Language Patterns to Influence NLP Patterns

by

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever we talk to someone, we are working to influence them in some way. Even if you are simply giving directions to your house, you are, in a sense, influencing someone to understand how to get there. Of course, as anyone who has told an angry friend to "Calm Down" can tell you, sometimes the things we say don't actually influence people to do what we want them to. For that reason, we have to **learn effective communication** to influence those around us.

At the same time, most sane people "talk" to themselves, even if they are silent. How many times have you said to yourself, *"This is going to hurt"* or *"Get going. It won't be so bad"*? Even if you aren't interested in effective communication to influence others, you certainly want to be persuasive when you talk to yourself, right?

Of course, when you disagree with someone, it's easy to scream, yell, bluster, bully, and threaten them into agreeing with you. But what's that old saying? "A man convinced against his will is a man who is unconvinced still."

The way you craft and phrase your communication has a **huge impact** on how effective and influential your communication is. Depending on how effective our language is, we can **build agreement, shift the focus of attention, persuade others to our views, convince them to take action, motivate ourselves, and so much more,** just with our choice of words.

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INTRODUCTION

An important master of the art of influence was psychiatrist **Milton Erickson,** who developed his language skills and ability of being 'artfully vague' to such an extent that **he would often hypnotize and fully cure clients in a seemingly normal conversation, with the aid of stories and metaphors.** He recognized that the imagination is far more powerful than the will, and he used his skills to capture and lead the imagination of his patients and students.

You can trust
the unconscious

Milton Erickson
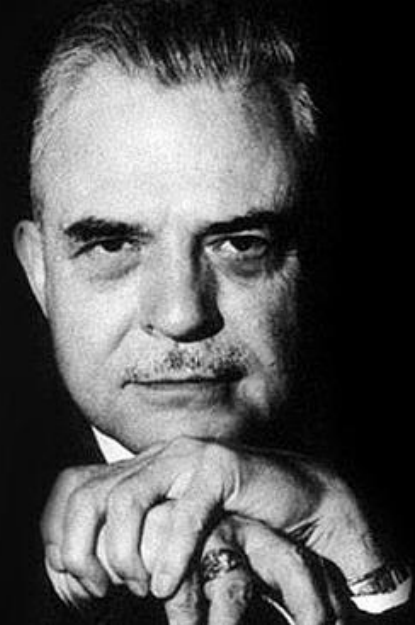
To **truly influence someone and motivate them to action -** even an action that is in their best interests—you must move them to a point where they have that **'ah-ha'** experience, and are able to adopt a new idea as though it were their own. **The following language patterns, based on the work of Milton Erickson, allow you to focus the resources of the mind in a specific way,** whilst being 'artfully vague' enough for your listeners to come up with their own conclusions that fit in perfectly with who they really are and what they really need, while still being in accord with your goals.

Language patterns help you to separate your listeners from certain thoughts, emotions, and actions, while focusing their attention on others. You want to be artfully vague, because you want to avoid disagreements while capturing and leading your listener's imagination.

INTRODUCTION

When you communicate effectively, you build consensus with your listeners. Any politician who wants to succeed in debates or get a message across would be well served by being artfully vague, using these effective language patterns and concepts. In fact, I'd dare say that any politician who is successful has either studied these approaches or hired speech writers who do!

When you listen to politicians, you'll notice their words will often be oxymoronic and specifically vague, because the politician's goal is to build consensus, rather than create divisions. He wants to avoid the use of anything that would bring out an objection.

Salespeople also find effective communication useful. For example, instead of saying to a customer, *"Buy this red car"*, a sales expert might say, ***"And you know, as you come to consider which of the cars you will buy today, you may find yourself thinking about some cars that really catch your eye, and just how they will look sitting proudly in your own garage."***

As you learn the language patterns detailed below, think back to this brief example, and see if you can identify just why it is **so effective.**

Another thing to bear in mind is that **these patterns are also used by all of us, unwittingly.** In fact, you may notice people you know using some of these patterns themselves as they describe their problems. In a sense, they have persuaded themselves to have these problems! In some circumstances, it's worthwhile to stop people and ask them to clarify—to be specific in their own thinking and communication, rather than haplessly vague.

