

NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING, LANGUAGE AND THE SUBMODALITIES IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

NLP looks at how we organise what we see, hear and feel and how we filter the information that comes in to us through our senses. The aim of this paper is to analyze the NLP submodalities, one of the most powerful NLP techniques to play with. I will first run through the three 'rep' systems (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and explain the submodality distinctions in each. Then, I will focus on presenting a variety of linguistic structures in an attempt to express different types of submodalities. Finally, I will examine the connection between timelines and critical submodalities.

Key words: *internal thinking, language structures, NLP, representational systems, submodality distinctions, tenses, time frames*

1. INTRODUCTION

If representational systems are modalities (ways of experiencing the world), then submodalities are, in O'Connor and Seymour's (2002, p. 42) view, "the building blocks of the senses, how each picture, sound or feeling is composed".

Primary representational modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic – VAK) allow people to make different maps of the world, and therefore understand the world differently. In line with this, the ability of our sensory systems to allow for qualities such as lightness, distance from the eye, intensity, shapes, association or dissociation changes the structure of an experience, and hence, its meaning. Mental images, sounds and feelings display certain qualities. Mental pictures, for instance, have colour and brightness, rhythm and tone characterize sounds, texture touches upon feelings. NLP has a name for all this – 'submodalities'. Senses are known as 'modalities' used to receive information from the environment, whereas the qualities of our sensory experiences make up the submodalities.

In language, we can resort to the most convenient submodalities in order to describe a certain situation, and therefore we can choose the meaning that we wish to convey to a certain experience. The words people use reveal the way they are representing things internally. Some typical examples are *I hear you loud and clear* (auditory channel of representation), *I'll take a dim view of this* (visual channel of representation), *We've barely scratched the surface* (kinesthetic/tactile channel of representation). These examples reflect not only the sensory specific predicates, but also the associated submodalities. As Bavister and Vickers put it "They give more precise insight into what people are thinking about and how they're coding their experience internally" (Bavister and Vickers 2004, p. 42).

A way of changing the qualities of our internal representations is through the use of **critical submodalities** which are likely to help us manage our states more easily. According to Molden (2001, p. 67), one way to think about this is to "imagine you have a control panel for changing the qualities of your internal representations, called submodalities". In other words, the three types of submodalities, i.e. visual, auditory and kinesthetic, serve us develop our ability to work with our internal representations.

I share Alder's opinion that "each representational system has its own *neurological qualities* or characteristics, known as *submodalities*. These submodalities tell us more about the *process of thinking*, and in particular the nature of the *unique mental maps and filters* in the NLP model" (Alder 2002, p. 114, emphasis added). This is particularly evident when using an internal representation of a pleasurable past experience. Starting from this point, one could make a mental exercise and bring back the feelings, images and sounds they experienced at the time of the event and intensify them using

submodalities. That is why the role of submodalities is closely related to our internal representation since images (black and white, bright and dim, larger and smaller, framed and panoramic), sounds (mono or stereo, loud or soft, cleared or muffled), and feelings (rough or smooth, hard or soft, hot or cold) are associated with the representation and make up what the NLP Model of Communication calls “mind programming unit”.

Changing the submodalities is a very powerful and efficient transformation which not only changes the meaning of an experience, but also “changes the whole way we feel about the experience” (O’Connor and Seymour 2002, p. 43).

Changing certain submodalities can have a minimum or no effect. However, others can trigger changes with immediate effect. These are landmarks in distinguishing between states and, from an NLP perspective, they stand for **critical submodalities**. The difference between two states, one positive and the other negative is emphasized by three or four submodalities which are a gateway to switching states around. Each feeling uses different submodalities which drive deeply into the territory of emotional experience. Ellerton’s (2006, p.104) research on modalities and submodalities makes it clear that “The submodalities we use to store our memories give meaning to those memories; by adjusting the modalities of the memory, you can change how you perceive it and respond to it. This is also true for envisioning and imagining future events”.

Each representational system undergoes clear and subtle distinctions and every sense has different qualitative characteristics.

