УДК: 811.111:792.028

NLP, SUGGESTOLOGY AND STAGE-ACTING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Doctor of Pedagogy, Tarnopolsky O. B.

Alfred Nobel University, Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk

The article discusses the requirement to improve the system of preparing teachers of English as a second/foreign language by way of introducing the techniques of neuro-linguistic programming, suggestology and stage-acting into their training. The kinship of all the three types of those techniques is shown, and the necessity of training future language teachers in such techniques is proved by demonstrating their crucial role in establishing optimal teacher-student rapport which is the key to success in second/foreign language teaching/learning.

Key words: second/foreign language teacher training, NLP, suggestology, stage-acting, teacher-student rapport.

Introduction. Teacher-students communication in the classroom of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) may be considered in the light of a kind of *mutual facilitation contest* involving both parties: the teacher, on one hand, and every individual student, on the other. In this contest the teacher's aim is to *initiate* every individual student into learning, i.e., to lead him/her where he/she should be led – from some initial level of language proficiency and ESL/EFL communicative competence to the target level. The initial level can be none at all or more or less developed, but it is always lower than the target level – otherwise there is no point in teaching. The target level may be set in different ways – for instance, it may be imposed externally through curricula and syllabi that are obligatory both for the teacher and his/her students; it may be adopted on the basis of exact knowledge of most probable students' needs that are determined in some preliminary study of a

definite group of prospective learners; finally, this level may be negotiated between the teacher and the students which is probably the best for optimum teacher-students co-operation in classroom communication.

In all these three cases (but especially in the first two when students do not directly participate in determining what level of target language mastery they are supposed to reach by the end of the course and how they should best reach it), the teacher's initiation of all the learners in a group into learning, presupposing some degree of authority over them, is necessary to allow facilitating the students' progress to the target level of proficiency. Facilitating means psychologically conditioning learners so as to get desirable attitudes, reactions, and responses to teacher's actions and ensuring their positive motivation in doing it, and not only leading the students along the shortest and easiest path to attaining the pre-set learning goals. Such facilitation takes place in any kind of communication that goes beyond indifferent and often meaningless exchanges of clichés of politeness since the speaker always attempts to facilitate for the listener the acceptance of desirable attitudes, feelings, emotions, and, in the end, getting a desirable response. The listener does the same when he/she in his/her turn becomes the speaker. Facilitating interlocutor's understanding and accepting the point of view suggested to him/her for attaining the goal of communication – it is what actually makes the heart of any communication process.

Students, as sensible human beings, do not object to teacher's initiating them into learning and facilitating it for them in classroom communication, despite the fact that this involves some degree of teacher's authority over them. They expect such authority from their teacher since, having come to be taught, they feel (though cannot always distinctly formulate it) that unavoidable. Certainly, there are extreme cases when one or two students in the classroom are in direct opposition to teacher's authority declining to admit it and be guided in any, however lenient, manner. Any teacher must have encountered such cases during his/her career and probably remembers how frustrating the experience was – and how disrupting for

normal functioning of the group as a whole. Fortunately, such students' attitudes are comparatively rare because, when they happen, they require enormous amount of tact, wisdom and patience on the part of the teacher to bring the situation back to normal.

But even in a normal situation when students are quite ready to accept the authority of the teacher over themselves with initiation and facilitation ensuing from it, they do it only on certain conditions. It is not simply a question of authoritarian, despotic manner of teaching versus the democratic one. Any student feels more or less resentful of the authoritarian manner because such a manner always to a greater or lesser degree encroaches on his/her personal integrity, independence, dignity etc. So, when teaching is authoritarian, teacher-students conflicts in classroom communication are inevitable as this communication is a kind of struggle – though both the conflict and the struggle are often hidden from view. But conflicts are quite possible even if the teaching manner is democratic. That is where the notion of contest comes in.

Students quite voluntarily (without any outer or inner conflict) agree to teacher's authority and his/her initiating them into learning for facilitating it only when this authority, as reflected in teacher's initiating and facilitating efforts, harmonises with their personalities. It means that every student wants the teacher to take full account of his/her individuality, positive and negative reactions, fears, phobias, anxieties, likes and dislikes, interests, attitudes, the manner of learning that this particular student consciously or unconsciously prefers due to the type of his/her intelligence [1] and his/her primary representational system [2, p. 31].

