

## **Neurolinguistic Programming and English Language Teaching: An Exploration of Linguistic Variants in NLP for its Connection to ELT**

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### **Abstract**

*The human brain, which can be programmed through a multiplicity of practices, is the foundation of NLP. Language teachers can effectively program their students for improved language output if made aware of the Neuro-functioning of the brain. This new-fangled aspect of language teaching is, hitherto, an uncharted area in the Pakistani teaching context. The current study seeks to look into the existing estate of English language pedagogy in Pakistani scenario with the assistance of the NLP Milton Model, based on the employment of the language patterns by famous hypnotist-Milton Erickson. The focal point of this model is- presupposition, mind read, lost performative, unspecified verb, comparative deletion, cause and effect, universal quantifier, complex equivalence, modal operator, nominalization, and unspecified referential index. It has implications, to a great extent, in ELT to generate preferred results. For this study, the sample population is chosen through purposive sampling technique and encompasses language skills' classes; whereas, the five English Language institutions were preferred through random sampling method. This study, accordingly, underpins the exploitation of NLP as a toolkit for effectual language pedagogy. Besides, it also advocates copious ways for meaningful, motivational, and momentous communication between language teachers and learners.*

**Keywords:** Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP); Language Teaching; Pakistani Academia; Pedagogical Skills

### **Introduction**

Despite the existence of numerous methods in English language teaching (ELT), no method was recognized, acknowledged, and prioritized as the best possible method. The phenomenon of 'changing winds and shifting sands' (Marckwardt, 1972, p.05), due to the status of English as a lingua franca, diverse backgrounds, interests, different learning habits, and individual differences, could never bring researchers, linguists, and teachers to suggest a single method.

Individual differences or personality types can be brought into consideration only by taking into account various thinking styles (Alwan, 2012). However, language learners differ because of diverse psychological attributes such as interests, aptitudes, intelligence, emotions, feelings etc, yet their individual differences can be noticed and refined. Keeping in mind the fact, that every individual strives for success, achievement, and need to belong, many significant steps can be taken to make better the thinking styles, or personality types of the language learners.

People have been divided into five personality types in the recent researches: extroversion introversion, openness-closeness, neuroticism-emotional stability, conscientiousness disorganized, and agreeableness-disagreeableness (Geher, 2018). These personality types are based on various reasons, and the environment is one of the most significant aspects as comprised of social, moral, and cultural values and forces (Essays UK, 2013). Environment, too, plays a crucial role for language learners, which does not only relate to the physical settings such as classroom, but also refers to teachers and their ideas.

The concept of individual differences or personality types gave rise to another important distinction of three main learning styles, which are given below (Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Learning Styles (VAK, 2011) :

- First, Visual learners learn more via reading, observation, and writing

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- Auditory learners get more via either listening to others or themselves. They also prefer the self-talk
- Kinesthetic learners use their body languages and gestures to develop understanding (they may be noticed using their hands during their conversation)

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) considers these learning styles as significant sources to bring noticeable differences in learners' behavior and to let teachers adapt and adopt various techniques for effective language teaching process. The function of the brain has been ignored for a long. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) takes its roots from neurology and psychology to deal with complex and intricate language processes and thought patterns existing in human brains, which in turn may have various positive or negative consequences. The founders of NLP: Grinder and Bandler, strappingly believe in its positive results and they consider and emphasize the usage of positive language patterns to bring improvement to the current negative state of mind. The change in current thought patterns for personal growth and professional development have been the strapping tenets of NLP since its origin in the 1970s.

NLP considers teaching primarily as a process, which is directly related to learning. The behavior of the teachers is reflected and depicted through their words. All the communication, which takes place in the classroom, is intended for the improvement and self-enhancement of language learners. These essential traits of NLP can be an efficient and valuable source to deal with effective English language pedagogy. In a nutshell, NLP draws on every effective tool that can help effective English language teaching.