2. SUBMODALITY DISTINCTIONS

Submodality distinctions (visual, auditory, kinesthetic – VAK) are essential in applying NLP to language patterns. Knight (2002, p. 20) uses the label “finer distinctions in thinking” for submodalities. In language, we can resort to the most convenient submodalities in order to describe a certain **situation**, and therefore we can choose the **meaning** that we wish to convey to a certain experience.

It is a well-known fact that, when recalling an experience, changing the submodalities may have a profound impact on how we feel about a certain memory. The way we think of an experience affects our internal state. According to Knight (2002, p. 20), “People who have control over their emotions and their experience have the ability to manipulate these fine distinctions in their thinking”. Thus, by varying the submodalities of a memory, we can make changes to manage our feelings and behaviour more effectively. Cooper (2008) establishes a connection between changing our emotional responses and leading from within, known as “programming your remote control”. She suggests that we can take control and change submodalities: “You can think of this technique as being a remote control for your thoughts. Your internal representations may be digital, by which I mean you can turn them on and off” (2008, p. 169). Depending on whether the memories are pleasant or unpleasant, we are associated or dissociated from them. NLP theorists agree on certain features (submodalities) common to the three primary representational systems. Thus, an unpleasant memory might be characterized by being *small* (size), *dark* (contrast), *black and white* (colour), *far away* (distance). On the contrary, more intense, memorable and pleasant experiences are *big* (size), *bright* (brightness), *colourful* (colour), *close* (distance), and *associated*. In both cases, the content of the memory stays the same, it is how we remember it that has changed.

Submodalities have a direct link with the intensity of our experience. Within each of the main thinking patterns of visual, auditory and feelings there are finer distinctions, e.g. *the color and clarity of an image*, *the tone and volume of a sound*, *the strength and location of a feeling*. These sensory qualities help us begin to understand and express the essential aspects of human experience. Most submodalities vary forming a sort of sliding scale, for example clarity, brightness or volume.

Visual distinctions:

Brightness (bright or dim, dull or sparkly)
Clarity (dim and hazy, sharp and in focus)
Size (larger or smaller)
Distance (close to or distant)
Speed (fast or slow)
Framed / Panoramic
Sequence (in order/random/simultaneous images)

Auditory distinctions:

Volume (loud or soft)
Speed (fast or slow)
Location (in front of you, to one side, behind you)
Distance (the sound is close or far away)
Clarity (clear or muffled)
Pitch (high/low/mid range)
Continuous (continuous/intermittent)

Feelings distinctions:

Pressure (hard or soft)
Location
Motion (a feeling can be fluttery, steady, intermittent, tingling)
Temperature (hot/cold/damp)
Intensity (strong/weak)
Weight (light or heavy)
Texture (rough or smooth)

The range of submodality distinctions reveals, in Milliner's (1988, p. 6) terms, "the richness and uniqueness of human subjectivity. For Neuro Linguistic Programmers, language provides a useful map for understanding another person's model of the world". The following sentences contain a variety of submodality distinctions and other sensory-specific words:

Kinesthetic(K)	Visual(V)	Visual(V)
e.g. I can't <u>get a handle</u> on the <u>clear</u> meaning of <u>hazy</u> future experiences.		
Submodality	Submodality	
(SM)	(SM)	

K A V
e.g. The harmony of warming changes speaks to me of sparkling horizons.
SM SM

V V V
e.g. The boss's black-and-white thinking can blind people to a colourful imagination.
SM SM

With finer distinctions in thinking patterns, the richness of our internal thinking leaks through into our communication. It is no wonder that people make different maps of the world. They have different preferred representational systems, different synesthesias, and code their memories with different submodalities.

3. LANGUAGE AND THE VISUAL SUBMODALITIES

Not only do predicates, phrases, metaphors give us information concerning a person's preferred representational system, but they also reveal certain types of submodalities as mentioned above. The following sentences are relevant for ways of expressing visual submodalities:

"I take a *dim* view of this contract".

"I have a *hazy* notion about the project".

These examples point out that, on the one hand, the speaker uses the visual representational system, and on the other hand, "brightness" as submodality is *critical* of the created image. The submodality "brightness" has a powerful influence on the person's judgement.

