Chapter 2  
Review of Literature

Neuro-Linguistic Programming has generated considerable interest among English Language professionals in Europe and North America, especially in England and the US. Many of the NLP strategies have been found to be very useful in the English language classroom by different teachers around the world. It is also important to note that the NLP-approach to language teaching is comprehensive. It takes into account the physical setting of learning, the mental states of the learners, the language used in the classroom, meta-communication such as voice quality, body language, facial expressions, gestures, rapport, motivation, pacing and leading, the structuring of the content etc. The following is a description of what scholars and researchers say about NLP and a review of some of the earlier researches on the use of NLP in ELT as well as NLP literature on education.

Definitions of NLP

The term Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was coined by its founders Richard Bandler and John Grinder during the 1970s (O’Connor and Seymour 3) to describe “a body of phenomena and concepts which broadly support the view that humans can be seen as a single mind-body system, in which patterns of connections can be defined which link internal experience and language (‘neuro’ and ‘linguistic’ respectively) to behaviour (programming)” (Churches and Terry 4).
John Grinder, Richard Bandler, Judith DeLozier and Robert Dilts (1980) succinctly describe it as “the study of the structure of subjective experience” (8).

Richard P. McHugh (2000) in his *Mind with a Heart* gives the following detailed description of NLP:

In general terms NLP is about how the brain works, how people think, feel, learn, motivate themselves, interact with others, make choices, and achieve realistic goals. More specifically, it is the study of human subjective experiences and an approach to communication. As a study of subjective experiences NLP studies very closely what goes on inside a person - the processes people use to build their unique, distinctive maps or models of the world. NLP not only studies how our maps or models of the world are created, but it offers practical techniques to develop and expand those maps so that effective communication can become a matter of conscious choice. In this way NLP is an approach to communication that produces the widest range of choices and the ability to change in order to achieve desired results, (ix)

Paul Tosey and Jane Mathison (2003) state that the term NLP “refers to ... systematic, cybernetic links between a person's internal experience (neuro), their language (linguistic) and their patterns of behaviour (programming). In essence NLP is a form of modelling that offers potential for systematic and detailed understanding of people's subjective experience.”

According to L. Michael Hall (2004) NLP is “the study of excellence, a model of how people structure their experiences, the structure of subjective
experience, how humans become *programmed* in their thinking-emoting and behaving in their very *neurology* by the various *languages* they use to process, code and retrieve information” (369).

Richard Bandler (2008), co-founder of NLP defines it as follows: NLP is “an attitude, methodology, and technology that teaches people how to improve the quality of their lives. It is an educational tool that teaches people how to communicate more effectively with themselves, and with others. It is designed to help people have personal freedom in the way they think, feel, and behave” (213).

According to John Grinder (2008), the other co-founder, “NLP gives you a specific set of strategies to unconsciously assimilate precisely the ‘differences that makes the difference’ between a genius and an average performer in the same niche.”

Steve Andreas (2009), one of the earliest developers of NLP, offers two definitions. The first one is that NLP “is the study of the structure of subjective experience, the inner workings of our minds, and how to use that knowledge to enrich our choices. Much of this structure is typically unconscious, or preconscious. However, much of this structure can become conscious, altered, and then allowed to become unconscious and automatic again.” And the second definition is that “NLP is an operating manual for the human brain, providing ‘software for wetware’, that can be used to reprogram ourselves when we are less than fully satisfied with our responses.”

Brian Cullen (2010) quotes the Oxford English Dictionary, definition of NLP in his article “Alternative Definitions of NLP” as follows:
Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a model of interpersonal communication chiefly concerned with the relationship between successful patterns of behaviour and the subjective experiences (esp, patterns of thought) underlying them. It is a system of alternative therapy based on this which seeks to educate people in self-awareness and effective communication, and to change their patterns of mental and emotional behaviour.