This study aspires to probe deeply into English language pedagogy in the Pakistani academe to understand its significance and the crucial role that it plays for effective language learning processes and outcomes. Indeed, the focus on the cognitive functioning of the language learners to achieve the desired outcome can yield commendable results. This research with the help of the Milton model in NLP, explores and explains the techniques, and tools for effective English language teaching, in the Pakistani academe.

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To explore and elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of NLP concerning language teaching
- To determine and examine the current teaching styles in academe (in selected universities) in association with NLP techniques

Concerning the above-stated objectives, the following questions have been formulated:

- How do the theoretical underpinnings of NLP contribute to effective language teaching?
- What are some common teaching practices, used in the academe, in line with NLP techniques/strategies?

This study will be momentous for English language teachers to bring improvement to their teaching style, keeping in mind, the individual differences of their language learners. It will, also, facilitate them to understand the corollary of the functioning of the human brain for the occurrence of effective language learning. With the help of this study, countless indispensable steps can be taken to let the language learners trounce their negative feelings towards the language learning process. Above and beyond, various teacher training programs following NLP techniques can be conducted by the ministry of education to reinforce effective language pedagogy.

### **Literature Review**

The studies suggest that the impact of NLP in various fields is commendable. Grinder and Bandler (2013) assert NLP as a source to achieve the desired results with the help of language patterns and capable enough to change the emotional and behavioral human states (What is NLP, 2013). NLP is found to be useful in human psychological therapy, business, personal or self-development, and professional growth. Yet, the area in education seems to be neglected as it has not been given much preference as compared to the other spheres of life. It is for this reason that only a few researches are available in this regard and even in those few studies, the majority does not account for theoretical and in-depth stance of NLP but only the practical relevance for learning either vocabulary or grammar of the language.

Carl Rogers (1983) perceived NLP as dwelling into common-sensical grounds of human existence that can be made "highly effective" for ELT. Rogers (1983) intended to believe in therapeutic and emotional attributes in ELT. Ellis (1993) took NLP as the following the humanistic

approach that is learner-centered. Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, and Troll (1994) state NLP as trans-disciplinary due to its connection to an assortment of sources from the academe. However, there is still a need to develop its in-depth theorization for its effective practical application in various academic fields (Gibbons et al, 1994).

Harris(2001) stated all conspiracies, criticism, and controversial aspects of NLP for the ELT which were hurdles for its recognition as a methodological approach in applied linguistics. However, he concluded that NLP may not be all the way rejected due to a lack of effective coverage and biased opinions. In Tosy and Mathison's' viewpoint (2003), NLP is noteworthy since it provides both: a theory to deal with human behavior and a method or approach for practical application. Further, they perceive NLP possessing much worth in the academe if it is given a thorough investigation and in-depth critical evaluation for measuring its practical application. Millrood (2004) considered teachers' discourse of paramount importance for learners. He conducted NLP workshops to raise awareness among teachers regarding their verbal patterns to bring positive changes in their learners' behavior.

Hirschhorn (2005) perceived language teaching merely to cover the need of the learners instead of teaching the contents of the syllabus. He also added NLP in the category of the Humanistic approach in language learning that holds theoretical grounds from all teaching methods. Carey, Churches, Hutinson, Jones, and Tosey (2009), studied the various aspects regarding NLP. They investigated all those case studies by teachers who first received training in NLP and then led action research to check its practical application. They found all studies having a strong impact on students' learning progress as a result of NLP training.

Burnham (2010) emphasized the use of NLP for making it a part of the curriculum to cater to the needs of language learners. Pishgadam (2011) presented the notions of rapport building, anchoring, flexibility, motivation, individual differences, modeling and, cognitive, and emotional boosters as significant aspects of NLP. He further designed the scale on which teachers' progress can be evaluated.

Ramganes (2015) found a strong correlation of NLP with students' progress after having gathered the finding of the research on 45 English language teachers. He also found a significant relationship between NLP and individual differences to develop rapport since NLP caters for the various aspects of the individual differences.