As regards the language used to express visual submodalities, sensory-based words and phrases have to be considered first:

Look, picture, focus, imagination, insight, scene, blank, visualize, perspective,
shine, reflect, clarify, examine, eye, focus, foresee, illusion, illustrate, notice,
outlook, reveal, preview, see, show, survey, vision, watch, hazy, dark.

(O'Connor and Seymour 2002, p. 46)

It is obvious that the first two verbs, i.e. *look* and *picture* and the verbs *shine* and *watch* have a denotative meaning expressing voluntary actions. The nouns *scene, eye, illusion, notice* are also used with a 'visual' meaning. However, they can also be used with the 'mental' meaning like the other nouns mentioned: *light, focus, imagination, insight, perspective, survey* and *vision*. Consider the following examples:

- (1) This recent *view* will *shed some light* on such a difficult topic.
- (2) I was happy to realize that we could *see eye to eye* on that matter.
- (3) He could *see* that *with his mind's eye*.

The other verbs and nouns mentioned above belong to the class of mental activity in all the traditional classifications. Even the verb *look* may be used as a verb of mental activity to express visual submodality. Compare, for example:

- (4) *Look* at that painting.
- (5) We will closely *look* at your offer.

In sentence (4), *look* is the pair of the verb of perception “see”, used to express a voluntary action. In sentence (5), *look* is used with the meaning “consider”, “look into”, “examine”, “think about”, and its voluntariness is emphasized by the modality expressed by *will* (of the modal concepts of promise, willingness and determination, that of promise is obvious).

The adjectives *blank*, *hazy*, *dark* to which we should add *blind* and *dim* are used to express both visual and mental perception. For example:

- (1) All those aspects *kept* the customers *in the dark*.
- (2) The shareholders *turned a blind eye* to the takeover of the company.
- (3) They stared at him with a *blank expression*.

Also consider the examples:

- (1) I *see* what you are telling me.
- (2) I asked him to *show* me what he meant.
- (3) That successful promotion *coloured her view of life*.
- (4) The solutions *flashed before my eyes*.
- (5) This *sheds some light* on the matter.

In the sentences above, the verbs *see* and *show* are used as transitive verbs of mental activity to express visual submodalities, having a connotative meaning, whereas *colour* and *shed* are transitive verbs used with a connotative meaning; *flash* is also used with its connotation together with the adjunct (adverbial) “before my eyes”, both of them expressing visual submodalities.

4. LANGUAGE AND THE AUDITORY SUBMODALITIES

The language used to express auditory submodalities includes verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs such as:

Verbs	<i>say, resonate, sound, ring, ask, discuss, proclaim, remark, listen, shout, tell, shrill, speak, clamour.</i>
Nouns	<i>accent, rhythm, tone, sound, shout, remark, silence.</i>
Adjectives	<i>loud, monotonous, deaf, audible, clear, speechless, vocal, dissonant, harmonious, shrill, quiet, dumb.</i>
Adverbs	<i>clearly, monotonously, harmoniously.</i>

(My synthesis of O'Connor and Seymour's Sensory-Based Words 2002, p. 46)

The nouns *shout*, *remark*, *harmony* and *tone* are used with a clearly denotative meaning both when used with the syntactic function of subjects and objects and when they occur as adverbials in prepositional phrases:

- (1) That *remark* sounded out of place to the negotiator.
- (2) The salesperson gave a thoughtless *remark*.
- (3) The people in that enterprise lived *in harmony*.

The adjectives expressing auditory submodality *loud*, *clear*, *audible*, *speechless*, *quiet* belong to an overt class of adjectives, whereas *monotonous*, *dissonant*, *harmonious*, *dumb*, *deaf* belong to a covert class. The former are more closely and clearly linked with the ‘auditory’ dimension, whereas the latter are much looser.

- (1) The stockbrokers were speaking in a *loud* voice.

- (2) The *harmonious* sounds showed that the instruments played the right notes.
- (3) His business proposal has fallen on *deaf* ears.