**Neuro-Linguistic Programming - Clarification of Terms**

Though the phrase Neuro-Linguistic Programming appears to be rather cumbersome, it contains, in fact, three crucial ideas which are central to human life:

**Neuro**

[It] acknowledges the fundamental idea that all behaviour stems from our neurological processes of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and feeling. We experience the world through our five senses; we make ‘sense’ of information and then act on it. Our neurology covers not only the invisible thought processes, but also our visible physiological reactions to ideas and events. One simply reflects the other at the physical level. Body and mind form an inseparable unity - the human being. (O’Connor and Seymour 3)

**Linguistic**

[It] refers to language and non-verbal symbol systems by which we code, organize, and attribute meaning to neural representations
Linguistic does not refer only to words and prepositional language, but to all symbol systems: the sensory systems of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc., and the non-propositional symbol systems of mathematics, music, art etc. (Hall 16)

Programming

It “refers to the process of getting ourselves into regular and systematic patterns of responses, responses that habituate into dependable habits. [They are] organized ‘plans’ and processes that can become installed in human functioning” (Hall 16).

Review of Researches

This review starts with one significant research conducted in India on the use of NLP in ELT and proceeds to other researches in the field elsewhere in the world.

Anju S. Gupta (2008) of IGNOU in her article titled “Neuro-Linguistic Programming: The New Kid on the Block” feels that being able to match the learning styles of the learners is at the heart of building rapport. “Successful communication implies maximizing similarities and minimizing differences at a conscious and subconscious level. Communication would therefore be positive and harmonious and everybody concerned was more likely to achieve his or her outcomes” (8).

According to her, to achieve our goals we have to change our behaviour. Using new metaphors will help us change the way we think, and behave. For metaphors shape the way we think about the world and the way we behave in
relation to it. Exploring new metaphors enables us to understand and appreciate things in new ways. And if we change our metaphors, we change the way we think and behave. Thus we see that metaphors are directly related to flexibility in behaviour and achieving our outcome. That is why metaphors have become predominant in NLP.

Both NLP and CLT do not believe in structure-oriented language learning. They emphasize the use of language in learning the language. Both the systems see errors and mistakes as feedback, not as something undesirable. They place fluency over accuracy and function over structure. If that is the case, then what is the difference between the two? Gupta thinks that NLP goes much deeper than CLT. According to her, NLP takes the issues in the ELT classroom beyond the fluency-accuracy debate to issues such as being sensitive to differences, being aware of goals and the tools to achieve them, verbal and non-verbal communication at the conscious and non-conscious levels etc, (7-9).

According to Caine and Caine (1991), it is important to create a safe and secure learning environment. And the best way to provide a safe and secure environment is to begin by empathizing with the barriers, blocks, fears and negativities of the students. When we respect their current views and provide them with the appropriate degree of safety and the opportunity to creatively explore, then we can take them beyond their immediate limitations. This is the nature of the challenge good teachers provide.

Eric Jensen (1994) in his book The Learning Brain also speaks about the importance of creating a safe and secure learning environment. The brain becomes very active when risk-taking is encouraged and supported. However, it
becomes helpless under perceived threats. Research tells us that threatening learners may foster more of the same behaviour that we are trying to avoid. A threat is any stimulus that causes the brain to trigger defensiveness or a sense of helplessness in the learner (10).

William Acton (1997) of Nagoya university of Commerce, Japan, explores the use of NLP in the teaching of pronunciation in his article titled “Seven Suggestions for Highly Successful Pronunciation Teaching.” He says that being able to approach pronunciation teaching from different modalities of perception (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.) is clearly advantageous. According to him, being able to practise sound or sound processes from several perspectives is just the basic stuff of good teaching and good pronunciation work. And he finds anchoring to be very effective in language learning especially in pronunciation work.

Also, he invites our attention to the quality of voice in communication. According to him, speech and voice have been deemphasized in communicative language teaching. And training in NLP almost always entails voice work. A voice, which communicates messages of confidence and authority, and the ability to accurately monitor vocal production and body movement are very crucial to NLP, public speaking and first rate pronunciation teaching.