According to Anita Lashkarian and Sima Sayadian (2015), NLP is an effective language teaching tool to increase the motivation level of language learners and to keep them away from language learning anxiety and depression. They consider language teaching and NLP as closely intertwined for effective language teaching. The purpose of their study on 60 young Iranian EFL learners', from a junior school, was to see the effects of NLP techniques on students and to train the teachers to use such language patterns which could help them to grasp the attention of their learners and raise their level of confidence. They also believe in substantial teachers' progress when trained from the perspective of NLP.

Russel (2017) investigates the existence of NLP in the ELT world via exploring its inclusion in various journals' articles and the ELT books. Zeba Siddiqui(2018)discusses and examines the various techniques and approaches of NLP to underline its significance and implication for the ELT world. She emphasizes the usage of numerous NLP techniques for building self-confidence, invigorating and increasing creativity, and convalescing body language for the professional life.

NLP has been practiced in various fields such as business, personal growth, physical therapies, psychological treatments, and professional development. However, it has not been noticed a profoundly researched area in the ELT world. Its significance has been determined by the various researchers across the globe, yet it is an unexplored area in the Pakistani academe and immense benefits can be found if practiced in English language teaching in the Pakistani context.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

NLP is a psychological and neurological belief with a robust epistemological perspective. It has a huge implication for English Language Teaching (ELT). There are a few considerable theories to be applied and investigated in this regard. Metatheory of NLP is discovered to get the awareness of surface structure to understand the deep structure. This model is the result of a meeting of Grinder and Bandler with the famous family therapist Virginia Satire. They both found Virginia taking hold of the minds of his clients by asking them various straightforward questions and with their help, she further considers the complicated notions (Grinder & Bandler, 1976).

NLP Milton's model, too, is a result of a meeting, by Grinder and Bandler with Milton Erickson, a famous hypnotist, who moves in opposition to Virginia Satire in his usage of words, since his focus is not on vagueness, unlike Virginia. He relies more on surface structure to realize the deep structure. However, he is equally famous and linguistically competent to inspire the minds of his clients and to convert the negative state of the mind into a positive one (Tosey & Mathison, 2003).

The Metamodel emphasizes (Ellerton, 2005):

- What specified
- How specified

The Milton model focuses on (Ellerton, 2005):

- What unspecified
- How unspecified

The following characteristics are the aspects and attributes of both the Milton and Metamodels in NLP:

- Deletion: to omit any parts/chunks from conversation to get positive results
- Distortion: to distort to get positive results
- Generalization: to generalize or not to generalize to get the positive results (Ellerton, 2005)

The emphasis is on the positive results. Everything happens to seek the positive results in NLP whether it is to get the realization of the deep structure or the surface structure.

Milton's model, as has been employed in this study, is of huge implication in NLP to deal with ELT. It has got numerous language patterns such as (Ellerton, 2005):

1. Ambiguity- structural, phonological and syntactic,
2. Selectional restriction violation- associating animate qualities to non-animate,
3. Extended quote-to present quote as a part of sentence,
4. Embedded command- giving direction in the broader context,
5. Double bind- giving options
6. Conversational postulates- giving short answers (yes or no)
7. Complex equivalence: to link something to another phenomenon which may or may not have a cause
8. Nominalisation-to talk about something in terms of abstract sense
9. Pace current experience: talk about the latest situation
10. Comparative deletion- not to mention the thing being compared
11. Lack of referential index-no specific reference
12. Universal quantifier- to take all as equal
13. Presupposition- to have positive assumptions
14. Cause and effect-relating one aspect to another
15. Tag question- to attach question at the end to demand answer
16. Model operator- referring to probability
17. Unspecified verb- not to reveal the "How" aspect
18. Mind read- to assume to know mental states
19. Lost performative- not to mention the person who has made the judgment
20. Utilization-make use of every possible concrete or abstract notion in context (Ellerton, 2008).

The various language patterns from the above list are of immense interest to study and investigate the theoretical underpinnings of NLP and English language pedagogy in the academe. They can also strengthen the use of NLP as an effective toolkit for ELT. Therefore this study employs NLP Milton Model to examine the current ELT practices in Pakistani academe. The surface structures may give an understanding of reading the deep structures; teachers' language patterns may depict teachers' role in a language learning process.