The fact should be mentioned that a stylistic device such as the hendiadys *loud and clear* is also very frequently used to express emphasis in an NLP auditory submodality.

The verb *speak* is often followed by adverbs, such as *loudly/quietly/quickly/slowly/sharply/softly* and adverbial phrases as in *to speak in a low/shrill/strident/trembling voice*, *to speak with a stammer*, indicating the manner of speaking - the intensity, the pitch of the sound, the tempo. The verb *clamour* expresses the intensity, the high tone, the duration of sounds, also laying emphasis on the speaker's attitude and feelings with regard to his interlocutors and the message transmitted (Teleaga 1999, pp. 62,79). These two verbs, i.e. *speak* and *clamour*, are relevant in business English, especially when a complaint is made or a request is made under protest.

- (1) The project manager spoke *sharply* criticizing the report.
- (2) The seller *spoke with a stammer* in front of his customer.
- (3) The employees *clamoured* publicly for raising their salaries.

The adverbs *clearly*, *harmoniously*, *monotonously* usually occur together with a past participle in collocations such as '*clearly* argued/stated', '*harmoniously* expressed', '*monotonously* presented'.

There are a lot of simple (fixed) and idiomatic phrases used to express auditory submodality. For example, on the same wavelength, a lot of mumbo jumbo, calling the tune, word for word, hold one's tongue, give an audience, turn a deaf ear have a very high frequency in the language used in negotiating and selling.

- (1) India's monetary policy is a macroeconomic *mumbo jumbo*.
- (2) His leading position allows him to *call the tune*.
- (3) The chairman will *give them an audience* in the boardroom.

The language used to express auditory submodalities also includes sayings and proverbs such as: *That is music to my ears*, *That is all Greek to me* in which "be" is used with the meaning "to sound": *that sounds like music to me/my ears* (to like something very much), *that sounds Greek/foreign to me* (not to know/understand anything).

I do not wholly agree to O'Connor and Seymour's classification. My objection is that they include a mixture of nouns, past participles, adverbs + past participles, simple (fixed) set phrases, idiomatic phrases and sayings/proverbs in one large class of auditory phrases (O'Connor and Seymour 2002, p. 47):

Auditory Phrases

on the same wavelength.	music to my ears.
living in harmony.	word for word.
That's all Greek to me.	unheard of.
a lot of mumbo jumbo.	clearly expressed.
turn a deaf ear.	give an audience.
rings a bell.	in a manner of speaking.
calling the tune.	loud and clear.

From the NLP submodalities classification point of view, they are right. However, from the linguistic point of view, all these words should be arranged according to the parts of speech they belong to, their collocations, structures, patterns and phrases, as I have already suggested.

5. LANGUAGE AND THE KINESTHETIC SUBMODALITIES

The language related to the kinesthetic submodalities includes verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs such as:

Verbs	<i>touch, handle, contact, push, touch, grasp, hold.</i>
Nouns	<i>pressure, weight, texture, shape.</i>
Adjectives	<i>solid, warm, cold, rough, sensitive, gentle, heavy, smooth.</i>

(My synthesis of O'Connor and Seymour's Sensory-Based Words 2002, p. 46)

The language which expresses kinesthetic submodalities includes:

- phrasal verbs such as: *hold on (a second)*

e.g. **Hold on** a second, I'll just put you through.

- idiomatic (metaphorical) collocations (adj. + n.): *cool customer, firm foundation, heated argument, smooth operator, warm-hearted man*

e.g. The committee debates brought about **heated arguments** over the company's policy.

e.g. The real estate project of the residential neighbourhood has a **firm foundation**.

- simple phrases such as *get in touch with, go to pieces*, which are used with both the 'kinesthetic' and 'mental' dimensions:

e.g. My assistant will soon **get in touch with you**.

e.g. First of all, you should **get in touch with** your values and see if it is beneficial to do business with them.

e.g. Her plan **went to pieces** when somebody else came with another proposal.

- idiomatic phrases such as *I feel it in my bones, scratch the surface, put one's finger on smth.*

e.g. She knew that she was going to be fired; she could **feel it in her bones**.

e.g. The senior manager only **scratched the surface** of the diagram of the motorway.