Nominalization

Many successful motivational 'gurus' are masters of using **nominalization**—which can be defined as any noun that cannot be put in a wheelbarrow.. You can take some toasters and put them in a wheelbarrow, but you can't take some "learnings" and put them in a wheelbarrow. Learnings? Is that a word? Yes, it's a nominalization.

You can make a nominalization out of any experience by turning it into a noun. Milton Erickson would often say something like, *"The learnings that you are experiencing..."*. Well, learnings is now a noun. It's an abstract noun, an invention; it can't be put in a wheelbarrow. But using the word learnings forced Erickson's patients to abstract what learnings are, and how they experienced the sight, the sound, the touch of a new concept. The experience of learning was up to the individual client. It drew upon all of their sensory experiences.

> **Nominalizations force your listeners to
> draw on their wealth of experiences and resources,
> and use these to ascribe powerful and personal meaning
> to the words you use.**

Three language patterns related to nominalizations are:

1. Unspecified Nouns
2. Unspecified Referential Indices
3. Unspecified Verbs

Nominalization

Unspecified Nouns

Let's say I want to build consensus with someone. I want them to agree that using my product is a positive experience and would be beneficial to them. To accomplish this, I may say something like, *"People successfully use my product to get over their problems."* Well, what people? Who are these people, and where are they? **This statement is difficult for them to disagree with, because it uses an unspecified noun.**

If I were to say, *"Academics (a specific noun) use my product to successfully solve problems"* then someone might be able to disagree with that. Or, if I were to say, *"Meghan uses my product to improve the quality of her life"* well, someone may be able to disagree or argue because it's tied to a specific person, not them. With an unspecified noun, however, listeners can only agree, thus building consensus. **Unspecified nouns help to avoid the subconscious conflicts that people may create with specific nouns, whilst also causing them to accept suggestions at some level.** People can easily learn and understand how to use and apply these patterns in their communication, can't they?

Unspecified Referential Indices

These are nouns that really don't refer to anything, and are, in a sense, an example of unspecified noun. For example, **"And a person can focus deeply on a certain sensation."** This language pattern is so vague as to both make disagreement virtually impossible, and it leaves your listener room to manufacture for themselves the ideal sensation or experience, while still feeling a sense of being in agreement with you.

Unspecified verbs

For example, *"A person can enjoy this, easily…"*. Here the verb is 'enjoy'; however, the referential index of this verb is unspecified, so once again we are being artfully vague.

A person can see how these three patterns integrate and overlap, and enjoy thinking about how one could use them in an effective and influential way, and identify them when used accidentally by other people, easily now, couldn't one?

Other Patterns

Sidebar: Don't Sound Weird

Again, the purpose of effective language is not to sound weird or strange, but to generate agreement. Use these patterns carefully and gracefully. If used clumsily, they will backfire.

Presuppositions

An important part of effective communication lies in presupposing something is true and using our language to imply the truth of our presupposition. For example, asking, *"Why are you so opposed to my success?"* presupposes that the other person is in fact opposed to your success. There might be a million other explanations for their behavior, but you've eliminated those options with your presupposition.

When you craft sentences which presuppose a certain fact, acceptance of this fact will be more likely. Presuppositions can be very basic, such as *"when you buy this car"* or more covert, such as, *"When you look at yourself in the mirror in a few weeks time and realize that you love owning this new car, just how big will your smile be?"* In both examples, the presupposed fact is that the listener will buy the car in question.

Complementary Adverbs and Adjectives

By using adjectives (words that describe things) and adverbs (words that describe actions) together, we presuppose a connection between them.

Example: *"Easily and enjoyably experience marvelous self-discovery."*

Easily and **enjoyably** are both adverbs, and marvelous is an adjective. They work together to reinforce the presupposition that self-discovery is easy, enjoyable, and marvelous. The sentence as a whole presupposes that the listener will experience self-discovery.