And according to Acton, the impact of suggestion depends on meta-communication. No matter how carefully the explanation or practice is done, if it is set in comments and interpersonal relationships not suggestive of success and learning, the efficacy of the lesson will be seriously compromised.
Modeling is the backbone of NLP. In fact NLP was born modeling the excellent behaviour of outstanding therapists. And one of the original claims of NLP is that if you model the behaviour of a genius at the minutest level, then you will be able to achieve the same result as that person has achieved (J. Grinder). It is quite possible to apply this idea to language learning. In the article titled “A Mini Modelling Adventure using Peer Observation” Brad Deacon (1997) of Nanzan University, New Zealand, offers the following tips for peer modeling for teachers;

1. Identify a colleague whose skills we would like to imitate.
2. Try observing and being observed
3. After observation, make a plan—create, adapt, and use your plan in the class.
4. Act as if you were your model. And observe from the position of an observer and then from the position of a student.
5. Keep a journal and keep updating it.
6. Maximize peer observation by cultivating a symbiotic relationship that develops through exchanging feedback.

Tim Murphy and Richard Bolstad (1997) of Nanzan University and The National Training Institute of NLP, New Zealand, speak about the power of using appropriate language in the classroom in their article titled “Educational Hypnosis”. According to them, the attention of a class can be guided using selected language. And by doing so, teachers can shift the student’s focus from discomfort and self-doubt (caused by mistakes of the past) to more confident and proactive images and outcomes such as the ability to learn, and the ability to
experience success and enjoyment. They also claim that the teacher’s ability to use language to hold these newer and more useful patterns in consciousness for longer periods will help students to let go of the older and less effective patterns automatically and effortlessly. And learning to speak in a language appropriate to each of the representational systems is the key to becoming effective in the use of language.

According to Murphy and Bolstad, there are four things that teachers can do to consciously create a supportive environment for learning:

1. Examine our language in the class (Record the class and listen and just notice).

2. Consciously think through our beliefs and the things we wish to communicate and see if the language we use really communicates these.

3. Decide on or create a context in which we can communicate them smoothly.

4. Observe the responses that we create in the students. If the response is not positive, then change the communication.

To do anything, we need an appropriate mindset. Very often we believe that our mindsets are not within our control. But NLP tells us- that we can in fact decide which mindset we want to be in and create it. In his article “Using the Language of the Brain” Richard Bolstad (1997) says that NLP provides us two important insights. It provides an understanding of the way the brain works. And based on this it provides remarkably new ways to get the students to quickly get into desired states of mind.
David Allaway (1997) says in “Buddhism and the Struggling Student” that the NLP technique of anchoring is a good tool to help individuals move from an unsatisfactory state to a more satisfactory state. It helps us in taking charge of our own states of mind. According to him the teacher may very effectively use anchoring to help struggling students to change their negative states and maintain a resourceful state.

NLP places a heavy premium on positive suggestions. In fact, Charles Adamson (1997) of Miyagi University, Japan, argues in his article, “Suggestopedia and NLP” that NLP is Suggestopedia in practice. In any case, the article makes clear that Suggestopedia and NLP make central use of non-verbal communication and positive suggestion.

According to Majorie Rosenberg (2000), how to teach is more important than what to teach. Central to this approach to teaching is giving enough scope for each of the representational systems (visual, auditory, kinesthetic etc.) in the class (classroom). Her article, titled “The How of Thinking: The Secrets of Neuro-Linguistic Programming,” has some practical tips to offer for each of the representational systems. She classifies learners into three categories on the basis of their preferred representational system: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

She has observed that visual learners learn best and fastest by seeing. Handouts or tape scripts or writings on the board are helpful here. Pictures, cartoons, sketches and videos are also great help to these learners.

Auditory learners remember best with the help of rhythms. Therefore, teachers can speak rhythmically to help them remember the material. They can encourage discussions in the classroom. And learners may be encouraged to read
aloud at home. They can also be encouraged to learn aloud with friends or imaginary persons. One problem with auditory learners is that they need to go to the beginning of a material they have learned to find particular information. To overcome this, they need to combine some pictures with their audio storage. They also need to study for a written exam by writing as well as speaking. Otherwise, they might have problems in a stressful situation with the transfer of information from one system to another.

As for kinesthetic learners, activities that entail movement are good for them. They need to try things out for themselves. If they need, they could be allowed to walk around and learn. They may need to take more breaks while studying and feel more comfortable when they hold small objects in their hands. They should be encouraged to make personal association with the learning material. They also need to have positive feelings about learning and are more dependent than others on their relationship with their teachers and classmates.

