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MENTAL PROGRAMMING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: ENCODING SOCIETY THROUGH LINGUISTIC PATTERNS

This article examines mental programming as a deliberate mechanism through which prescribed perceptions, values, and behavioral patterns are encoded into society, with a particular focus on its operation in English language teaching (ELT). The study starts with the historically grounded understanding that language has never functioned as a neutral medium of communication but has consistently served as an instrument for shaping collective consciousness.

The study addresses the largely unexamined prescriptive dimension of contemporary ELT materials. While the field of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, developed by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, has been extensively applied to improve motivation, rapport, and communicative competence in language classrooms, comparatively little critical attention has been directed toward the hidden agenda embedded in the materials through which language instruction is delivered. The article argues that structured linguistic input in the ELT classroom functions not merely as a vehicle for fostering communicative competence but as a channel for conveying officially sanctioned readings of pressing social matters, imperceptibly structuring the conceptual frameworks through which learners construct and interpret their experience of the world.

The purpose of the study is to trace the mechanisms by which mental programming operates in English language teaching by analyzing the framing strategies employed in widely used coursebooks and thematic handouts. Through close reading of discussion prompts, reading texts, and vocabulary themes drawn from materials targeting advanced learners, the article identifies recurring patterns of linguistic anchoring, selective framing, and ideological foreclosure. Specific examples drawn from ESL handouts addressing vegetarianism, fossil fuel dependency, marijuana legalization, and moral relativism demonstrate how open-ended discussion questions are constructed to lead learners toward predetermined conclusions, presenting ideologically charged positions as the natural outcome of critical thinking.

The analysis reveals a consistent and recurrent structure of normative inscription across the examined materials. Pre-loaded discussion questions, strategically sequenced reading texts, and emotionally weighted personal narratives collectively function to normalize specific worldviews while marginalizing or entirely omitting alternative perspectives. The study arrives at the conclusion that the ELT classroom constitutes a consequential site of cultural and conceptual transmission, and that given English's sustained position as the prevailing global medium of instruction, the normative content embedded in its pedagogical materials demands the same degree of rigorous analytical scrutiny accorded to any mechanism of large-scale societal influence. Prospective avenues for investigation encompass cross-platform mapping of value-laden patterns across ESL resources, comparative examination of thematic framing strategies as deployed across distinct national educational markets, and the elaboration of substantive methodological instruments to guide the design of conceptually balanced pedagogical resources.

Key words: *mental programming, linguistic framing, ideological encoding, ELT materials, cognitive architecture, predetermined conclusions.*

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МЕНТАЛЬНЕ ПРОГРАМУВАННЯ В НАВЧАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: КОДУВАННЯ СУСПІЛЬСТВА ЧЕРЕЗ МОВНІ ПАТЕРНИ

Стаття розглядає ментальне програмування як цілеспрямований механізм, за допомогою якого приписані сприйняття, цінності та поведінкові патерни кодуються в суспільній свідомості, з особливою увагою до того, як цей механізм функціонує у викладанні англійської мови. Дослідження ґрунтується на історично підтверженому розумінні того, що мова ніколи не виконувала роль нейтрального засобу комунікації, а постійно слугувала інструментом формування колективного мислення.

Дослідження звертається до значною мірою невивченого приписового виміру сучасних навчальних матеріалів з англійської мови. Попри те, що галузь нейролінгвістичного програмування, розроблена Річардом Бендлером та Джоном Гріндером, широко застосовується для підвищення мотивації, налагодження взаємодії та розвитку комунікативної компетентності у мовних аудиторіях, порівняно мало критичної уваги приділяється прихованій ціннісній спрямованості матеріалів, характеру їхньої наповненості, засобами яких здійснюється навчання мови. У статті стверджується, що структуровані мовні дані у навчальному середовищі з англійської мови функціонують не лише як засіб формування комунікативної компетентності, а й як канал передачі офіційно схвалених інтерпретацій актуальних суспільних питань, непомітно структуруючи концептуальні рамки, в межах яких учні конструюють і осмислюють свій досвід взаємодії зі світом.

Метою дослідження є простеження механізмів, за допомогою яких ментальне програмування реалізується у викладанні англійської мови, шляхом аналізу стратегій фреймінгу, що застосовуються у широко використуваних підручниках і тематичних роздаткових матеріалах. Через детальне прочитання дискусійних запитань, текстів для читання та лексичних тем із матеріалів для учнів просунутого рівня у статті виявляються повторювані патерни мовного анкерування, вибіркового фреймінгу та світоглядного обмеження. Конкретні приклади з навчальних матеріалів з англійської мови, присвячених вегетаріанству, залежності від викопного палива, легалізації марихуани та моральному релятивізму, демонструють, як відкриті дискусійні запитання конструюються таким чином, щоб спрямовувати учнів до наперед визначених висновків, подаючи догматично заряджені позиції як природний результат критичного мислення.