Using complementary adjectives can ensure that presuppositions are accepted without challenge or debate.

Comparable Statements

Comparable statement use the word 'as' to link ideas together. Usually, one idea is accepted as a presupposition, while the other draws the focus of the mind. **Comparable statements are used to build consensus and draw our clients into what we want them to focus on.**

Example: *"You will feel good as you notice your weight dropping dramatically."*

Mind Reading

In "mind-reading," you assume knowledge that could only really be gained through knowing someone's thoughts.

Example: *"I know that you would like to feel more freedom in your life."*

Mind reading is an interesting way of gaining authority in the mind of the listener (if your 'mind reads' are vague or accurate enough to be accepted) and also a subtle way of implying suggestions.

Cause and Effect Patterns

Also known as linguistic bridges or linkages, **cause and effect patterns are very influential.** The mind likes to make connections between ideas; people have been shown to act more powerfully on suggestions when given a reason, no matter how irrational the reason is. The suggestion 'notice as the sound of my voice causes you to relax deeply' has no logical basis; however, you'll find that **it will generate a much more powerful response than simply telling someone to relax.**

Other powerful words you can use when linking ideas are and, as, which means, which causes, allows, enables, and encourages. Because you are reading this, the information you are learning causes you to think deeply about how you can use and apply these patterns in your everyday life, which means that as you enjoy this book you are becoming a much more confident, effective, and influential communicator.

Conjunctions

Do you remember the old TV show School House Rock with the song *"Conjunction Junction, What's Your Function?"* They talked about language—verbs, pronouns, adjectives, conjunctions, and such—and presented a little educational clip between the cartoons. **The words and, and but are examples of conjunctions.** As you sit here and relax, realize conjunctions are used to draw comparisons that your listeners can agree with, and are a very powerful way of presupposing cause-effect relationships. **Like linguistic bridges, conjunctions can be useful for building agreement.**

Time-based Connections

Connections and time are important. Connections and time let you **build consensus** not only in the present, but also in the future.

Example: *"As you hear these words, you may become curious about your abilities."*

The phrase as you hear these words establishes a time relationship. As I hear these words, I become curious about my abilities. As I become curious about my abilities, I can extrapolate that into time.

One important type of time-based connection is called "Future Pacing." Think of the common interview question, *"Where would you like to be in five years?"* If you consistently picture yourself in the future, having reached your goals, you have a much better chance of actually achieving them.

Clichés and Adages

"Too many cooks spoil the broth." Well, according to whom? Who made this judgment? This is a powerful way of being motivational and seeming to speak from a place of authority, such as, *"It is important that you relax deeply now, and allow me to help you, because many hands make light work."*

Many adages involve lost performatives. Also called indirect presuppositions, lost performatives are language patterns containing at least one judgment, whilst leaving the source of the judgment ambiguous.

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Conversational Postulates

Conversational postulates are requests for action phrased in a yes or no sentence. For example, *"Can you answer the phone?"* To reply to this yes or no question with a yes or no answer would be facetious, because we can clearly identify these as imperatives hidden in question form.

A salesperson might say, *"Can you imagine how great it would be to drive this car? Can you think about being worry-free, knowing your car is dependable? Can you think about what you would spend the extra money on when you have a car that uses less gas?"* These are all requests for the customer to take action.

Conversational postulates are useful for building consensus. They are a nice and non-demanding way of issuing instructions. Can you learn these patterns easily and naturally?

The Choice of "Or"

The word or is itself presupposition because it offers a choice of only two things, presupposing that those are the only two options despite a world of possibilities.

Example: *"Would you prefer to continue to breathe in carbon dioxide with each breath, or would you rather breathe in fresh air?"*

This example gives a smoker an obvious choice and builds consensus.

Awareness

By directing your listener's awareness toward something, you are presupposing that that something is actually happening.

Examples:
Have you realized how much easier this is now?
Notice how much fun you are having.
Are you aware just how quickly you are accomplishing your goals?

These statements all require the listener to accept that what is being presupposed is true.
People will naturally accept what you are asking them to realize or notice, because the issue for them becomes not whether what you suggest is true or not, but whether they have realized or noticed it occurring. Have you realized just how easy awareness presuppositions are to use and apply?