When we find activities and teaching styles that incorporate all the different representational systems in our teaching, we increase our chances of reaching all our learners. For, then we are, in fact, matching our teaching styles to our students’ learning styles. This will create a learning atmosphere of trust, co-operation and mutual understanding. This will enhance their self-confidence by making them feel that they are able to learn and understand more easily.

Fiona Farr (20.00), in her article titled “The Word is Mightier than the Sword,” says: “if we do not connect with our students as human beings on some level, we will fail to impress with methodology, materials or even technology” (2).
All of us have different motivational preferences. And according to Farr, motivational preferences strongly influence the type of language we use or the type of language that appeal to us. Knowing that our students may have different motivational preferences (‘meta-programmes’ in NLP) allows us to make more informed choices about language when trying to communicate better, and increase motivation and rapport.

And Farr goes on to advise teachers to identify their own meta-programmes initially so that they are aware from the very outset of the type of teacher language they are likely to use more naturally and more frequently at the unconscious level; this may provide the key to establishing good rapport between the teacher and the student.

Farr’s own experiences with matching appropriate language with the meta-programmes of her own students have taught her that the word, indeed, is mightier than the sword. A major part of her article in the FELT News Letter enumerates the different types of expressions she has used in accordance with the meta-programmes of her students.

According to L. Michael Hall (2004), NLP as a communication model of human learning obviously has many applications in the domain of education. He suggests that representational systems and different learning styles would be a good starting point. These NLP concepts, according to Hall, are amazingly similar to the concept of multiple intelligences of Howard Gardner. He also argues that as every learning context involves a holistic mind-body state, teachers inevitably have to attend to the mind-body states in which they find their learners.
And he feels that NLP patterns for working with and managing states are of
critical importance here.

Gunta Cupane (2005) of the University of Latvia offers the following tips
for modelling useful behaviour patterns in the article titled “Use of the Elements
of Neuro-Linguistic Programming in the Enhancement of the Acquisition of the
English Language”:

1. Take on the identity of the native speaker. This gives one the freedom of
   the behaviour of the native speaker and reduces one’s embarrassment.

2. Let this native speaker be a concrete individual so that you get the
   physiology of the language. This includes movement, facial expressions,
   gestures etc.

3. Pretend that you understand everything even if you do not, at the
   beginning. By the end of the first session or so, you will begin to
   understand.

4. See to it that you are communicating. Everything else is irrelevant.

Serhan KOSE (2005) says in his article titled “Preparing a More Brain
Compatible Classroom for EFL Students in University” that identifying and
addressing the lead system of the students is important in creating a brain-
friendly classroom. The more we understand the brain, the better we will be able
to design our teaching to match how it learns best. The teacher’s task is to create
learning opportunities, which are consistent with natural brain process. And
Kose offers the following suggestions to achieve this:
Provide global and sequential overviews of the lesson. This would cater to both the hemispheres of the brain as the left-brain is sequential while the right brain is global or holistic, in their approach to reality.

Identify the lead systems of the students and address them.

Create an enriched environment. Primarily it means a colourful, stimulating, physical environment. The brain learns best with active rather than passive learning.

Use Physical Activities. Using physical activities during the lesson will boost the learning process. Action and movement are considered as the functions of the Right brain. So, when we use physical activities in the class, we are, in fact, bringing the Right brain alive.

And researchers point out that the brain alternates between periods of focus and non-focus in nine-minute cycles. KOSE quotes French researcher Picorn who says that the brain learns best when learning is interrupted by breaks of 2-5 minutes for diffusion or processing. And our optimal learning pattern corresponds to our age plus or minus two minutes up to a maximum of 20-25 minutes. At the end of this period it is necessary to do a diffusion activity for about 2-5 minutes. These breaks could be total breaks or alternate forms of learning the content like peer teaching or reflective writing.

Use Music. Music also is a function of the Right brain. Usually, in an ordinary class, only the left-brain, which is the seat of language, logic and reasoning, is activated. When music is played in the background, the
right brain is activated, thus bringing in both the hemispheres of the brain into full play.

6. Use Humour. Humour is yet another Right brain function. Humour has physiological, psychological and sociological and educational benefits. It aids memory, relieves stress, is a discipline tool, helps attention and creates a positive climate.

