

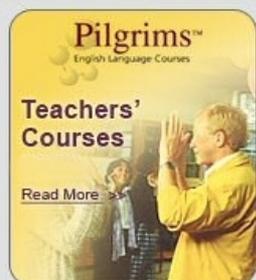
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SHORT ARTICLES

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Language Patterns and Embedded Suggestions for Motivating Learners

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Introduction

You probably remember a teacher who motivated you when you were in elementary school, high school, or university. When you think about that teacher again now, you may also be able to remember some of the powerful words that teacher used, words that motivated you to learn much faster and more easily than in other classes. As teachers, we are aware that students may be motivated or demotivated depending on which words and phrases we choose to use in the classroom. An effective teacher carefully uses words and language patterns that influence students positively in their learning. In this paper, we will provide some examples of language patterns that you can use in your own classroom to motivate students. Perhaps in many years, those words will still be resounding in the minds of your students as they continue to motivate themselves in learning and other important skills.

Background to the Language Patterns

The language patterns in this paper are drawn from the field of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and in particular the *Milton Model*. NLP postulates that the most effective way to learn how to do a skill or to teach it to others is to model excellent performers of that particular skill. In the 1970s, the founders of NLP, Richard Bandler and John Grinder (1975), began to model excellent communicators. One of the people they chose to model closely was the highly renowned hypnotherapist, Milton Erickson, generally regarded as an excellent communicator. Erickson used his knowledge of linguistic skills as a means to motivate people to learn or to change in positive ways by using selective language. As users and teachers of language, there is much that we can learn from this modelling of excellence in communication. The

Milton Model language patterns presented in this paper are drawn directly from his use of language in promoting learning and positive change.

Milton Model of Language Patterns

Below, we introduce the main language patterns of the Milton Model and give examples that are suitable for the language classroom. Of course, the actual motivational language that you use with your students will depend on their level and the type of course you are teaching and you will probably want to experiment until you find the language that will really motivate the students in your own classroom.

1. Presuppositions

The sentence that the teacher says *presupposes* something else. Below are some examples with the main presupposition shown in brackets.

“You can choose to learn the vocabulary for the test before or after you eat dinner tonight.”
[You will learn the vocabulary at some time.]

“Which section of the reading did you find most interesting?” [At least one section of the reading was interesting].

“This will be quite easy because it's junior high school material.” [You learned it already at junior high school, so you know it.]

When we speak, every phrase includes its own presuppositions. Something as simple as, “The ball is on the floor,” presupposes on some level that it must have got there somehow. At a more existential level, it also presupposes that a ball exists and that a floor exists. We cannot not use presuppositions, and in the classroom, every sentence we say also has presuppositions. It is useful to consider whether these presuppositions are motivating or demotivating your learners. For example, think of the different presuppositions in the following:

“Who didn't do their homework?”

“Who wants to share their answers with the class?”

It is good to always try to include useful presuppositions in your classroom language. As the course proceeds, you will notice that your students will begin to accept those presuppositions. In a 1990's movie, *The Truman Show*, there is a line that “*people accept the reality that they are presented with.*” Linguistically this reality is contained in the presuppositions that we use in our language. If you include positive motivational presuppositions consistently through your classes, students will begin to accept these presuppositions as the reality of the classroom, and of learning English. If a teacher says “Who didn't do their homework”, the presupposition is that some students will always forget or neglect to do their homework. If the teacher says “Who wants to share their answers with the class,” the much more useful presuppositions include: a) all the students have completed the work; b) collaborative learning is a good thing; c) students want to be active in class.

2. Mind reads

The teacher pretends to know or to guess what students are thinking. Of course, the mind read may or may not be correct, but simply by doing it, the teacher is putting those words and ideas into the students' minds.

“You may be thinking that practicing your presentation tonight will really help you remember your lines.”

“You may be saying to yourself, I have some great ideas for an interesting composition.”

3. Lost performative

The teacher says a statement which contains a judgment, yet it is not clear who made the judgement.

"It's quite simple to choose a good topic for your next composition."

"It's easy and fun to listen to American TV programs."

Students will generally accept these lost performatives as fact, particularly as you are in the teacher/authority position.

4. Cause and effect

The teacher says a sentence in which one thing causes another, but the cause/effect relationship is not explained (A causes B). Generally, students will simply accept the cause-effect relationship and you can use it to embed positive motivational suggestions.

"Because I have taught English writing successfully to many students before you, you are already beginning to develop better writing habits."

"You were able to pass difficult entrance exams and come into this classroom, so you already realize that you are smart and able to do well in this class."

5. Complex equivalence

In these statements, one thing means another thing, but the relationship is not explained (A means B). Like Cause and Effect statements, students will generally accept the equivalence and you can use it to embed motivating suggestions.