### **Methodology**

To carry out this research, the sample population was chosen through purposive sampling technique. It is also known as subjective and judgmental (Crossman, 2017). The language skills classes have been observed in the five higher education institutions in Islamabad for this study.

Being exploratory and explanatory, the present study employs semi-structured observation. The purpose of this type of observation is to take notes in naturalistic settings following the set guidelines and specific questions, hence to develop an in-depth understanding of any phenomena. Observations, in this regard, are an essential part of the process of evaluation and determination (The

Developmental Evaluation Toolkit, 2014). This research uses the observation sheet based on Milton's Model in NLP. It considers three important aspects: "yes", "no" and "to some extent". The observation sheet supplies particulars regarding the use of these responses, to establish a thorough understanding.

The Milton model was adapted to develop the observation checklist for this research. The following elements are used as part of this observation sheet: Presupposition, Mind read, lost performative, Cause & Effect, Universal Quantifier, Modal Operator, Unspecified Verb, Tag Question, Lack of Referential Index, Comparative Deletion, Extended Quotes, Pace Current Experience, Double Bind, Conversational Postulate, Nominalisation, Utilization, Embedded Commands /Questions, Unconditional Acceptance, Time orientation, and Tasking.

### **Findings of the Study**

The following aspects of the Milton Model have been discussed below to find their intricate and essential relevance to English language pedagogy in academe:

#### **1. Presupposition**

Assumptions hold significance for various and diverse reasons. They have got two significant ways: positive and negative. On the one hand, positive assumptions may improve the abilities, on the other hand, the negative assumptions may deprive of the already existing abilities since teachers' beliefs play a significant part in their learners' progress. This language pattern of the Milton model was 60% in the usage. The few very common examples, as noticed were:

- You know about this topic.
- You know about many things about technology as you are a new generation.
- You all have been practicing these things.

#### **2. Mind Read**

Grinder and Bandler considered Milton Erickson as the expert in reading the mind of his clients. Primarily, whatever exists in the mind is a deep structure and whatever a person utters is a surface structure. For one deep structure, there can be many surface structures. The concept of deep and surface belongs to Noam Chomsky, who proposed the concept of transformational Generative grammar. Milton, while following this strategy with his clients, was able to get precise outcomes. This pattern was 20% only in teachers' communication with their learners. The only example found is given below, where the teacher intends to think about students' attitude:

- I know you can do it.

#### **3. Lost Performative**

This aspect of Milton's model proposes the actions without mentioning their performers. It is a general and critical aspect to propose or advise any necessary action. Besides, it is a very effective strategy when the purpose is not to refer to any person but his words. Its usage is 40% as given below:

- It is nice when one reads loudly and so be loud, please.
- Listening is always effective.

#### **4. Cause and Effect**

The relationship of reasons with their possible consequences is an admirable strategy to grasp others' minds. It is also effective to deal with any problematic situation in a classroom while linking the reasons with their possible consequences. It was 40% in its occurrence. The following examples are quite helpful in this regard:

- If you cannot read properly, you cannot write properly.
- Listening carefully is important to understand others.

#### **5. Universal Quantifier**

The language pattern of Universal quantifier refers to the usage of the general and global words. For instance, all, everyone, everybody, nobody, etc, do not identify and specify any individuals. Following the humanistic approach, their agenda is not to influence or attack anybody personally. Its usage is highly effective without stimulating negative emotions or feelings. This language pattern was noted 40% as shown below:

- You all should answer now.
- You all do it please now.
- All listen to me now, please.
- You all look at me.

## 6. Modal Operator

Modals in language hold fundamental significance to advise, suggest, request, order, criticize, authorize, and recommend etc. They are part of any language class to emphasize certain inevitable situations and circumstances for effective pedagogy. This language patterns was noted 100% in usage. The given examples illustrate the usage effectively:

- You should tell me.
- You should pay attention.
- You have to do it.
- You can do it.
- You must have seen such situations in your practical life.