Linguistically speaking, I again do not agree to O'Connor and Seymour's including all these classes in just one class of kinesthetic phrases (O'Connor and Seymour 2002, p. 47):

Kinesthetic Phrases

I will get in touch with you.	I can't put my finger on it.
I can grasp the idea.	going to pieces.
hold on a second.	control yourself.
I feel it in my bones.	firm foundation.
a warm-hearted man.	heated argument.
a cool customer.	not following the discussion.
thick skinned.	smooth operator.

scratch the surface.

6. SUBMODALITIES, TENSES AND TIME FRAMES

An interesting perspective for analyzing time language is by paying attention to how people give different **submodalities** to events. As O'Connor puts it, "You can find out a lot about how people think about time together with their critical submodalities by listening to their language" (O'Connor 2001, p. 112). People may change submodalities in relation to distant / recent past or near / distant future:

- e.g. (1) *It happened in the dim and distant past.*
(2) *The small company faces a bleak future.*
(3) *The leader's looking forward to receiving a huge payoff.*
(4) *Put this failure behind you.*
(5) *Time is running out.*
(6) *Time is on our side.*

The verb *happened* refers to the past time frame, the verb *faces* in the present tense makes reference to the present time frame, and the phrasal verb *is looking forward* has a future meaning. The adjectives *dim* and *bleak* and the phrasal verb *looking forward* are critical submodalities for the visual system of representation, while the phrasal verb *running out* and the prepositional phrase *on our side* correspond to the kinesthetic representational channel.

There are two methods of organizing our perception of time. One key feature by means of which we can position or reposition ourselves with respect to the perception of time is *time* viewed as a *time line* consisting of points which stand for past, present and future in a cause-effect relationship. Another method is by perceiving *time as a frame*, where long term, medium term and short term represent neurolinguistic operators for shifting time frames. Their coordinates are the distance, area or relationship of different events along the time line.

The distinction between the two forms is made by Dilts and DeLozier (2000, p. 1423) who consider that "While *time lines* help us to *sequence events into a path*, time frames often more strongly determine how events will impact us. *Time frames relate more to distance than sequence*" (emphasis added).

From a cognitive perspective, specific verbal and sensory predicates are associated with time frames, and "*verb tense* is the obvious *linguistic encoding* of time frames" (Dilts and DeLozier 2000, p. 1423, emphasis added). Firstly, the *past time frame* which shows an action already completed is expressed through verbs in the past tense like *I saw, felt, did, talked*. These verbs are also sensory loaded. Secondly, the *present time frame* reflects an action in its continuity whose verbs in the present tense *I see, feel, do, say* are anchors for the ongoing sensory experience. Thirdly, the time frame related to the *future* is rendered by verbs in the future tense like *I will see, will feel, will do, will say* to show what will happen next.

Building upon the various ways in which people code time, Molden (2001) added to O'Connor's (2001) remarks on submodalities two basic rules with reference to the language of time: 1. *Emotions are fixed to memories, but can be recalled and changed using submodalities*; 2. *Present events are stored with present emotions*. The way time influences people emotionally is a reflection of their use of language to refer to past, present or future experiences. There is a difference, for instance, between the following two sentences:

- e.g. *I am content that you have seen the benefits of the purchase at our last meeting.*
It is reassuring / a promising start that you see the benefits of the purchase so obviously now.

The first example requires only the confirmation “Yes, I saw the benefits at our *last* meeting”. In the second sentence, however, one can identify the use of some language patterns which, together with the verb in the present tense simple “see” and the adverb of time “now”, change our internal representation into a positive one. “Yes, I am seeing the benefits now” would be the customer’s response to the salesperson who uses certain patterns that work in favour of his client and the closing of the transaction.

I share Molden’s opinion that “If you are heavily oriented towards the past, *speaking in the past tense can dampen enthusiasm and draw out too many negative experiences*” (Molden 2001, p. 161, emphasis added).