7. Use Art in the Classroom. Art also springs from the Right brain. Using art in language teaching, therefore, allows students to see details, understand relationships and learn to think creatively, it also helps to constitute wholes from parts. Role plays, charades, drama, etc., are helpful in this regard.

Murat Hismanoglu (2006), in the article titled “Current Perspectives on Pronunciation Learning and Teaching” in the Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, says that NLP’s multi-sensory approach to pronunciation is the basic stuff of good pronunciation. According to him, paying attention to meta-communication is conducive to success even in such a specialized area of ELT as the teaching of pronunciation.

Richard Churches and Roger Terry (2007, 2009) offer teachers a wide range of NLP tools and techniques for effective teaching and classroom processes, as well as to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal capacity, manage emotions and communicate much more effectively. They developed these techniques through their trainings in NLP and the innumerable teacher training workshops they conducted across UK. In their extensive experiences with teachers, they have found that knowing what is important to us (as teachers),
what we want, and having the personal effectiveness to act give us the ability to link our values to our behaviour and to influence those around us to easily achieve what really matters. They firmly believe that the link between values, behaviour and purpose is of key importance to effective improvement in formal education. Therefore they offer specific approaches for getting in touch with who we are so that we can truly connect to our moral purpose and values as teachers, for thinking deeply about what we (as teachers) do, and for developing the skills to take effective action. They feel that at the end of the day, all answers to the problems and challenges in teaching have to come from practitioner-led enquiry. They have noticed that nearly every teacher they have worked with has found something in NLP that has made a real difference to them and their relationships in both the classroom and the staffroom. They have also noticed that not every tool or technique works for everyone. Therefore, they have presented about a hundred strategies and techniques for teacher effectiveness in two thick volumes. The first volume, *NLP for Teachers: How to be a Highly Effective Teacher* (2007), offers hundreds of sources that establish the theoretical underpinnings of NLP as well as current research in a variety of areas that independently support NLP claims about the functioning of the human mind-body system.

John Carey et al (2010), in *Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Learning: Teacher Case Studies on the Impact of NLP in Education*, present 24 teacher-led action research case studies. These case studies demonstrate that ‘teachers’ recognize the importance of communication in effective learning and teaching, and more so, understand the potential of the application of NLP to achieve this, particularly in relation to language and learning, rapport, interpersonal skills and
flexibility. This systematic review demonstrates, there has been a growing and developing education literature, which refers to both adults and children right from the time of the publication of the earliest popular books on NLP and teaching and learning. Furthermore, criticisms (where they exist) are often made at a theoretical or ‘in principle’ level rather than from an evidence-based position.

**Critiquing NLP**

Bruce W Davidson (1997), after going through the several articles on the use of NLP in language teaching published in the *Language Teacher Online*, unleashes a scathing attack on NLP in an article titled “The Perils of Programming”. He feels that NLP is an educational approach that bases itself on a model of human behaviour coming directly from computer programming. NLP recommends the use of trance states, hypnotic suggestion, meditation etc. All these, says Davidson, put the students into a passive role and make the teachers hypnotists, gurus or programmers. According to him, teachers should have done the opposite. They should have helped students overcome their passive role as followers.

Further, in a democratic society, the role of a teacher is not to reproduce his own image or ideas in the minds of students. It creates irrational student-submissiveness.

And by overemphasizing the power of suggestion NLP pushes the students to unrealistic expectation.

It is clear that Davidson has only responded to some essays on NLP and its use in ELT. His views betray a clear lack of insights into NLP. His doubts might have vanished if he had read some of the authentic source books on NLP.
For, to say the least, NLP is about experiencing one’s subjectivity and taking charge of one’s subjective world. Researches prove that all his fears about submissiveness and passivity are quite unfounded. In fact, these are the evils that NLP is fighting against. And by empowering one to be in charge of one’s own subjective world, NLP allays all irrational and unrealistic fears and anxieties about the past and the future and helps one to take a pro-active role in the present.

Thus, rather than being unrealistic or irrational, NLP is quite down-to-earth and is quite in touch with reality in the present.

