

THE SET OF METAPROGRAMS IDENTIFIED IN PUBLIC APPEARANCES OF VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY

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ABSTRACT

The people we choose (or not) to represent our interests in political, economic, social, and cultural areas are the ones whose power is great enough to influence the events occurring in the world every day. It would be much easier if people knew which are the real intentions of political figures before they would vote for them. By doing this, it is expected to find a way to predict the future decisions regarding the internal and external affairs of the states. This is the reason why there should be more studies on the perceptual filters, also known as metaprograms. These filters are part of a more comprehensive subject, called Neuro-Linguistic Programming, and abbreviated NLP. This article includes an analysis of the particularized conceptual and cognitive sets of the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, by studying the way he thinks, behaves, and makes decisions.

Keywords: Meta-programs, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Introduction

The large-scale events taking place since the beginning of 2022 in the Eastern European region, more precisely, the area around Romania's borders, have made two political actors to become protagonists on the international stage. One of them needs no introduction, being active in the political world for more than 20 years and having a controversial presence to say the least - Vladimir Putin - the one in whose vision a war with Ukraine was necessary. The other politician is Putin's military opponent, Volodymyr Oleksandrovich Zelenskyy, who has won the hearts of the people, both by the courage he portrays and by the zealous speeches he makes to the world. His firm presence and willingness to defend himself against Russian attacks have made his fame follow a meteoric upward trajectory. This was amplified by the surprise created by his success in "standing up" to the colossal Russian Federation (Knox, 2022).

As this is an ongoing phenomenon in the vicinity of Romania, I believe that addressing this issue is justified and that it is a topical point of interest. Case studies on topics that influence the direction of the country's development can serve as a wake-up call that history is being written here and now.

Personally, Volodymyr Zelenskyy attracted my attention with his charisma. It is interesting to know what factors have made all the attention to be directed towards supporting him in the fight against the Russian army. Thus, I decided to make a more in-depth study of his personality and, more specifically, of his set of metaprograms as a guiding mechanism in perceiving reality. His appearances in public will be analyzed, considering the message conveyed verbally, as well as non-verbally. The results will be superimposed on The Big Six model of metaprograms and an attempt will be made to establish its own model.

In the beginning, the concept of Neuro-Linguistic Programming will be presented as this is the macro area in which the individual representation filters are embedded and then these will be explained in detail.

Conceptual Delimitation and Contextualization

The general framework for the study of this article is the field of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). The founders of the field (Dilts et al., 1980) referring to NLP as the ability to use one's own resources to manage and optimize one's own

mental states and subjective experiences, O'Connor and Seymour (1993) echoing and complementing this early definition, stated that NLP is the art and science of personal effectiveness, the study of what makes the difference between excellent and mediocre. The originators of NLP initially studied the relationship between neuroscience, linguistics, and behavioral patterns, realizing that they influence each other through mutual determination and conditioning. NLP derives from bringing together the three disciplines whose defining concepts were used to develop it.

In this context:

- *Neuro* is about the ability of the human nervous system to perceive, (re)present and build the unique and unrepeatable experience of each of us;
- *Linguistic* refers to the system of communication, both linguistic and non-linguistic, verbal and non-verbal, both conscious and unconscious, through which we construct a unique model (map) of reality and present it using these means;
- *Programming* is a term taken from cybernetics and is used, in this context, to designate the ability of the human brain to be programmable.
- *NLP* is a coherent system incorporating an epistemology - a theoretical system of knowledge of psychological phenomenology, a methodology - a set of logically and coherently formulated methods, and a technology - the techniques and tools specific to the implementation of theoretical principles.

In recent years, there has been an increase in psychologists' interest in the concept of metaprograms, especially when it comes to the study of neuro-linguistic programming models. This is due to the central role that metaprograms play in how we relate to the social environment around each individual.

The core of the theoretical foundation of this work is composed of individual representation filters, also known as metaprograms. These can be seen as conceptual-cognitive sets that function as perceptual and actional macro-strategies designed to achieve a subjective perception of reality (Tropotei & Rebegea, 2022). They are formed throughout life, as a result of each individual's interactions and life experiences. Hence their particular, subjective character. Practically speaking, they represent habitual states of mind-body-emotion integration (Bodenhamer & Hall, 1997), habits, patterns, biases, ways of critical thinking (Cullen, Matsui-Haye, & Mulvey, 2012), predisposing cognitive and action strategies. They originate from the work of Carl G. Jung and can be identified in his proposed concept of psychological typology.

I intend to develop an analysis of the contents of the speeches of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy from the beginning of his appearances in the public eye in order to make use of information that can be found in spoken form or indirectly transmitted through his non-verbal language. The metaprogram structure defined by NLP will be used as a filter. This approach will allow the creation of a form of knowledge, a type of profiling that will result in the contextualization of the messages of the person analyzed. This can lead to a predictability of the actions of some people.