I also agree with Molden in that his approach to the language of time can highly create positive associations and feelings in particular business contexts. For example, the play of switching submodalities contributes to accessing past and present enjoyable events:

e.g. *Imagine **having reached** your targets with this clearance sale. What after-sales benefits **do you receive?** or It **must have been** so exciting to **have reached** your targets. How **do you reap** the rewards of all your hard work?*

and

*This pilot project **will improve** your supply chain management. Imagine the benefits it **will bring** you when going into full production **next month**.*

On the one hand, the use of the perfect construction such as the perfect after the modal auxiliary *must have been* (modal auxiliary + have + past participle) and *having reached* (having + past participle) accesses a past enjoyable event and “facilitates a positive association” (Molden 2001, p. 161) to a specific business activity. On the other hand, one can frame in positive terms the success of a project into the future using verbs in the future tense (“safe predictions”) like *will improve*, *will bring*, intransitive verbs of motion *going into production* and adverbs of time such as *next month*. In talking about future accomplishments, the interlocutor is likely to *store* a positive record of the trial project’s benefits.

In agreement with Molden, O’Connor points towards people with a timeline that is future-oriented, mentioning that “A compelling future should be in front of a person with big bright pictures” (O’Connor 2001, p. 111). He enlarges upon the connection between timelines and critical submodalities, referring to how memories and *plans are stored as pictures on the time line*: “The nearer the picture, the closer to the present moment. Distance is usually a critical submodality” (O’Connor 2001, p. 111).

From the linguistic point of view, the way we talk about events using *verb tenses* will give us a representation of how we react to the experiences we pass through. O’Connor and Seymour’s linguistic approaches to “talking with time” show how language affects brains: “We respond to language at an unconscious level. Ways of talking about events will *programme* how we represent them in our minds” (O’Connor and Seymour 2002, p. 139, emphasis added). Thus, studying how to draw timelines with tenses, the authors investigated the effects of thinking with *nominalizations* and *modal operators* from two main perspectives, namely the *in time* and the *through time* time lines. From my point of view, their application also holds valid for business purposes since certain verb tenses are typical to each of these two perspectives.

Referring to the past, the *in time* time line would mostly correspond to the *past tense continuous*. One could think of a time when customers were complaining about something and feel as if s/he were in the middle of the action:

e.g. *Customers **were claiming compensation** for the faulty products.*

The speaker identifies with the moment when customers were claiming compensation, brings this moment as close as possible to the present moment and *re-experiences* it. S/he *associates* with it, seeing it as a moving picture. On the contrary, if one sees the same event from a different perspective, that is from the *through time* perspective, one is likely to use the *past tense simple*:

e.g. Customers **made a claim** in writing about the faulty products.

Even if the meaning of this sentence is similar to / identical with that of the previous sentence, it is the form of words which devoid the picture of dynamism / movement. Consequently, the speaker is more *dissociated* offering a still picture of the event.

In the opposed direction, i.e. seeing an event from a future perspective, one can attribute different forms of the *future tense* to describe experiences from both the *in time* and the *through time* time line:

e.g. Customers **will make a claim** in writing about faulty products.

Customers **will be claiming compensation** for the faulty products.

The different verb tenses distinguish the difference between "in time" and "through time". The first sentence is an example of a *through time* perspective with the verb in the *future tense simple* and the speaker *dissociated* from the action. In the second sentence, the speaker's use of the *future continuous* / *will + progressive* (will + be + vb. -ing) **will be claiming** focuses on the action in progress. Hence, the speaker feels more *associated* to the *in time* timeline.

It is no wonder that NLP practitioners consider our experience of time as being one of the most fascinating applications of submodalities. That is because, apart from the examples already mentioned, one can go even further and stretch into the distance making a (time) line:

e.g. Customers **will have made a claim** in writing about faulty products.

In the sentence above, the time stretching into distant future by means of the future perfect **will have made** challenges us to think about a past memory which has not yet occurred.