**NLP and Mainstream Applied Linguistics and ELT Authors**

Notwithstanding its tall claims and at least the moderate successes in the classroom, NLP is rejected, overlooked and sometimes sneered at by mainstream Applied Linguists and ELT authors. Why is it so? Tony Harris (2002) of the University of Granada, Spain, examines the issue ill some detail in his article titled “NLP: If it Works Use it. Or Is There a Censorship Around?”

Harris finds that there is a potent lack of scientific or academic literature to support some of the central blocks upon which NLP is built. Nearly all the published material on the subject to date is practical in nature. And he guesses that it could be due to the widespread aversion among its apologists to theorize something which they see as being eminently pragmatic.

Though NLP has found considerable acceptance among English teachers, NLP has not found its way into standard reference works on ELT methodology. Very often its relative size in these books is reduced to that of a footnote or less. For example, Brown’s *Teaching by Principles* (1994), Bailey and Nunan’s *Voices from the Classroom* (1996), Penny Ur’s *A Course in Language Teaching*:
Practice and Theory (1996) and Rod Ellis’s The Study of Second Language Acquisition (1994) contain no reference to NLP.

And such covert rebuttals in the form of non-referencing of NLP especially by influential academic figures, argues Harris, undoubtedly govern the type of textbooks that get published. According to Tony, “many scholars would distance themselves from Sinclair’s high handed comment that ‘those who teach language depend on those who describe them’ but few would doubt his claim.”

ELT professionals need to be made aware of this and should learn to value their own experiences and intuitions in preference to an academic fraternity which can itself stake no great claim to success in providing a definite theory to govern Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which could in turn be applied to ELT methodology, argues Harris.

And Harris quotes Michael Swan who exposes the mysteries of research in the field of Applied Linguistics:

Teachers do not always appreciate how little (new approaches and theories) are based on proven facts. We actually know hardly anything about how languages are learnt... and rely on pre-scientific mixture of common sense and insight derived from experience. Like 18th century doctors, we work largely by hunch concealing our ignorance under a screen of pseudo-science and jargon.

According to Harris, the whole problem of inclusion/exclusion or censorship could be described in terms of insecurity on the part of Applied
Linguists and a perceivable need to be accepted into the general field of scientific
community.

And Harris argues that Applied Linguists should be able to respond to the minimum requirement of making theoretical notions applicable to practical contexts. Researchers in the field should encourage a more open dialogue with experts in the teaching community who are more centrally involved in language teaching. This would allow practices and hunches, which may not necessarily fit their “scientific” criteria, even though they have proved successful in the classroom, not to be discarded or stigmatized.

Many suspect that NLP lacks a scientific base. But according to Tony Harris, that is not the case. NLP recognizes many of the theories and hypotheses that are frequently referenced and scientifically documented. And it actively promotes and uses them in the classroom. Of course labels and jargons of SLA are changed in NLP. For example, when SLA speaks about cognitive styles, NLP would call them meta-programmes or representational systems and the Affective Filter Hypothesis of SLA turns into an epigram in NLP: “Map becomes the territory.”

And Harris suggests the following areas of research for NLP-practising English teachers:

1. They should strive to forge a stronger link between generally accepted theory in SLA and the central tenets upon which NLP is based.
2. They should popularize the highly effective but very simple theoretical notions in NLP connected with the teaching and learning of languages.
3. The way to advance the cause of NLP is to focus attention on specific applications in the classroom.

Conclusion

The review of earlier researches on the use of NLP in ELT has enabled the researcher to find out arguments for and against the use of NLP in education in general and ELT in particular. He has also found that most studies in this area support the use of NLP in education for better results. Some of them, like Churches and Terry, and Tony Harris, have given the researcher a direction to conduct research, pointed out research gaps and possible areas of research, and suggested possible NLP strategies he could make use of in the classroom. There are, however, experts who have their doubts on the issue. Therefore, the researcher has felt that carrying out research in the actual classroom would enable him to authentically verify the claims and counter claims on the use of NLP in ELT. The review has revealed that much work awaits to be done in the field of ELT with help of NLP. Most of the work that has been done is in schools and in teacher-education institutes. Not many serious researches are done even in this area in India, if one goes by the number of published research articles. Teaching English using NLP in colleges in India is almost an unexplored area. Therefore the researcher thought he could make some contribution to this area by exploring the use of NLP in teaching general English to undergraduate students in one college in Kerala.