

Neuro Linguistic Programming - Eye Pattern Origins

History

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming¹⁾, 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 representations²⁾ 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.

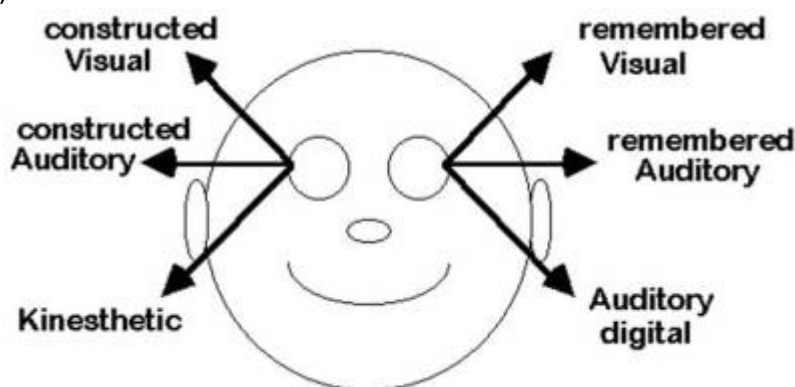


After that, Robert Dilts did a study, at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute in San Francisco, trying to connect the eye movements to specific mental and neurophysiological processes. He used electrodes to track the eye movements and brain wave characteristics of the people he was working

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.

From the Dilts' experiments, and the observation of different people from different countries and backgrounds, the NLP Eye Accessing Cues were extrapolated and identified as follows (Dilts, 1976, 1977; Grinder, DeLozier and Bandler, 1977; Bandler and Grinder, 1979; Dilts, Grinder, Bandler and DeLozier, 1980):

Eyes Up and Left: Visual Remembered (Vr).



Eyes Up and Right: Visual Constructed (Vc).

Eyes Lateral Left: Auditory Remembered (Ar) and tonal discrimination.

Eyes Lateral Right: Auditory Constructed - i.e., constructed sounds and words (Ac).

Eyes Down and Left: Internal dialogue, or Auditory Digital (Ad).

Eyes Down and Right: Feelings, both tactile and sensory (K).

Eyes Straight Ahead, but Defocused or Dilated: Quick access of almost any sensory information; but usually visual.

This patterning was seen in the NLP studies to be consistent with right-handed people, which they called "Normally organized", and that appeared to be prevalent with the majority of the people tested. There was an exception in the Basques regions that had a more frequent occurrence of what was called "Reverse organized", and were exceptions to the rule. More studies were done by Loisel, 1985 and Buckner, Reese, and Reese, 1987, which supported the NLP claims. The reverse organizations were seen in many left-handed individuals, and their eye accessing cues were seen as the reverse image of those of an average right-handed individual. A smaller percentage of people, that was ambidextrous and a few right-handers were seen as reversed in some of their eye accessing cues (auditory eye movements, for example) but not the others.

Here is a way for you to test the NLP patterns on yourself. Find someone, and get them to ask you questions like the following to notice the different movements:

Visual Remembered: Think of the color of the first car you ever drove. What is the color of the font

on your toothpaste?

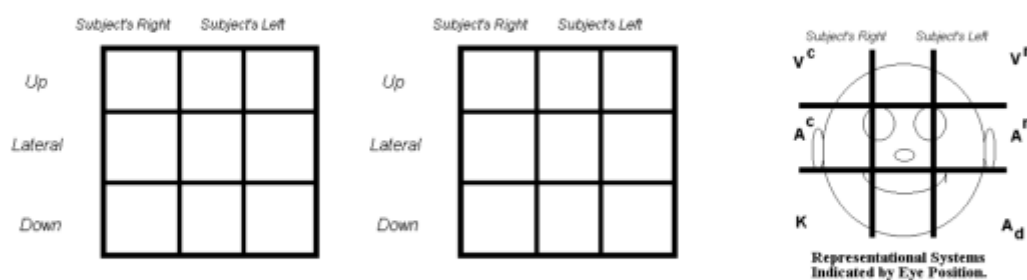
Visual Construction: What would a green rabbit look like? What would be the color of your dream car?

Auditory Remembered: What is your favorite song? What was the first thing you heard today?

Auditory Constructed: How would your favorite song sound like if it was sung by Donald Trump? What would the national anthem sound like if it was sung by Bob Marley?

Auditory Digital (Internal Self Talk): Can you count backward from 3754 back to 3745, inside your head? What is the thing you say to yourself the most?

Kinesthetic: What would it feel like if you were walking on hot sand right now? How does it feel like to walk in the rain?



- ¹⁾ Neuro-linguistic programming [Wikipedia](#)
- ²⁾ Representational systems (NLP) [Wikipedia](#)

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