The part that a student plays in teacher-student intra-class interaction (communication) is not less bound with initiation and facilitation than that of the teacher. It is connected with (explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously) initiating the teacher into the student's world with the aim of demonstrating to him/her on what conditions the authority to initiate into learning and facilitate it may be granted. The overall purpose is convincing (making) the teacher accept

these conditions, and pursuing that goal, a student devises means of facilitating teachers' understanding them, and student's own personality through them. So, every individual student in a group strives (most often unconsciously) to facilitate teacher's understanding of how he/she expects to be facilitated in learning in a way most suitable for himself/herself. Thus, the teaching/learning process (when the teacher really wants to teach and the student really wants to learn) turns into *mutual facilitation contest* where the teacher does his/her best for facilitating student's learning and the student attempts to facilitate teaching by way of giving overt or hidden signals of how this teaching should be adjusted most suitably to his/her particular personality. If students' expectations in this respect are deceived (they cannot achieve becoming adapted to the teacher and the teacher's manner becoming adapted to themselves), some kind of conflict may ensue though the teacher is not at all authoritarian, never treads on forbidden grounds, never bosses the students about, etc. But some students will feel frustrated all the same as the teacher is not in harmony with their inner selves.

So, it is a question of harmonising teacher's manner of teaching and student's expectations, needs and wishes (either conscious or, most subconscious) as to how he or she should be taught. Such harmonisation means nothing else but the optimum *rapport* between the teacher and every individual student in the group. Experienced and highly-qualified teachers always find their own ways of establishing this rapport. But the time has probably come to cease doing it by a trial-and-error method, to get tools for it that can be taught in ESL/EFL teacher-training programmes. It presupposes developing some algorithms, patterns of teacher's behaviour and reactions in his/her relationships with students facilitating establishing rapport (or even ensuring its establishment) in the majority of cases. Such algorithms and patterns are provided by *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)*, by Losanov's *Suggestology* and by *stage-acting techniques*. Discussing how such tools can be used in ESL/EFL teaching and learning process is the **goal** of this article.

NLP is known to be one of the most efficient instruments for establishing human rapport, in particular, in classroom relationships and communication, including those in the ESL/EFL classroom [2]. The purpose that this rapport should be used for by the teacher is instilling ideas, notions, ways of doing things and the necessity of doing them into the minds of his/her students. So, the teacher gets an opportunity of leading students in the desired direction. But it should be strongly emphasised that when a rapport is established, the ideas, notions, attitudes etc. are gently *instilled* or *insinuated*, i.e., *suggested*, not imposed or enforced. That may be considered as the most valuable aspect of rapport establishment and NLP as its tool; students stop feeling being manipulated and start feeling being facilitated – either because of accepting what is suggested as their own (in the best of cases) or, at least, because of becoming convinced that what is done is the best for them, and they themselves would have chosen this course of actions as the most sensible thing to do in the given circumstances.

Therefore, NLP may be considered as a way to facilitate suggesting things to students, and at this point comparison may be made with suggestology as Losanov understood it. In those works in English where Losanov's suggestology and suggestopedia are described [3; 4; 5] greater attention is usually paid to suggestopedia – the pedagogical aspect. Suggestology, the psychological and physiological basis of suggestopedia, is much less frequently discussed. So, to understand it better, it is worthwhile turning to the source of the whole Losanov's approach.

Losanov's suggestopedia is based on suggestology, the theory of subconscious psychic activity that is characterised by non-specific psychic reactivity. The latter can harmoniously override anti-suggestive barriers and create new suggestive frames (sets). For instance, on hearing a word, its meaning gets into the focus of consciousness where it is logically analysed. But human reactions to a word are not limited to its meaning. We react to all the set of non-specific stimuli accompanying this word – gestures, facial expressions, intonation, situation and

environment. According to Losanov, the number of such stimuli governing our every reaction is immeasurably great, and it is the perception, subconscious processing and subconscious adaptation of our behaviour to those non-specific stimuli having suggestive influence that constitute the non-specific psychic reactivity. Losanov also believed that art influences human emotions and reactions just through this channel of non-specific psychic reactivity arousing our feelings and encouraging us to act in a specific way not always clearly realising the reasons for our actions. So, suggestion always makes its way through non-specific psychic reactivity, and suggestology uses it for instilling new ideas, notions, patterns of behaviour, and finally, for opening up hidden resources of human mind.

