

# Neuro Linguistic Programming - Eye Pattern Origins

## History

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming, eye movements are claimed to represent specific internal representations that correlate to Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, and Internal Dialogue processes. It is one of the controversial topics that was used at certain points to discredit parts of NLP, and at the same time paved the way for the creation of Eye movement processes such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), as claimed by NLP Co-Creator John G. Grinder. Other processes that came as a bi-product of that discovery were EMI (Eye Movement Integration) developed by Steve and Connirae Andreas, and IEMT (Integral Eye Movement Therapy) developed by Andrew T. Austin.

One of the first people to suggest that eye movements were related to internal representations was the American Psychologist, who is touted by many to be the father of modern psychology, William James in his book *Principles of Psychology* (1890, pp. 193-195). After observing the micro-eye-movements that were happening as the person was thinking a certain thought, James wrote:

*"In attending to either an idea or a sensation belonging to a particular sense-sphere, the movement is the adjustment of the sense-organ, felt as it occurs. I cannot think in visual terms, or example, without feeling a fluctuating play of pressures, convergences, divergences, and accommodations in my eyeballs...When I try to remember or reflect, the movements in question. . .feel like a sort of withdrawal from the outer world. As far as I can detect, these feelings are due to an actual rolling outwards and upwards of the eyeballs."*

In the selected paragraph, what James is referring to is what is correlated as the visual eye-accessing cue [eyes moving up and to the left or right for visualization]. This discovery was then disregarded until the 1970s when psychologists such as Kinsbourne (1972), Kocel et al (1972), and Galin & Ornstein (1974) when they connected specific eye movements to be connected to specific processes related to different brain hemispheres. They saw that right-handed people tended to move their heads and eyes to the right during "left-hemispheric" (logic and language-oriented) tasks and to move their heads and eyes to the left during "right-hemispheric" (imagistic and space-oriented) tasks. Moreover, people tended to look in the other direction of the part of the brain they were using to complete a mental task.

As Bandler and Grinder started developing NLP in the early to mid-1970s, they asked their students one day to start exploring the relationship between the senses, in addition to the different mental processes associated with the different hemispheric regions. In one seminar Bandler mentioned that he was surprised that the therapeutic field had not picked up on these movements, that was blatantly obvious, where even the people who were involved in the animation and cartoon field had picked up on that, especially the creators of the "Betty Boop" cartoons where she used to be drawn to look in specific directions when she was thinking in a certain way.





After that, Robert Dilts did a study, at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute in San Francisco, trying to connect the eye movements to specific mental and neurophysiological processes. He used electrodes to track the eye movements and brain wave characteristics of the people he was working with. He asked specific questions that contained visual, auditory, and kinesthetic aspects that were either memory or imagination related, that are related to different hemispheric functions. The questions were grouped into 8 categories, and each category triggered a different mental function related to the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (feeling) senses. The questions were directed to either memory (non-dominant hemisphere processing) or creation (dominant hemisphere processing). His recordings tended to confirm other tests which claimed that the direction of eye movements accompanied brain activity during different cognitive activities. This pattern also seemed to stay the same for tasks related to different senses.

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Last update: **2021/10/10 19:42**

