oral, reading and writing skills.

TASKS

a) Identify the structure / form of the poem (what are the parts of speech in each line); and,

b) Report orally and informally to the rest of the class on the feeling / tone of the poem.

Students can use dictionaries, as necessary, to figure out unfamiliar words.

Education

written collaboratively by Evrim and Dilek

Education

Necessary, lifelong

Training, challenging, improving

A journey that leads us to the target

Discipline

TEMPLATE

Title of Poem

Author's Name

_____ , _____

_____ , _____ , _____

Line 1: Education = 1 NOUN-A

Line 2: Necessary, lifelong = 2 related ADJECTIVES

Line 3: Training, challenging, progressing = 3 descriptive GERUNDS
(verb + -ing)

Line 4: A journey that leads us to the target = 1 complete, related

SENTENCE

Line 5: Discipline = 1 NOUN-B (a synonym of NOUN-A)

Students' observations regarding synonyms, parts of speech on each line, emotional tone, etc. are also discussed / outlined clearly.

Similarly you may want to make use of diamond-shaped poems with 7 lines. The instructions are the same. This time you may want to go a step further and ask the students to find a relationship between the first and last lines. Students can use dictionaries, as necessary, to figure out unfamiliar words.

Woman
Written collaboratively by Evrim & Dilek

- Line 1: Woman = 1 NOUN-A
- Line 2: Young, inexperienced = 2 ADJECTIVES-A
- Line 3: Loving, producing, protecting. = 3 GERUNDS-A (verb + -ing)
- Line 4: Man, money, kitchen, children = 2 NOUNS-A + 2 NOUNS-B
- Line 5: Marrying, cooking, cleaning = 3 GERUNDS-B (verb + -ing)
- Line 6: Tired, old = 2 ADJECTIVES-B
- Line 7: Grandmother = 1 NOUN-B

TEMPLATE

Title of Poem
Author's Name

_____, _____

_____, _____, _____

_____, _____, _____, _____

_____, _____, _____

_____, _____

Make up your own examples, using simpler or more complex vocabulary/topics, to tailor this activity to your particular students' level.

2- FREE ASSOCIATION

Free association is a product of stream-of-consciousness technique, it is a blur-of-writing. Tell your students to write as fast and as much as possible. The writing can be very "sloppy".

Give your students an abstract noun/word such as SORROW. Tell them to close their eyes and explore their feelings and jot down answers for questions as such:

- What colour would it be?
- What shape would it be?
- What things would it be?
- What noise would it make?
- How would it touch like?
- How would it taste like?
- What drink/food would it be?
- What would it smell like?

Poetry means paying attention to your senses and exploring how your sensory channels perceive the world you live in. Alternatively, you may bring a basket of apples, give each student an apple, let them touch it, smell it, feel it before they eat it. Let them think about the apple. Remind them that the apple has gone through the hands of the picker, the packer, the unpacker and the shopper. Tell them to jot down any words that come to their minds non-stoppingly. Let them realise how ideas become poetry. So apple is the poem. I'm the picker. I'm the packer. I'm the unpacker. Here, you've made your students use their five senses in order to draw their attention to create a perception.

3 - PERSONA POEMS

Description: A structured 8-line poem, biographical in nature.

Sample Analysis of a Persona-Poem

Line 1: Evrim = first name/nickname of the person in the poem

Line 2: outgoing, energetic, optimistic, intelligent = 4 adjectives which describe the person

Line 3: friend of mine = X of Y formula, describing an important relationship to the person

Line 4: who loves music, books and ELT = 3 things s/he loves

Line 5: who is afraid of Nevin, spiders and heights = 3 things that scare her/him

Line 6: who wants to see Latin America, the end of poverty and summer = 3 things s/he wants to see

Line 7: resident of this moment = resident of...+ place/time/concept

Line 8: Üstünlüoğlu. = last name of the person in the poem

TEMPLATE

(justify right, centre or left for different effects)

Title of Poem

Author's Name

_____(first name/s)

_____, _____, _____, _____

_____ of _____

who loves _____, _____ and _____

who is afraid of _____, _____ and _____

who wants to see _____, _____ and _____

resident of _____

..... (last name)

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