But NLP functions in exactly the same manner [2]. It uses non-specific psychic reactivity for establishing a rapport between the teacher and every individual student – in this way removing students' anti-suggestive barriers and opening up their minds to teacher's suggestions (controlling student's reactions and behaviour to make them most beneficial for efficient teaching and learning).There is nothing surprising in the fact that suggestology and NLP are based on the same ideas and use practically one and the same methodology. They both originated from psychiatry, and it is from there that they were introduced into language teaching. That is why they have as their fundamentals identical psychiatric notions concerning human psychic functioning – those notions leading to identical conclusions. Therefore, NLP and suggestology in language teaching may be considered as very similar (and in some respects mutually complementary) tools, their specific aim being lowering students' anti-suggestive barriers (or the affective filter – c.f., [6]) for improving teacher-students classroom relationship, communication, and interaction with the view of perfecting and facilitating language learning/acquisition process. Both attain their goals through teacher's influencing students' non-specific psychic reactivity by employing non-specific factors in his/her classroom communication and behaviour (voice, intonations,

using certain ways of expressing ideas and suggestions, creating propitious psychological environment in the classroom, etc. – see before).

But to make effective use of such non-specific factors, the teacher has to know as much as possible about his/her students and their probable reactions to what he/she says or does.

In fact, close observation of every student with the aim of getting insight into his/her inner self is the royal road to effective NLP/Suggestology practising in the classroom. But to be able to make such observations, a trainer needs a good working knowledge of psychology, while for putting the results of such observations into practice the techniques of both practical psychology and psychiatry are needed. Such NLP techniques as «sleight of mouth» or «meta-model» [2; 8] are psychiatric techniques broadly employed in psychoanalysis. Determining students unconscious patterns such as inclinations towards generalisation or, on the contrary, better grasping of details and examples, defining a particular student's type of intelligence and adapting teaching to it are clearly in the domain of practical psychology. Certainly, only knowledge of psychological and psychiatric observation techniques can provide the teacher with a reliable tool for getting truthful information about his/her students and making correct conclusions.

Therefore, to make NLP/Suggestology classroom practising possible and effective, ESL/EFL teacher-training programmes should provide future teachers not only with opportunities of understanding what NLP and Suggestology are and how they work. Some techniques of practical psychology and psychiatry should be mastered – those that make an integral part of NLP that in itself (together with suggestology) is nothing else but a branch of practical psychology and psychiatry.

Mastering such techniques is only the first, although the most important, prerequisite. The second prerequisite is mastering the stage-acting techniques. It has already been repeatedly said how great a role in NLP/Suggestology plays the teacher's voice and intonation, the way he/she walks, smiles, what his/her gestures

are, etc. All these manifestations of teacher's personality are the primary factors of influencing students' non-specific psychic reactivity, i.e., the principal way to making the process of suggestion effective or ineffective. So, to make this process really effective and meeting the teaching goals, the teacher should be in full possession of his/her external personal manifestations including voice, postures, facial expressions and others. It all can be reduced to one thing. Suggestion to «pass through» needs to be as convincing as possible. It is achieved not only, and even not so much, verbally (through the meaning of what is said), but also by manner of speaking (how it is said) and the manner of behaviour when saying it (facial expressions, postures, gestures, gait etc.). It is just this «how» and not so much «what» that influences the non-specific psychic reactivity.

Here it must be emphasised that the ability to convince by the manner of speaking, standing, walking, smiling etc. is the domain of stage-acting techniques. The task of an actor or actress is to convince the audience of absolute truthfulness of those things, events, feeling, emotions, ideas that are shown, felt, spoken on the stage – to convince in such a way that an audience becomes not just sympathetic but *empathic*. All the good actors know how to do it by influencing the non-specific psychic reactivity of their audience. Sometimes by their gestures, voice modulations, manner of behaviour on the stage they utterly change the sense and meaning of the words they pronounce – thus changing the whole meaning of the play as compared to what was «put into it» by the author.

Certainly, it is hardly possible (and necessary) to make a really good actor out of a teacher of English – though some highly qualified and experienced teachers often have skills allowing them to stage a performance in their classroom that can be compared to the performance of the very best of actors on the professional stage. But to be able to use NLP/Suggestology, and use them efficiently, any teacher should know at least some fundamentals of stage-acting techniques – what voice modulations are best in every particular case, how to use the body language, etc. to be absolutely convincing to students, to evoke their

sympathies and even empathy, thus removing their anti-suggestive barriers (lowering the affective filter). It is quite clear that it is not the theoretical knowledge that is needed in this case but developing some practical skills of stage-acting.