It is also possible to use the power of the timeline language to great effect when orienting others in time. In business, this aspect usually stands for coaching purposes, especially when communication problems occur at a leadership level. The analyses of O'Connor and Seymour's (2002) and Garratt (1997) summarize the consequences of using timelines linguistically in two domains, therapy and coaching. O'Connor and Seymour demonstrate that all language does something, and knowing how to orient people in time gives you choices about how to influence them. In therapy, the question asked in the *present perfect tense*,

e.g. So you **have felt** depressed? Is that how you **have been feeling**?

dissociates the patient from feeling depressed and sends the experience to the past on a *through time* timeline. On the other hand, if asked,

e.g. So you **feel** depressed? What things **will make** you feel depressed?

the patient is more *associated* with an *in time* timeline. The action is expressed in the *present* and *future tense simple* which is more likely to programme him/her to feel depressed in the future.

The impact that language has when it uses time should not be underestimated. I examined various *types of language* and their implications in a counseling context when the trainer and the client are in rapport. I laid emphasis on the important steps used by trainers in general to help their clients achieve their own goals. Referring to this aspect from a linguistic point of view, Ted Garratt also pointed out that "The trainer can use *matching words, phrases and representation of time sorts* and then, by using *shifting verb tenses*, move to the future, *embedding positive language to achieve a dramatic change for the client*" (Garratt 1997, p. 163, emphasis added). For instance, the trainer who asks the question

e.g. What **was** your problem in keeping a tight grip on the situation in the **past**?

could reformulate it by putting it into the present with the verb in the present tense as follows:

e.g. What **is** your problem in keeping a tight grip on the situation **now**?

The last example moves the situation to now and it actually provokes a change in the client's mind and in his/her way of perceiving things. Now the client is able to respond to the situation, to tackle it and

deal with it more properly. If the trainer had left the situation in the past tense, the client would not have managed to find any solutions for it.

What Garratt adds to O'Connor's (2001), O'Connor and Seymour's (2002) and Molden's (2001) commentaries on the concept of timeline, from the linguistic point of view, is the relevant change brought up by the use of the "-ing" suffix. The first aspect is in the use of the *past continuous instead of the past simple* as in the example,

e.g. *What was the difficulty you **were having** in keeping a tight grip on the situation?*

compared with

e.g. *What was the keeping control difficulty you **had**?*

The second aspect lies in the use of the infinitive form as follows:

e.g. ***I am going to handle** this issue.*

in which the pattern "be + going to + inf." expresses an intention that the speaker already has. From an NLP perspective, it also helps to cope with the root cause of an issue and remove negative emotions because the speaker commits himself/herself to taking attitude to the current issue.

Most people are not aware of their timeline unless they have done NLP training. We experience time as a line running from past to future. Hence, we often talk about 'a long time', 'a short time', 'time stretching into future', we have the 'distant' past and the 'immediate' future. Using timelines helps people to access resources, create a compelling future and organize their lives and activities. Timelines have critical submodalities. We can find out a lot about how people think about time together with their critical submodalities by listening to their language. The question may arise: How do we know what to do first? We give the events different submodalities, usually by arranging them in our mental space. The one that is nearest is the one we do first.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Being at the centre of much NLP thinking, the concept of submodalities has an extraordinary effect on behaviour and mental state, or as Alder (2002, p. 119) puts it "Sensory submodalities constitute an *inner world ripe* for exploration and further discovery [...] In other words: you can *enrich* your map of the world and convert it into purposeful behaviour and *achievement*" (emphasis added).

In line with Alder, Knight also points out that the ability to distinguish between the various aspects of our own and other people's experience is "a way of determining the difference that makes the difference between those who do *achieve* what is important to them and those who don't. [...] The *richness* of your *internal thinking* leaks through into your communication and into the way you influence yourself and others. *Enrich* your thinking – enrich your life" (Knight 2002, pp. 22, 25, emphasis added).

Like many NLP skills, using timelines can be regarded as one of the most exciting and useful of the NLP techniques. This is particularly because, apart from the fact that we sort time into past, present and future, we can also mix timelines with other techniques such as the submodalities. The power of the technique also comes from the impact of language in sorting and using time, the use of matching words, phrases, shifting verb tenses and positive language in an attempt to give ourselves choice and control over our personal experience of time.

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