"You've already prepared your presentation at home, and that means that you will be relaxed in front of your classmates."

"You've already met these words in an earlier class, and that means you will memorize them easily for the test."

6. Universal quantifiers

The teacher over-generalizes from specific cases.

"All of my previous students have loved this class, and I know you will too."

"Everyone who learned English successfully took the time to do listening practice on their own."

This can be particularly useful when you show an excellent example of an assignment from a previous year and imply that it was a regular class activity and something that was enjoyable for previous students.

"Every student was able to do this assignment really well last year. Let's watch an example of one of their videos now and see how much fun everyone had."

7. Modal operator

Using modal verbs like 'can' or 'don't have to' or 'could' or 'might' rather than direct commands can be very powerful. Even though the examples below are not direct commands, they all contain embedded suggestions which the students are likely to act upon.

"You could study this vocabulary by using flashcards, or you might record and listen to them many times, or of course you could post them on your bedroom wall where you can look at them often."

"You don't have to wait until just before next class to finish your homework; you can complete it tonight, or you could do it easily... a little bit each day."

The examples above also give many options to choose from. This can be called an illusory choice because as a teacher, you probably don't really mind which of the several options the students take as long as they learn the vocabulary or do the homework.

8. Nominalization

Sometimes, it is good to use general nouns that describe a process in vague terms. The sentences below are quite hard to disagree with because they are so vague and general, yet if the students accept them, then they will be more motivated.

“Knowing that the English education that you receive here really increases your opportunities when you graduate, whether it is to get a great job or to live a richer life, or simply to be a great communicator, makes it that much nicer to study.”

“The skills which you develop in this class will eventually bring you great satisfaction and reward.”

9. Unspecified verb

Use a verb with multiple possible meanings. This is similar to using nominalizations because the word is vague enough for anyone to accept and to carry out the details of the suggestion in their own specific way.

“Sometimes if you change your study habits, you create better learning opportunities.”

“When you develop new skills, you begin opening doors to greater opportunities in your life, and English can really help you to make the best of those opportunities.”

10. Unspecified Referential Index

A pronoun/noun is used but the context is unclear/unknown.

“The university will help you to learn English in many ways.”

“It will be fun to learn.” “People can learn faster when you begin to enjoy English more.”

11. Deleted Comparative

A is compared to B, but either A or B is unspecified.

“And you are hearing and understanding the English words much more clearly... now.”

“You will enjoy this class more...”

12. Simple deletion

Something is deleted from the teacher's utterance allowing the students fill in the details in a way which is appropriate for them.

“You ... are improving lesson by lesson... quickly.”

It is not clear what the students are improving in or how they are improving or even who specifically the utterance is directed at, yet if used in the right context with sufficient rapport, students will automatically fill in the missing details in their own minds in the most appropriate way.

Using the Milton Model Patterns

Before using these language patterns, it is important that you are in rapport with your students. Of course, having rapport is always good for motivation anyway and it is also worth developing your skills for creating rapport in the classroom. Once you have established rapport, you can use the Milton Model patterns to give embedded suggestions to your students to increase their motivation and learning abilities. When delivering these suggestions, you might like to use some kind of analogue marking to make them stand out in the students' unconscious mind. For example, you can change the speed, pitch, or timbre of your voice, or you could use a subtle physical gesture such as tapping a finger. Here is one example of a way that you could use analogue marking:

When you **[short pause and then lower pitch and gesture]** come to this class every week, there will be many chances for you to hear and use English, and you will **[short pause and then lower pitch and gesture]** begin to learn English much more easily.

Another form of effective analogue marking for teachers is spatial anchoring. If you consistently stand in a particular area of the room when you make your embedded

suggestions, then over time the students will unconsciously recognize that area and accept those suggestions much more easily.

Learning more and going deeper

The key to using these language patterns effectively to motivate your students is to really try them out, a little in every class that you teach. As you experiment with different language patterns and different types of analogue marking, you will find that you develop your own style which is most appropriate for motivating your students. Practice the language patterns and analogue marking until they become natural and unconscious for you. In the beginning, it may help to write out examples of language patterns including the embedded motivational suggestions that you want to give to your students, and then later as you practice them more and more, you may find that you begin to notice them emerging naturally in every class in the most appropriate situations.

A fun and highly effective way to master these language patterns at a deeper level is to use the *Ericksonian Hypnosis Cards* from a British company called Salad, LTD. NLP also offers many other powerful language patterns and techniques that you can use to help your students, and if you're looking for more information on how NLP can help teachers and students, there are many good books available including the very readable O'Connor (2001, 2011).

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