Аналіз виявляє послідовну та повторювану структуру нормативного закріплення в досліджуваних матеріалах. Наперед сформульовані дискусійні запитання, стратегічно впорядковані тексти для читання та емоційно насичені особисті оповіді в сукупності функціонують як засіб нормалізації певних світоглядів, одночасно маргіналізуючи або повністю замовчуючи альтернативні точки зору. Дослідження доходить висновку, що навчальна аудиторія з англійської мови є важливим осередком культурної та концептуальної трансмісії, і що з огляду на стале становище англійської мови як провідного глобального засобу навчання нормативний зміст, закладений у її педагогічних ресурсах, потребує такого ж рівня ретельного аналітичного вивчення, що й будь-який механізм масштабного суспільного впливу. Перспективні напрями дослідження охоплюють міжплатформне картування ціннісно навантажених патернів у ресурсах з англійської мови як іноземної, порівняльний аналіз стратегій тематичного фреймінгу на різних національних освітніх ринках, а також розробку ґрунтовних методологічних інструментів для проєктування концептуально збалансованих педагогічних ресурсів.

Ключові слова: ментальне програмування, мовний фреймінг, концептуальне кодування, матеріали для навчання англійської мови, когнітивна архітектура, наперед визначені висновки.

Problem statement. Before the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics, human civilization intuitively regarded language as a codified system of impact, reflected in a range of sacred texts and ritual traditions. The Bible, transmitted in Hebrew, Greek, and later Latin, was understood as a carefully

preserved linguistic code in which specific words carried transformative authority. The opening of the Gospel of John, “*In the beginning was the Word,*” suggests that language itself is the very origin of reality. The translation of the Bible into English was strongly resisted by the Church, which viewed it as a

breach of its sacred linguistic code. The *Wycliffe Bible* (1382–1395), translated from the Latin Vulgate, and William Tyndale's New Testament (1526), transmitted from the original Greek texts, were the first official attempts to render the sacred text into the vernacular and were deemed to undermine the structures of authority.

Old Church Slavonic, preserved in the Eastern Orthodox tradition as a sacred language distinct from everyday use, imbues acts of service with a sense of divinity. In a similar way, the runic alphabets of the Germanic and Norse traditions, represented by the Elder Futhark, were never purely a writing system but carried symbolic, spiritual, and psychological weight, understood as forces activated through sound and inscription. Together, these examples illustrate forms of the intentional use of linguistic systems to influence thought, belief, and behavior.

The concept of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was molded in the 1970s by American researchers Richard Bandler and John Grinder at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Rooted at the intersection of psychology and communication, NLP explores the connection between the mind, language, and learned behavioral patterns. The authors argue that human thinking, communication, and actions are not rigid, but can be deliberately modified and guided. In recent decades, these ideas have been used in English language teaching, shaping approaches to strengthening teacher – student relationships, addressing different learning styles, easing language-related anxiety, and creating supportive, positive classroom environments.

The analysis of the main studies and publications.

N. Perumal and G. Shanmuhavelu, in their article *“Examining neuro-linguistic programming practice in English language teaching: A systematic review and qualitative meta-synthesis”* (2026), examine how Neuro-Linguistic Programming techniques, such as anchoring, reframing, and rapport-building, affect English language teaching outcomes. They prove that NLP improves learners' motivation, emotional intelligence, and language skills (Perumal, Shanmuhavelu, 2026). Thakre with a team of authors in publication *“Neuro linguistic programming: An effective tool for teaching of English as a second language”* retrace how Neuro-Linguistic Programming can improve both the teaching and learning of English as a second language, focusing on how understanding the brain's processing of language can develop learners' four core skills, represented by listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Thakre et al., 2023).

Statement of the task. The present article aims to retrace mental programming as a system deliberately

employed to encode society with prescribed perceptions, values, and behavioral patterns, and to examine how this mechanism operates within English language teaching. Building on the historical view of language as a tool for guiding collective perception and shaping consciousness, the study suggests that structured linguistic input in the ELT classroom serves not only as a medium for language learning but also as a way of fostering shared conceptual frameworks through which learners are guided to interpret reality in a specific manner. The article explores how intentionally structured language vectors learners institutionally endorsed interpretations of socially important issues such as gender, global warming, and related contemporary issues, shaping not only their communicative competence but the very cognitive architecture through which they perceive and engage with the world.