Including fundamentals of stage-acting techniques into ESL/EFL teacher-training programmes as a prerequisite for mastering the ways of using NLP/Suggestology in classroom practice makes necessary the choice of some school of stage-acting as a basis. Probably, the system of Stanislavsky should be taken as such a basis because it emphasises just what is needed for effective NLP/Suggestology – the power of convincing, making the audience sympathise (and empathise), believe without the shadow of a doubt into actors' sincerity, share feeling and emotions they display on the stage.

However, one more thing is needed. It is teacher's self-control, meaning the control of one's own feelings, emotions, attitudes, moods etc. – and first of all the external manifestations of all these things in behaviour. The teacher is an ordinary human being who has his/her personal troubles, bad moments, may feel out-of-sorts, be angry or frustrated, have conscious or unconscious sympathy or antipathy to some of the students, etc. Experienced teachers know how to control these things so that they do not influence much the quality of their teaching, do not damage the teacher-student rapport and intra-class communication. For young beginners in teaching profession it is sometimes an insurmountable obstacle, and it becomes ten times more difficult to overcome it if a young teacher wants to start practising NLP/Suggestology. They require not simply sympathy but empathy with students, readiness to penetrate to the roots of their anxieties, fears, unconscious reactions, etc. How can it be done without an ability to exercise the strictest self-control if just before his/her classes the teacher has got some bad news and cannot stop thinking about it?

Only self-control, an ability to put one's own ego aside for the time being for the sake of empathising with the egos of one's students can help in this situation.

But such ability should be trained together with other techniques relating to NLP/Suggestology. Here we go back again to the domain of psychology and psychiatry where the practice of training self-control techniques (for instance, relaxation techniques) is of quite a long standing. But stage-acting techniques could also be of great help. There are many well-known stories of famous actors who demonstrated absolutely brilliant performance on the stage at the time when great personal troubles or even tragedies had just befallen them.

Certainly, it would be expecting too much of a teacher to practise NLP/Suggestology in the classroom, and do it very well, knowing that something was really and seriously wrong in his/her personal life. But to provide teachers with techniques enabling them to cope with minor troubles so that they would not interfere with their normal performance in the classroom is a task that should be set before any efficient teacher-training programme. And solving this task will greatly contribute to teacher's effectively employing NLP/Suggestology for establishing rapport with his/her students.

Conclusion. Summarising everything said above, it may be said that to practise NLP and Suggestology is not so simple. The teacher should have a good working knowledge of this approach (as well as of other related approaches), master skills in some of psychological and psychiatric techniques, in some stage-acting techniques and techniques of self-control. Is it worthwhile? For sure, a teacher can do without NLP or Suggestology. As M. Rinvolucri (8, p. 19] wrote, "NLP is one of many ways towards understanding people less stupidly." But there are other ways, and then, in practical teaching experience the teacher will inevitably deduce for himself/ herself many of NLP/Suggestology and stage-acting techniques without knowing that they are in fact just those kinds of techniques. But NLP/Suggestology and learning them deliberately together with stage-acting is probably the shortest cut, and the most efficient one at that, as it aids the teacher to be at his/her best in the classroom from the very beginning of professional career. Learning NLP, Suggestology and stage-acting can give at once what will otherwise

come only after years of experience. That is why it is worthwhile including them into teacher-training programmes.

The **prospects** of further studies in this direction are developing the practical ways of effecting such an inclusion and harmonising it with the existing, more traditional, parts of the ESL/EFL teacher-training programmes.

References:

1. Gardner H. Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice / H. Gardner. – New York: Basic Books, 1993. – 304 p.

2. Revell J. In your hands. NLP in ELT / J. Revell, S. Norman. – London: Saffire Press, 1997. – 144 p.

3. Bancroft W.J. (1978). The Losanov method and its American adaptations / W.J. Bancroft. // The Modern Language Journal. – 1978. – 62. – P. 167-175.

4. Blair R.W. Innovative approaches / R.W. Blair. // Teaching English as a second or foreign language. Ed. by M. Celce-Murcia. – Boston (MA): Heinle and Heinle Publishers, 1991. – P. 23-45.

5. Larsen-Freeman D. Techniques and principles in language teaching / D. Larsen-Freeman. – New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. – 142 p.

6. Krashen S.D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition / S.D. Krashen. – Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982. – 202 p.

8. Rinvolucri M. What is NLP? Answer one / M. Rinvolucri. – The Teacher Trainer. – 1997. – 11. – P. 19-20.