

## Meta-Model Explained - NLP

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## META MODEL

The meta-model in neuro-linguistic programming (or meta-model of therapy) is a heuristic set of questions intended to elaborate and clarify information as well as challenge and expand the limits to a person's model of the world.

The meta model forms the basis of Neuro-linguistic programming as developed by then assistant professors of linguistics, John Grinder and Richard Bandler. Grinder and Bandler "explained how people create faulty mental maps of reality, failing to test their linguistic /cognitive models against the experience of their senses." The meta model draws on transformational grammar and general semantics, the idea that language is a translation of mental states into words, and that in this translation, there are unconscious processes of deletion (not everything thought is said), distortion (assumptions and structural inaccuracies) and generalization (a shift towards absolute statements). Likewise in hearing, not everything said is acknowledged as heard.

The following examples were derived from therapeutic contexts and are helpful in teaching how to use the meta-model. The developers state that these patterns can be both identified and universally applied to all human communication.

**Presupposition**

Presupposition, refers to an assumption whereby the truth is taken for granted. Crucially, negation of an expression does not change its presuppositions: I want to do it again and I don't want to do it again both mean that the subject has done it already one or more times; My wife is pregnant and My wife is not pregnant both mean that the subject has a wife. In this respect, presupposition is distinguished from entailment and implication. For example, The president was assassinated entails that The president is dead, but if the expression is negated, the entailment is not necessarily true. Eg. "My wife is pregnant." Presupposition: You have a wife.

**Cause-Effect**

Cause-effect, this shows how to identify the inappropriate use of causal thinking (x means y, x makes me y, or x makes y happen), which is considered semantically ill-formed and unacceptable (irrational). Causality always implies at least some relationship of dependency between the cause and the effect. For example, deeming something a cause may imply that, all other equal, if the cause occurs the effect does as well, or at least that the probability increases. Eg. "That news makes me angry." Challenge: "If it weren't for that be angry?"

**Nominalization**

Nominalization occurs when a verb is transformed into a noun. A dynamic process (i.e. a verb) is transformed into something static (i.e. a noun). It's like taking a snapshot of a moving object, you don't see the movement any more, just the (static) object. In English, some verbs and adjectives can be used directly as nouns, for example, change and good. Others require a suffix: applicability (from applicable) carelessness (from careless) difficulty (from difficult) failure (from fail) intensity (from intense) investigation (from investigate) movement (from move) reaction (from react) refusal (from refuse) swimming (from swim) nominalization (from nominalize) Eg. "The communication [from 'communicate'] in this company is poor." Challenge: "How could we communicate more effectively?" "They need my decision [from 'decide'] by Monday." Challenge: "Have you decided yet?"

**Complex Equivalence**

Complex equivalence draws an unrelated conclusion from an event to create a logic that "does not follow" See also: non sequitur Eg. "And now my secretary quit. I'll be bankrupt by the end of the year!" Challenge: "Are you telling me your fortune depended



things being  
of the effect occurring  
news, you would not

on your secretary's employment?"

## Generalization

### Universals

All known human languages make use of quantifiers, even languages without a fully fledged number system. For example, in English: Every glass in my recent order was chipped. Some of the people standing across the river have white armbands. Most of the people I talked to didn't have a clue who the candidates were. Everyone in the waiting room had at least one complaint against Dr. Ballyhoo. There was somebody in his class that was able to correctly answer every one of the questions I submitted. Eg. "My co-workers are all lazy." Challenge: "All of them?" or "Which co-workers, specifically?"

### Modal operators

Modal operators are intuitively characterised by expressing a modal attitude, such as necessity (have to, must, should) or possibility (can, might, may) towards the proposition which it is applied to. (see also: wishful thinking)

Example: "I can't put myself together." Challenge: "What would happen if you did/didn't?" "I must put myself together." Challenge: "What would happen if you didn't?"

### Simple Deletions

In a simple deletion an important element in a statement is missing. For example: Go and do it. That is important. I feel bad. Key words to look out for are it and that. The appropriate response would be to ask what, where or when exactly? "Go and do what exactly?" This example is used for teaching how to identify this common linguistic distortion. In responding, the NLP practitioner will know how to break the limiting pattern of the client.

### Unspecified Verbs

In an unspecified verb it is not clear how the action creates or created the result. For example: I created a great impression on them. The appropriate response is to ask how exactly does taking "x" action lead to "y" result. "How exactly did you create a great impression (and note the unspecified referential index "them") on who exactly?"

### Comparisons

Unspecified Comparatives or null comparative is a comparative in which the starting point for comparison is not stated. These comparisons are frequently found in advertising. For example, in typical assertions such as "our burgers have more flavor", "our picture tube is sharper" or "50% more", there is no mention of what it is they are comparing to. In some cases it is easy to infer what the missing element in a null comparative is. In other cases the speaker or writer may have been deliberately vague in this regard, for example "Glasgow's miles better". The null comparative Eg. "That was the best plan." Challenge: "What were some of the other plans?" "Our picture tube is sharper" Challenge: "Sharper, compared to what?"

### Unspecified referential index

Unspecified referential index, refers to the use of personal pronoun when the context is unknown, or can not easily be understood based on the preceding sentences. For example uncontextualised use of they, them, you, ... Eg. "They say I should go into business, but I don't know if I have the confidence." Challenge: "Who is it that says you should go into business?" "Yeah, I have tried alcohol before. It makes you say stupid things." Challenge: "Wait, it makes me say stupid things?" "I hate watching the Vikings in the playoffs. We always lose and it makes me depressed." Challenge: "By 'we', do you mean that you are part of the Vikings?"

### Lost Performative

Lost Performative makes reference to a performative speech act, but the person who is the source of it, and sometimes the speech act itself, is unspecified. This often takes the form of a value judgment without acknowledgment of the fact that a person is the source of that value judgment. Eg. "Her book was highly acclaimed." Challenge: "Highly acclaimed by whom?" or "How do you know that?" "Disobeying the government is wrong." Challenge: "According to whom?"

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