Jan Ardui and Peter Wrycza

NLP—Presuppositions Revisited

Peter The launch of *NLP World* marks the coming of age of NLP. *NLP World* aims to serve the NLP world, but its title also reflects the spread of our discipline worldwide. It's a good time to take another look at what our discipline is really about.

Jan It's timely. We have high expectations and aspirations in NLP, but we don't always match our ideals. For instance there's been a spot of trouble recently in one of our key professional associations. Did you see the letter of resignation from the president of the North American Association for NLP?

Peter Yes, but what part do you mean?

Jan Let me quote: "This is a wake up call! It is time to define and refine what underlying values, alignments, and common grounds are essential to the field of NLP and any association that is to represent it."

Peter So once again, the NLP community throws up a challenge for us to check what beliefs and values we hold and how well we are aligned with them.

Jan NLP has always tried to offer a meta-model, a way to explore our models of reality. One of our presuppositions—the map is not the territory—urges us to make a distinction between *reality* and our *maps* of reality, between our descriptions and explanations of experience and experience itself. Our pre-suppositions set the nature and shape of our maps, and as such are arguably their most important element.

Peter But we probably don't consider the presuppositions of our own discipline as much as we should. It's so easy to get caught in one's own maps and, in our case, that means the maps of NLP.

Jan   For me, there's been some wisdom missing until now from our field. But if we can apply NLP to itself, we should have a richer and wiser discipline. I think some of our presuppositions may contribute to both its strengths and its weaknesses.

Peter I think we need to make a distinction between the explicit presuppositions usually taught in some form in practitioner training and those implicit ones, which we may not even be aware of.

Jan   Yes, important questions are: What presuppositions do we use in relation to the NLP presuppositions? What implicit ones do we use in applying the explicit ones? And given some of the implicit presuppositions, do we need to modify the explicit ones?

Peter I think that knowing our purpose in NLP should tell us something about our underlying presuppositions. What is the real aim of NLP?

Jan   "To Never Lower Prices for training," say some!

Peter "Noisy Loving in Paris," say others!

Jan   Seriously though, one common definition of NLP is "the study of the structure of subjective experience."

Peter That's quite a satisfying definition. NLP offers a discovery model promoting questions rather than answers. It invites each of us to look afresh at our own experience and that of our fellow human beings. It presupposes that there is a structure and coherency to subjective experience and emphasizes the discovery of pattern rather than content.

This definition explains the eclecticism of NLP, which readily applies its methodology to discovering the patterns of other people's explorations of experience.

Jan   Yes, it makes NLP a potentially broad church that accepts and uses many apparently contradictory models of reality. The distinction between map and territory allows us to enter into a particular world view to understand and model it, and then to step out to a place where that world view can be understood in relation to others.