## 7. Unspecified Verb

Milton was curious to unveil the inner thoughts of his clients. Grinder and Bandler noticed Milton following this pattern to reach to the inner state of his clients without differentiating any particular phenomena. The principle of unspecified verb is to mention the existence of a problem only, but not the aspect “how”; no detail about the process that leads to existence. The same pattern can be equally used in a language classroom where teachers may suggest certain actions but not their specific process. Its usage was noted 20% only with the following example where a problem in the form of the modal verb (may) brought into consideration of the learners but not clarified:

- You may be hardworking (a problem was told), but not intelligent to achieve your goals (the difference between being hardworking and intelligent is not made clear). One needs to be hard working only.

## 8. Tag Question

Tag questions in language possess an exceptional significance for not letting others' attention diverted in a conversation. They are remarkably conspicuous features of getting to know others' viewpoints and keep the theme engaged. This language pattern may offer important outcomes if applied to a language classroom. This pattern has been used 20% only by the language teachers:

- Do you like to say something? Don't you?
- You found it? Didn't you?

## 9. Lack of Referential Index

To give a direct reference to people is not an effective strategy to influence them. People may not unwrap themselves easily. Only general references where no one is targeted specifically can generate preferred results. In English language teaching, this strategy can be very productive and prolific to stimulate learners' responses. This aspect was observed 100% in teachers' classroom discourse. It overlaps with the concept of modal operators since both act following each other, when no references have been made and all are addressed equally:

- You all should answer now.
- You all do it please now.
- All listen to me now, please.
- You all look at me.
- You must have seen such situations in your practical life.

## 10. Comparative deletion

When a comparison is drawn between two things in such a way that one entity is mentioned without giving reference to another, is known as comparative deletion. For instance, 'you work better this way', but what about the other way? It is another significant aspect to grasp others' attention in a specific direction without mentioning the other entity. The indirect comparison is a source of mammoth motivation. This study does not find any language patterns indicating a lack of strategic was in teachers' discourse to manipulate their learners' minds.

## 11. Extended Quote

An extended quote is an extension/narration of a particular subject. It is to convince unconsciously about a certain agenda with the help of a series of incidents, where a person even does not realize the main point or agenda. Out of this uncertainty, he produces many responses. It may be linked to the narrative aspect of language teaching to influence learners' minds. Its usage may keep them curious and engaged in a learning process. Then the concepts are grasped unconsciously and memorized consciously. This language pattern did not exist in language teachers' talk.

**12. Pace Current Experience**

NLP emphasizes upon the present situation with the possibilities for the future whereby completely ignoring the past. In a language learning process, if learners are continuously made aware of their present situation, it keeps them focused and active. Language teachers used this pattern frequently. Its usage was 80%:

- You are now on page 120
- Here is the beginning of this passage.
- You can see now examples of phrases and clauses on the board.
- I am going to explain more.

**13. Double Bind**

The phrase double bind refers to giving double options within a single sentence. There are options out of which one has to select one option. However, there is no option indeed. The task is imposed but others do not get this realization. Grinder and Bandler noted from Milton's therapy sessions that he does not ask his clients to tell the truth. He always gives them options in the background of: "now" and later". This language pattern was not found in many instances.

**14. Conversational Postulate**

Conversation is a two-way process. Milton used to ask many questions to his clients to be aware of their mental state. It has to undergo a specific direction for its existence. For every question, there is the urgency of an answer. In a language teaching situation, teachers may ask many questions to produce more chances for learners to participate actively. An equal correspondence is required for a conversation to be considered effective. This has been employed 100% by the language teachers: following are a few examples:

- Do you find any difference between phrase and clause?
- Are you looking at the board?
- Do you get me?
- What's a compound word in this sentence?
- Is it clear?