Presentation of the main material. Modernism believed that truth would be visible to the elite (the educated, the rational, the scientifically literate, the artistically enlightened), thereby creating a natural hierarchy. Postmodernism gave the idea of multiple truths. The post-postmodern character of the contemporary epoch moves a step further as it does not simply accept the multiplicity of truths but seeks to integrate and act upon them. The ‘truth’ (represented by behavioural norms, societal culture, familial interface) is created and ‘traded’ through social networks, mass media, advertisement slogans, YouTube, movies, books, coursebooks, and educational establishments.

Bandler and Grinder, in their book *Frogs into Princes: Neuro Linguistic Programming*, which is a transcript of introductory NLP training workshops conducted by the authors, talk about a range of techniques: a) sensory experience (how people process the world through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic representational systems, and how to detect this through eye movements and language patterns); b) anchoring (how to connect emotional states to triggers and use this to help people change personal history and behavior); c) reframing (how to communicate with unconscious parts of a person to find new behavioral choices). The book uses the word *programming* to describe the behavioral patterns people run automatically, much like a computer: *“We call ourselves modelers. What we essentially do is to pay very little attention to what people say they do and a great deal of attention to what they do. And then we build ourselves a model of what they do. We are not psychologists, and we're also not theologians or theoreticians. We have no idea about the “real” nature of things, and we're not particularly interested*

in what's "true." The function of modeling is to arrive at descriptions which are useful." (Grinder, Bandler, 1979: 10).

American TESOL Institute in the article "Techniques to Teach English with Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)" (2023) stress that NLP sits at the intersection of three core elements: *neuro* (how we think and perceive the world through our senses), *linguistic* (how language shapes and influences those around us), and *programming* (how our behaviours and reactions affect both ourselves and others).

Pic. 1. (American TESOL Institute, 2023).

Let's take a coursebook for Advanced level students by Hugh Dellar, "Outcomes Advanced", second edition. Each topic in this syllabus directly connects to the essence of mental programming. Grammar structures (conditionals, wish/if only, cleft sentences) train the brain to reframe reality and think in possibilities (e.g. "what could be" rather than just "what is"). Vocabulary themes (e.g. relationships, conflict, society, science) build the internal mental library we use to label and interpret our experiences. Reading topics (e.g., urban myths, democracy, peace) challenge existing beliefs and reprogram assumptions about the world. Listening tasks (e.g. cultural identity, news stories, science discussions) expose learners to diverse mental models, expanding how they process reality (Dellar, Walkley, 2016). Developing conversations (e.g., giving impressions, defending, challenging overgeneralizations) mirrors NLP's core goal when teaching people to consciously shape how they communicate and influence others. Contemporary British trainers in methodology explicitly highlight the need to shift from systematic grammatical and lexical acquisition to pattern learning. On the one hand, such an approach will quickly equip learners with the necessary lexical and grammatical tools to communicate in the target environment; on the other hand, we will end up with an individual unable to communicate beyond the set frames.

English teaching approaches abroad are increasingly shifting from coursebooks to thematic handouts. A closer look at the discussion questions embedded in these materials, however, reveals a delicate but significant ideological framing. Consider the following example: "Why do some people become vegetarians? Put these reasons in order of importance, based on: a) your opinion/experience; b) they feel that meat is expensive; c) they think that vegetarian food is healthier; d) they are worried about animals; f) they are worried about the environment" (Linguahouse, 2019). Notably, the question does not ask *whether* vegetarianism is a valid or preferable choice; on the contrary, it assumes that and asks only *why*. All provided options affirm vegetarianism as the rational

