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# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: Using Presuppositions (Part 2)

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For readers who are new, the “Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox” series is an ongoing series focused on using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in our practice of amicable dispute resolution.

The first section focused on rapport (the first of which can be found [here](#)). The second section focuses on matters of self-care and personal improvement for mediators (the first of which can be found [here](#)).

This third section focuses on the use of language in amicable dispute resolution. For ease of reference and the convenience of readers, I will list in this and subsequent entries the series of entries in this section.

1. [A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: The NLP Communication Model](#)
2. [A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: The Hierarchy of Ideas](#)
3. [A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: Meta-Model \(Part 1\)](#)
4. [A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: Meta-Model \(Part 2\)](#)
5. [A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Language: Using Presuppositions \(Part 1\)](#)

It is recommended that you read the first entry (NLP Communication Model) before reading this entry. And the same caution I provided in the previous entry applies.

The previous entry explored how linguistic presuppositions can be used to “incept” ideas in communication. Put simply, every statement/question contains assumptions that we must accept, as a matter of simply understanding and responding to that statement/question. Specifically, we explored the presuppositions of existence and awareness.

In this entry, I would like to discuss the presuppositions of “Binds” and “Time” as they are often used together.

Put simply, the presupposition of “Binds” is any sentence giving the illusion of choice.

Consider:

“Would you like this shirt in blue or red?”

Or

“Sooner or later, you will realize that dealing with this is unavoidable.”

Congratulations to those who, having read the previous entry, immediately recognized the presupposition of Existence (“shirt”) and the presupposition of Awareness (“realize”). Astute readers will have noticed that common to both sentences is a choice, indicated by the word “or”.

This use of “or” is more obvious in the first sentence, where one has to pick between “blue” or “red”. Whatever the choice, the presupposition is that a shirt in either of those colours will be picked. It is also useful to point out that this first sentence is in the form of a question.

While the second sentence is in the form of a statement, the use of “or” is less direct and applies to when the presupposed event will happen. This sentence presupposes that dealing with this (whatever “this” is) is unavoidable. It is simply a matter of time, and that “sooner or later”, it will occur.

This is where we turn to the presupposition of “Time”. Put simply, presuppositions of time are semantically indicated by words delineating time. The ones that work hand in hand with binds are “sooner”, “later”, “now”, “before” and “after”.

Consider the following sentences:

1. “Share with me your side of the story.”
2. “Let’s identify solutions to that problem.”
3. “Let’s explore solutions to your problem.”

These are sentences which you might use in a mediation. They are fairly direct and can sometimes meet resistance. In sentences 2 and 3, parties may disagree that there are solutions to the problem, or might be unwilling to do so.

The presuppositions of “Binds” and “Time” allow for communication to be layered more subtly. Consider the following sentences alternatives:

1. “Would you like to share with me your side of the story **now** or **after** the claimant has had a chance to speak?”
2. “**Sooner** or **later**, we will begin to identify solutions to that problem.”
3. “Would you like to explore solutions to your problem **before** or **after** the break?”

I have chosen not to indicate the “or” as these are obvious. The words in bold are the presuppositions of time.

These alternatives say the same things as the first set, but has a softer effect. Instead of suggesting the event directly, the sentences presuppose that the event will happen, and it really is only a matter of time. Using this structure redirects the resistance in the listener’s mind from the event that you wish to have happen, to when it will happen.

So far, we have only considered the “or” structure for binds. It is possible to construct a bind without using an “or”. Consider the following sentences:

1. “**While** you consider ways to resolve this conflict, we can continue to flesh out these agenda items.”

2. “Are you **still** considering ways to resolve this conflict?”
3. “Have you decided on the ways to resolve this conflict **yet**?”

Again, the presuppositions of “Time” are in bold. These sentences all presuppose the happening of an event i.e. identifying ways to resolve the conflict, without the use of an “or”.

As readers consider the different ways you can apply what they have learnt, it is useful at this point to address two matters that readers might already be thinking.

First, it is important for the use of binds to be subtle. Binds are not unique to NLP and one often encounters binds when a salesperson is trying to pressure you into purchasing something. For example, “would you like to sign the contract with your pen or mine?”. In NLP, we frown upon this type of use. Instead, the use of binds needs to be subtle and layered.

Second, and this is even more important than subtlety, binds need to be used with integrity and respect for the parties. As mediators, we should not seek to strong arm parties into an agreement. Instead, we should use our language and behaviours to enable and empower parties to find sustainable outcomes to their conflict. Using binds allow us to subtly influence parties towards those outcomes.

Finally, I should say that there is a fair bit more to the presupposition of “Time”. This entry has only focused on those presuppositions of time that help us in the construction of binds. In a future entry, we will look at other aspects of presuppositions of time that can assist us in mediation.

I hope you have found this useful. Thanks for reading!

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