**15. Nominalisation**

When words seem to be a noun, but they are not- is known as nominalization in NLP. The process of nominalization presents a vague concept as an entity. Usually, a verb or an adjective is presented as a noun. The words ending in 'ing', and 'ment' are usually termed as nominalizations." This pattern was used 20% only by the English language teachers:

- To have an understanding with others effectively is not an easy job.

**16. Utilization**

The Milton model of NLP focuses enormously on the aspect of utilization- everything/ every single source existing in our surroundings can be utilized in any manner. Milton's model believes in the presence of all resources and sources in all our surroundings. For a language teaching, classroom and teachers are the best sources which can be utilized to mold learners' minds. Language teachers, in this study, followed this pattern 40%, as given below:

- I am going to explain on the board about this topic now
- You can open your books now to understand what I am saying.

**17. Embedded Commands / Questions**

To embed one command/question within another is to get a response when no response is received is a very effective strategy. Milton's model is primarily focussed on these ambiguous and unique patterns to get the desired results. This pattern has been used 60% by the language teachers:

- What do you think about a phrase when you see it's conveying full meaning though it is not meant to convey the full meaning so any other phrase which might come to your mind?
- What idea do you get when you read this sentence about the qualities of a loyal friend as it is hard to find such friends nowadays?
- You told me only a few examples of sentences where there are so many so think about other types of sentences as we all use many of them daily.

All the commands are embedded in such a way where getting any response is crucial and inevitable.

**18. Unconditional Acceptance**

The phrase indicates acceptance of all the responses without crediting them as right or wrong. Milton's model gives privilege to every single response though when it does not make any sense. Every response is feedback for the teachers. It does not only build rapport but also develops self-confidence. This language pattern was 80% in usage by ELT teachers indicating the frequent use of the phrases, "good", "excellent", "alright", etc.

**19. Time Orientation**

Time is a crucial factor to achieve one's goals. To hit people's minds at a certain time when they are properly engaged in a task is crucial for the accomplishment of that task. In a language classroom, this time orientation is significant to achieve the set targets. This study found only 20% instances from teachers' classroom interaction:

You have only ten minutes now to think about this topic.

**20. Tasking**

Tasking is crucial for the accomplishment of goals. Only those tasks which are performed timely and appropriately develop motivation and interest among the people. This study finds 60% such instances by the language teachers as given below:

- You now have to complete this task.
- You will tell me your viewpoints once I explain it to you.
- You will now speak as I want all to participate.

These results reveal the domination of a few language patterns over the others in language skills' classes. The language patterns such as presuppositions, conversational postulates, unconditional acceptance, modal operators, lack of referential index, pace current experience, and tasking occurred frequently. However, some language patterns were either unobserved or occurred rarely such as: comparative deletion, tag questions, nominalization, unspecified verb, universal quantifier, cause and effect, and time orientation- need to put into practice or develop awareness regarding them (among the language learners) for the following reasons:

- grasping the attention of the learners
- making the instructions clearer
- Keep knowing the language learners' mental states (via asking questions frequently)
- To understand individual differences
- to develop friendly relations/to establish rapport
- to let students overcome their depression/anxiety regarding learning process/outcome
- building their self-confidence/ a realization to associate mistakes with learning (more mistakes lead to more learning)
- to associate mistakes with learning-more mistakes and more learning
- encouraging their hidden potentials/ motivating them for better results
- to instill creativity( by adopting narrative style)
- allocating the time properly for equal learning opportunities
- to properly design every activity following different learning styles such as kinesthetic, visual, and auditory

Certainly, these findings would propose enormous practical applications for the language teachers and learners for effective language pedagogy in academe in general, and Pakistani academe in particular.

