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The Case for Describing Reality: exploring aspects of mental imagery

In a previous article (*NLPW* 3:3, pp.35–46), I explained that my desire to study mental images grew from the frustration I had experienced as a business development trainer with a UK big-six accountancy/consultancy firm. I had labelled the behaviour of the professionals as “Sales Reluctance” and it seemed that mental images were, in some way, playing their part in this. The literature on mental imagery that I presented revealed many of the difficulties of attempting to describe, through the medium of language, the plethora of pictures, feelings and sounds that make up our internal experience.

This paper takes this issue further and presents the difficulty I encountered when I attempted to explore images through the established NLP approach of submodalities.

In pilot work, I had asked participants to describe what the word “selling” meant to them. The following is a typical response.

Janet, business services consultant:

I can see a double-glazing salesman. Man, what a smoothie! Huh . . . he’s got a dark suit, briefcase. He’s tall and thin. “Can I come in?” he’s saying. I can hear him saying, “Don’t miss the opportunity.” I don’t like being pushed. Get rid of him.

The major themes elicited from this exercise with thirty participants were presented in the first paper. It was clear that many participants were emotionally influenced by their images (*I’m cross; I don’t enjoy this; get rid of him; I don’t like him*), for they used emotive words to describe the persona of their character image (*dreadful, pushy, smarmy, slick*). I wondered whether the question had evoked echoes of deeply-held beliefs about sales and salespeople rather than logical and sustainable representations of real sales situations.