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Experimental Paradigms in Analysis of NLP

Introduction

The modelling technology and attitude that constitute NLP have enabled people to produce astounding results: in business, in coaching and training, in therapy and in many other areas also. NLP works and works well, but quite how and why it works remain rather open to question. Many people are attracted to NLP on the basis of its utility, and from a purely functional perspective issues relating to validation of the underlying operating presuppositions might seem irrelevant. Indeed this makes good sense, since actually applying the stuff is fun and can make a useful difference to one's life. So why raise the issues of "why" and "how" at all?

Pacing the academic and medical cultures

In a recent article[1], we suggested that one reason for studying NLP relates to the idea of "cultural pacing". The culture at large is influenced by so-called "expert" opinion—a good deal of which arises from academic and medical institutions. For sure, academics enjoy a mixed image. On the one hand, there is an element of truth perhaps in the archetype of the stuffy intellectual, resistant to change and locked into rigid ways of thinking. But universities are also big business, highly competitive and spawn some highly original and profound thinkers. Rightly or wrongly, therefore, the opinions of academic and medical investigators matter, and nowhere more so than in orthodox medical practice, where empirical information concerning novel approaches (gained by a recognized scientific methodology) precedes their large scale use. It is also worth remembering that an integrative open-minded approach to

research could provide much of benefit to the field of NLP itself. Investigating the relationship of NLP to various academic models in neuroscience, cognitive science and other fundamental sciences could offer new insights for these research fields, and could help generate and refine models within NLP. Such arguments reflect a positive frame for examining NLP using academic research paradigms. There is, however, an additional highly pragmatic reason for the NLP community to take an active interest in research into the NLP model. With or without co-operation of "experts" within the NLP field, research has been and will be performed and it is in everyone's interest that such research be of high quality and be well conceived.