The summary of the findings is presented below in graphical format:

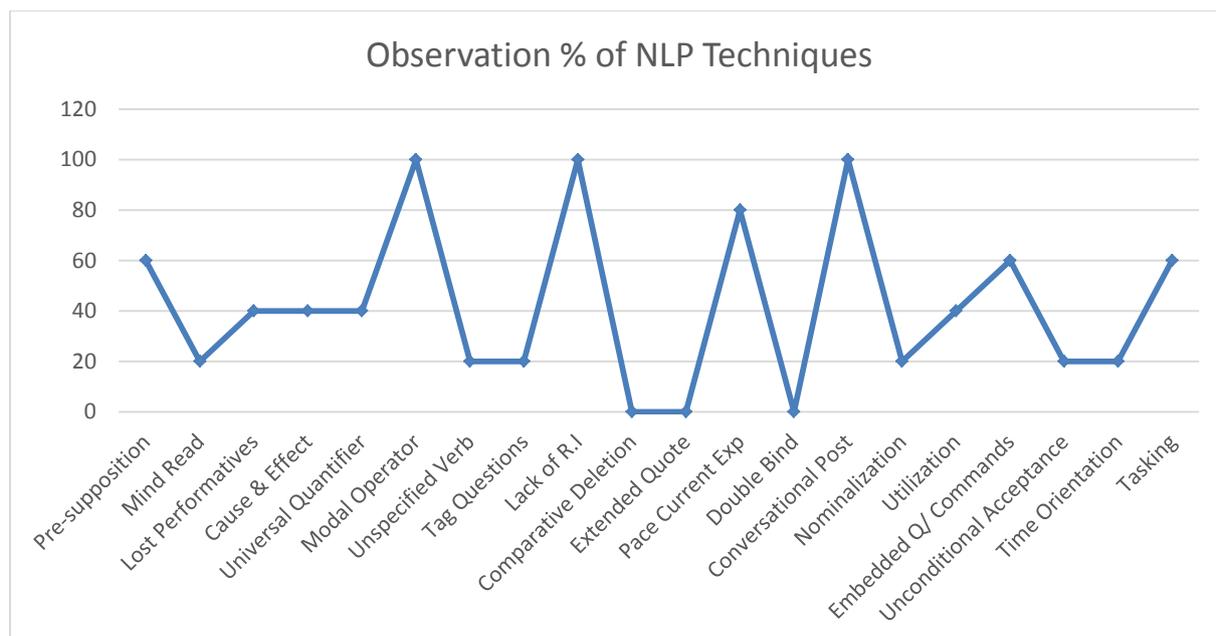


Figure 1

This graph demonstrates that the majority of NLP techniques are not commonly employed by language teachers in the majority of the institutions observed for the purpose. In this regard, few techniques are not in practice and few are higher in usage ratio. However, the data reflects the perceptions of teachers for the occurrence of effective pedagogy since the humanistic philosophy of English language teaching demonstrates learners' emotions and feelings as directly related to the smooth and efficient learning process. The more positive language patterns, the more there are chances to develop self-reliance, rapport, confidence, and motivation for successful learners. The data validates that English language teachers in Pakistani academe need NLP training to use NLP techniques skilfully in order not to teach merely the contents of the syllabus but to make learners communicate in the target language.

**Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Studies**

Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) NLP is an unexplored area that needs theoretical understanding for its practical applications. It is a toolkit for English language teachers though it was originally not intended for the English language pedagogy. This research has taken into account those significant language patterns, which Milton Erickson used with his clients to get the desired results. All the language patterns have enough potential for English language teachers to deal with learners from diverse backgrounds. The language patterns may develop enough confidence and motivation in language learners the same way as they did with Milton's clients. To sum up, there is a dire need to understand the fact by the language teachers that language teaching is not merely meant to teach the contents of the syllabus but to develop creativity and encourage critical thinking for efficient language teaching.

Future researchers can work on the other NLP theories and models to find their relevance to educational practices. They can bring to light various techniques such as anchoring, reframing, and visualization etc. which can enhance language learners' cognitive abilities. This study deals with language teaching only. Other researchers may discover its potential by asking language learners about their preferred style of learning via making its connection to language patterns of Milton's model as explained above. Many other researchers can be conducted to find the relevance of NLP with grammar teaching, vocabulary building, personality development. The research can also be replicated to determine language teaching in other parts of the world concerning NLP.

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