Binds

A great pattern to use is the bind, an example of cause and effect, which causes people to be linguistically **bound or trapped in a continual loop.** These often follow a pattern of the more … the more …

Example: *"The more you hear my voice, the more you feel relaxed."*

This can also be extended: *"The more you hear my voice, the more you relax, and the more you relax, the more you realize just how good it feels to go into hypnosis, and the deeper you go, the better you feel; the better you feel, the deeper you go."*

Double Bind, or Illusion of Choice

This is often used poorly by sales people who might say something like, *"Would you like this car in red or green?"* with the presupposition being that you like the car. Or "Would you like to sign the contract in blue ink or black?"

A famous example can be found in the story of the reporter who asks a politician, *"Have you stopped beating your wife yet?"* The question presupposes that the politician has at some point beaten his wife. The structure of the question, a yes/no, gives the politician no good option for answering. If he says no, he will be accurate, in that you can't stop something you never started, but it will sound as though he beats his wife on an ongoing basis. If he says yes, he is admitting to having beaten her at some point. The politician is caught in a **double bind,** albeit a pretty obvious one.

In effective communication, we can be much more subtle and elegant. Milton Erickson would often ask his clients, *"Would you like to go into a trance in this chair or that chair?"* Street hypnotists will often ask, *"Do you want to go into trance slowly or quickly?"* When you think about and practice these patterns, it becomes quite easy to invent them on the fly to fit almost any situation.

Many a mother has learned to ask her children: *"Would you like to put away your toys now or after you take your bath?"* Or to ask thirty minutes before bedtime, *"Would you like to go to bed now or stay up another half hour?"*

You will find yourself naturally using these patterns more and more
in your everyday communication
without even having to think about it!

Embedded Commands

Hypnotists who've studied Milton Erickson **often hide suggestions in the middle of sentences.**

Example: *"People can go into a trance deeply, and as you go into a trance realize just how easy it is to enter trance now."*

The command parts of the sentence can be absorbed by the unconscious mind separately from the rest of the communication, and subconsciously acted upon. **Embedded commands are much more powerful if subtly marked out, either with a shift in tonality, a subtle gesture or mannerism, or something else only just noticeable.** Practice ways to use embedded commands in your speech, and notice just how powerful they can be.

Of course, as with all of these techniques, embedded suggestions, when performed clumsily, can easily backfire.

Ambiguity

Exploiting the ambiguous meaning of words can both induce confusion and subtly embed commands. **There are many types of ambiguity:**

*Phonological Ambiguity: Many salespeople will work in the phrase "by now" as an embedded command for "buy now."

*Ambiguous Punctuation (or lack thereof): The beginning of one sentence and the end of another overlap, often utilizing phonological ambiguity.
**Example:** *"And you will wonder just what will become successful now."*

*Ambiguity Based on Scope: Here the scope is unclear, as it could be either yourself or the listener who is the person mentioned.
Example: "Speaking to you as someone who loves to drive a dependable car …"

Experiment, playing around with the various ways words, sentences and phrases can be interpreted. And speaking to you as someone who loves effective language patterns are easy to learn it is quite natural to see how you can put these ideas into practice. There are too many patterns and ways of speaking effectively to enumerate and list, so for now just focus on the ones we covered above, practice them, explore them, and learn them.
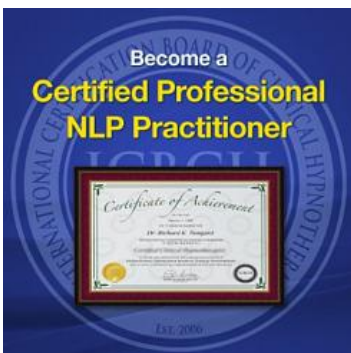
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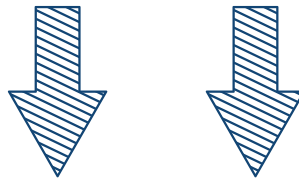
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