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Exploring the Social Panorama

The call for models that can be applied to group processes gets stronger as more trainers, organization advisors and management consultants become acquainted with NLP.

In this article I will describe the research that lead to the core of my answer to the question, "How can one apply NLP to group processes?" With the aid of what I call the Social Panorama model, NLP-ers gain access to ingroup/outgroup mechanisms, hierarchy, leadership and team formation.

Metaphors or predicates?
A wide variety of people in our society describe their relations with others in terms of "high", "low", "in front", "behind", "beside", "close" and "distant" (as in, "He feels very distant"). In so doing they express themselves in predicates of the submodality of *location*, which is the combination of direction and distance.

Are these expressions *really* predicates—in the way this term is used in NLP—or are they metaphors? In other words, is this communication about social relations "in a manner of speaking", or does it reflect the submodalities people truly experience when they think of these relations?

The hypothesis that this *is* communication in predicates forms the basis of the *social panorama*. If this view is correct, it implies that most people represent their social environment in the form of a panoramic landscape of social images around the self.

The alternative hypothesis suggests that these expressions are merely metaphorical. This view is largely promoted by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In their popular book, *Metaphors We Live By*, they present a catalogue of what I call call "Social Pano-

ramic Language". In their view these expressions are metaphors.

Maybe you say: "Who cares what they are; what is the difference anyway?" Well I care, and I will explain why.

If social panoramic language is metaphorical, it will be acquired by cultural transfer. Language acquisition is the precondition for communication in metaphors. On the other hand, if these expressions are predicates, this would indicate that the representations people tend to make of social relations do indeed have a panoramic character and are the result of spontaneous learning in childhood.

Thus, if these expressions are metaphorical, an utterance such as "he is close to me" will not (necessarily) reflect inner representations as directly as it would if it were a predicate. However, if we are dealing with a predicate, it will probably denote the core of the social experience, and not be just a way of saying something. "He is close to me" will indicate the distance at which the representation of the other is perceived (seen, heard and felt). So if it is true that social panoramic language consists of predicates, this will provide a direct opening for modelling social experience, and for changing it. Then the concept of the social panorama becomes a valid basis for the application of NLP to social life.