Individual Representation Filters – Metaprograms

According to Hall and Bodenhamer (1997), each individual has a specific set of metaprograms. From ca. 60 metaprograms, depending on personal experience and life contexts, each person's set is formed. At a general level, metaprograms can be classified into 4 categories:

- **Conative:** how individuals self-present and make decisions regarding the behavior or communication goals influence personal experience (i.e. closeness to or distance from the referent);
- **Cognitive:** in relation to the strategies of understanding reality and communicating messages or feedback that are relevant to perceived reality (e.g. optimism and pessimism);
- **Emotional:** refers to the origin and/or direction in which emotional energy is directed (e.g. importance is given primarily to internal feedback, one's own opinion or, conversely, to external feedback or the opinion of others);
- **Semantic:** the opinions expressed and actions taken by individuals in the context of communication are shaped by the importance they attach to life experiences in relation to their personal interactions with them over different periods of time.

The four categories of metaprograms are likely to influence the way individuals create their own map of reality, their own personalized perception on the basis of which they will interact in a specific way, based on their own labels and classifications (Linder-Pelz, 2011), based on a representational system that combines in an interactive and personalized way the connections between the different perceptual filters (McDermott & O'Connor, 1995).

When analyzing interpersonal communication, NLP specialists focus primarily on the six metaprograms they consider most relevant, such as the so-called Big

Six, adaptive and communication strategies found in specific tests and analysis tools such as the Life Set Meta Programs Survey (NLP Australia, 2019).

Volodymyr Zelenskyy – The Big Six

Based on the model of The Big Six, the following paragraphs will attempt to create a set of six metaprograms of President Zelenskyy, delineating the boundaries of his map of reality and his personalized perception.

► **Approach vs. Deviation** - refers to how individuals communicate and act toward their goals according to their own value structure. Behind this metaprogram is what Hall and Bodenhamer (1997) call the pull factor or push factor engine. President Zelenskyy is an opportunist by nature. He is a man with clear objectives. Even before he was put in charge of the state, he could be seen as a successful person who knew how to handle certain situations in such a way as to make the most profit from it. In 2015, he also directed and was the main character in the series "Servant of the People", which presents an ideal for the highest office of the state. Thus, on elections day, voters tend to superimpose Zelenskyy's persona over the role of the president-example "Vasil Petrovich Goloborodko", played by him. The push-factor engine is highlighted by the fact that it does not miss any opportunity to take actions that will bring it closer to achieving its goals. He himself has said that he did not intend to enter the political scene in this way, but it was a favorable event that he took advantage of (BBC News, 2019). In the 2019 BBC News interview he says: "People want to see a president like Vasil Goloborodko, with the same moral values. They are fed up with the corrupt system. They want something new" (BBC News, 2019). Like Donald Trump, he is playing the role of the "anti-system man", bringing the element of newness and restructuring the principles by which the country is governed. His whole life, but especially his whole election campaign, shows how his boundless ambition pushes him to achieve things that, to some, may seem hopeless of success. In other words, the way Zelenskyy communicates and acts puts him in the grid of closeness to purpose.

► **Past – Present - Future** – establishes the temporal moment in which the subject finds its reference system. Individuals who are linked to the past will relate entirely to previous personal experiences and the lessons learned from them. Thus, they will look at the conflicts they experienced in the past and aspire to learn from

their own mistakes in order not to repeat them. People who have a reference point in the present will always try to stay anchored in what is happening in the here and now, seeking to deal with new problems in ways adapted to the best possible outcome. People who cling to the uncertainty of the future tend to find their way by always referring to plans, dreams, assumptions that have long-term effects. Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a person who is totally rooted in the present world. He lives in a state of flow, of zen, doing what he feels in the moment. Because of his job as an actor, he has to be constantly on the lookout for things that are trending or have potential in that direction. His history in the world of showbiz proves that he is very good at finding and creating content that appeals to the audience at all times. What's more, his candidacy itself came as an unexpected element. According to him, his involvement in politics was not premeditated long beforehand, but rather a spontaneous decision (BBC, 2019). However, he is not a reckless person and he carefully calculates every word he says and action he takes. Historian Sorin Turturică says in a November 2022 interview that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is "the man who never says a word more or less" (Zaiafet, 2023). These allegations presented above, confirm to me the idea that President Zelenskyy is a person of reference today.