or ethical position, leaving no room for alternative perspectives. This is not a neutral discussion prompt; it is a pre-programmed conclusion dressed as an open question, guiding learners toward a particular worldview under the appearance of critical thinking. The title of the further text (Ex 3 in the handout) is "The meat that ruins our planet" (Linguahouse, 2019: 3). If the discussion question still carries some ambiguity, the article suggested for reading practice removes all doubt. We face an unambiguously charged language, as meat does not *affect*, *impact*, or even *harm* the planet; it *ruins* it. The handout suggests not the language of inquiry or balanced analysis, but the language of *verdict*. The learner arrives at the reading task already positioned as a passive recipient of a predetermined moral conclusion rather than an active critical thinker. What is particularly significant from a pedagogical standpoint is that this framing is cumulative, when the discussion question plants the seed, and the reading text reinforces it, creating a coherent ideological arc within a single handout. This is an instance of linguistic anchoring, in which repeated exposure to loaded language and one-sided framings gradually shape the learner's perception of what is normal, rational, and ethical through the quiet accumulation of assumptions. As a result, cows (a natural and ancient part of the ecosystem) are recast as a primary driver of global warming. Not wars, with their massive and continuous industrial explosions. Not the space industry, with its fuel-intensive launches. These are left conspicuously unaddressed, including, notably, by Greta Thunberg herself, whose seemingly narrow environmental focus has drawn criticism for what it omits as much as for what it champions. Instead, the target is the cow. This selective framing, reproduced uncritically in ESL handouts, does not educate learners about the complexity of environmental issues; instead, it recruits them into a particular narrative, one in which dietary choices are elevated to planetary responsibility while far larger and more politically inconvenient sources of damage remain quietly off the syllabus. Meat is, for much of the world's population, a primary source of complete protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12; these are nutrients that are difficult or costly to obtain in sufficient quantities from plant-based diets alone, particularly in lower-income contexts. For indigenous communities, pastoral societies, and populations in cold climates where plant agriculture is limited, meat is not a lifestyle preference but a nutritional necessity shaped by centuries of ecological adaptation. Beyond nutrition, meat holds deep cultural and economic significance across countless societies, from celebratory feasts to livestock-based livelihoods.

Another handout question for the discussion section: “*Why do you think most of the world is still so dependent on fossil fuels, despite greener alternatives? How can people encourage their governments to switch to renewable energy sources, rather than using fossil fuels?*” (Linguahouse, 2026). First, such framing instills the idea that citizens are not only entitled but obligated to steer governmental policy. Second, the question treats the transition to renewable energy as a universally available choice, obstructed only by political will or public apathy. It entirely bypasses the geographical, infrastructural, and economic realities that make such a transition genuinely impossible for vast portions of the world. A landlocked country with limited sun exposure, a northern region dependent on heating, or a developing nation without the capital for green infrastructure faces a reality categorically different from that implied by the question. By erasing this complexity, the handout does not open a discussion; it rather closes one, positioning learners to accept a globalist environmental agenda as rational and universal.

The pattern deepens further with a handout on marijuana, which opens with the discussion question: “*Is marijuana legal anywhere in your country? Why/Why not? What do you think the positive aspects of marijuana use are? Do you believe marijuana should be legal in all countries? Why/Why not?*” (Linguahouse, 2025). The question invites learners to explore the *positive* aspects of marijuana. The accompanying reading text titled “*Marijuana experiences*” (Linguahouse, 2025: 6) stabilizes this orientation through careful narrative construction. Three personal testimonies are presented, and while they vary in tone, the overall arc steers the reader toward a pro-legalization conclusion. Francine’s story, a cancer patient finding relief through marijuana, is emotionally the most compelling and is placed first, anchoring the reader’s sympathy before the other voices are heard. Samuel’s distressing experience in Amsterdam, which is the most honest account of marijuana’s unpredictability and psychological risk, is framed as a personal embarrassment rather than a cautionary medical observation. Charlotte’s story

ultimately resolves positively, with her finding a comfortable relationship with edibles in California, ending the trio of narratives on an affirming note (Linguahouse, 2025).

The ‘needed’ shaping of learners’ worldviews through ESL materials does not stop at dietary choices or drug policy; it extends into the most intimate and culturally sensitive domains of human life, such as morality, religion, family structure, abortion, and the question of whether to have children or pursue a career [<https://www.linguahouse.com/esl-lesson-plans/general-english/morality/preview>]. Handouts on morality invite learners to interrogate ethical absolutes and relativize moral judgments. This makes the ESL classroom an exceptionally powerful site of cultural transmission. It is programming in the sense of overwriting, replacing the learner’s inherited framework with another one without their knowledge or consent.

The conclusion and investigation perspectives.

The examined materials point to a consistent pattern unlikely to be incidental. Language has always been an instrument of power. Today’s learning materials display the encoded systems within the architecture of the question and in the selection of the text or the listening/watching choice. As English continues to function as the dominant global medium of education, the ideological content of its teaching materials demands the same critical scrutiny applied to any instrument of mass influence by teachers, curriculum designers, and learners alike.

Future research directions include a cross-platform analysis of ESL materials to map ideological patterns across topics and levels; comparative studies of how the same themes are framed for different national markets; and empirical investigation into how prolonged exposure to doctrinal materials shapes learner attitudes across cultural backgrounds. Most urgently, the field requires concrete methodological frameworks for ideologically balanced material design, tools that would allow educators to construct discussions that genuinely open thought rather than quietly foreclose it.

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