► **Internal vs. External Feedback** - highlights who is the authority behind the decision-making process. Individuals may or may not allow themselves to be influenced by feedback received from others. As for Zelenskyy, I think it is more than obvious that feedback plays an important role in his life, but it is not an element that influences the way he makes decisions. Although audience feedback is very important in a comedian's life, he has demonstrated time and time again that he does not care what "people" say he should do. An event that justifies my statement can be found in the life of the young Volodymyr who was strongly influenced by the opinion of his father figure. Although he was guided to pursue a career as a lawyer because it gives you status, Zelenskyy chose to do what he liked, even if it meant episodes of self-righteousness for him (reference to his 2016 performance for his Kwartal 95 show "Квартал 95") (Ramos, 2022). Moreover, the very abrupt change from life as an actor to that of a head of state is a decision that many may have considered irresponsible. In a 2019 interview he gave to Vice News reporters, he was presented with his biggest criticism at the time, followed by the question of whether he considered himself fit for the job of president, to which he replied simply: "Why

not?" (VICE News, 2019). Finally, to further reinforce my assertion that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is not a person who feels the need for external endorsement, I ask for a retrospective analysis of the general opinion of the Ukrainian President's capability before and after more than a year of war.

► **Internal vs. External Reference** – it reveals how the individual relates to the goal setting process. His/her attention may be focused on the self or on the needs of others. Those who are self-centered show self-sufficiency, unlike those with the external reference system who have a higher level of empathy. The direction of President Zelenskyy's attention cannot be accurately analyzed, as this type of metaprogram requires a higher level of intimacy and may differ depending on the individual's context. In the public eye it can be altered by the social mask the President of Ukraine wears. On the other hand, if we identify Zelenskyy's persona with that of the individual who represents the state and its interests, certain clear conclusions can be drawn that tip the balance in favor of internal references. In his actions, the President shows quickness in decision and indifference to the opinions of others. One example is his surprise visit to Washington on 21st December 2022. Afterwards, he was criticized for disrespecting the President of the United States by dressing in military uniform (Dorking, 2022). Moreover, the indirect message he gave during the visit was that he is grateful for all the help, he appreciates it, he values it, but Ukraine is not a slave to the US. "The world is too interconnected and interdependent to allow someone to stay aside and at the same time to feel safe when such a battle continues - our two nations are allies in this battle" (YahooNews, 2022) - said Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressing the Congress. The support given is for the purpose of achieving world peace and he considers the financial effort made by the US and other countries that have contributed to help Ukraine as an "investment" in keeping order. All this shows that the head of state is more oriented towards the good of himself and the country than towards obtaining pardons from other heads of state, be they enemies or allies.

► **Chunk down vs. Chunk up metaprograms** – highlight the multitude of details an individual needs to make a decision or understand a particular event. The chunk up type is succinct, laconic, can deal with a small amount of information, while the chunk down type needs the whole picture in order to orient to the situation. In the case of Zelenskyy, a correlation can be made between what has been said above under the other metaprograms. He is an opportunity speculator and always oriented in the

present. He is an easily adaptable guy and easily handles situations even if he does not have all the information at his disposal. During the election campaign he was put in the position of responding to the argument that he has no background in politics, economics or the military. This was never an impediment for the former actor and he claimed he knew how to get the knowledge needed to be at the helm of a state. Russ Bellant, an American journalist, says of Zelenskyy that "he knows his position as a country in the middle of a bigger power game between superpowers and he seems to know what he's doing. He's handling himself pretty well. He's his own man" (Kennedy, 2022). The public's opinion of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's term in office shows that he fits the chunk up typology, achieving the impossible even if at first it seems hopeless.

► **Same Decisions vs. Different Decisions** – provides information on the preferred way of making decisions. The individual may act in accordance with previous experiences or prefer to try to solve problems by new, experimental, empirical methods. President Zelenskyy's way of working is based on trying different decisions that might bring faster, better solutions. This trait is characteristic of his way of being, as described in the previous paragraphs. An element underlying this metaprogram is the very career of a comedian, who must be inclined towards the new, towards the innovative. Equally demanding in this direction is the current situation in Ukraine, which needs a way out of Russia's siege.

Conclusions

In an overview, these are the general characteristics of The Big Six model that we can extract from the public appearances of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The following conclusions can be drawn from the study in order to establish the informational value, importance, and necessity of the article. Thus, it can be said that an attempt was made to gain a deeper understanding of the President's perceptions and representations of the events, actions and situations in which he takes part.

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Zelenskyy is the kind of person who mobilizes his decision-making process in the direction of achieving goals by approaching them, choosing to do certain things because he considers them useful and necessary.
- He is a person anchored in reality, in the present, trying to achieve success through new, innovative, spontaneous actions.

- He listens to the advice of others, but ultimately, makes the decisions he thinks are the right ones, even if they contradict the beliefs of others.

- He seeks answers and methods of solving problems in his own person and not in the actions of others. As far as his role as president is concerned, he does his best to protect the interests of the country.

- He can manage to find a solution without necessarily trying to have all the possible details of the matter.

- He is always looking for new alternatives.

It should be mentioned that these conclusions are strictly subjective opinions and are not an attempt to express the absolute truth.

The current international context is a favorable one for the continuation of the studies conducted on the profile of the Ukrainian President, as data of interest are still provided that can be analyzed through metaprograms. It should be noted that the above is an unbiased study, not a desire to elevate the qualities of the head of state or to achieve an ideal profile of a president.

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