Exploring the Use of the Milton Model in Adolescent Education

Elmir Isgandarov

***Abstract*— Adolescence, with its distinctive characteristics and hypersensitive nature, has long been a subject of interest for researchers and has almost never been overlooked. Although adolescence has been studied from various perspectives, there is a significant need for a deeper exploration from the standpoint of neuroscience. In our time, one of the reliable, functional, and effective methods in the field of neuroscience is Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).**

This article discusses the Milton Model, one of the frameworks developed within Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). The main idea of the paper is the application potential of the Milton Model in the upbringing of adolescents. The dynamic and rapidly evolving changes in today's world, along with significant transformations in the general psychological and even physiological characteristics of adolescence, have rendered traditional approaches less effective. These circumstances highlight the growing need for new and more lasting methods of influence. Factors such as the narrowing generational gap, the increasingly diverse nature of change, and the rising importance of individualized approaches all contribute to the necessity of identifying meaningful differences in the educational processes during adolescence.

The article emphasizes the effectiveness of subconscious communication particularly during this developmental stage, provides relevant examples, and explores the potential of leveraging the indirect power of language as a more impactful means of communication.

***Keywords*— Adolescence, Erickson, language, Milton Model, NLP, speech, upbringing.**

I. Introduction

One of the most frequently referenced scholars in the formation of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) theory—referred to in NLP terms as a "model"—was Milton H. Erickson (1901–1980). Considered the founder of modern hypnotherapy, Erickson is regarded as one of the most successful practitioners in the history of psychotherapy [9, p.7].

It is estimated that he worked with approximately 30,000 patients at his office in Phoenix. More than 100 books have been written about him in the United States alone, and today, there are 50 institutes worldwide bearing his name.

Elmir Isgandarov, Azerbaijan Institute of Education, Orcid: 0009-0001-8183-8862

The founders of NLP identified the hypnotic language patterns used by Erickson and developed a corresponding model, which they named the "Milton Model" in his honor. The first major work on this subject was published in two volumes in 1975 (6).

The Milton Model, a core element of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), was developed based on the language patterns used by renowned hypnotherapist Milton H. Erickson. The founders of NLP, John Grinder and Richard Bandler, described Erickson's linguistic approach as "artfully vague" (2), emphasizing the deliberate use of ambiguous and indirect language to access the deeper layers of the subconscious mind.

In the Milton Model, communication is structured to influence the subconscious rather than delivering direct and explicit messages. This indirect communication approach gives precedence to metaphors, symbols, analogies, and emotional tones over precise and literal expressions. The primary objective is to free the individual from the limited choices confined by conscious reasoning and to activate a broader range of options that reside within the subconscious.

Unlike classical psychoanalytic traditions, where the subconscious is often seen as static, inert, and the source of problematic behaviors, NLP views the subconscious as a dynamic, active, and resourceful system. It is considered a reservoir of untapped potential, capable of supporting cognitive flexibility and positive behavioral change.

The Milton Model leverages the capabilities of language to create purposeful vagueness, thereby expanding the range of mental and cognitive possibilities. Through this method, issues are shifted away from the conscious mind's rigid perception of reality and into the open, ambiguous realm of the subconscious, enabling a wider range of solutions and interpretations. The skillful use of literary devices such as similes, metaphors, epithets, and symbols becomes particularly effective in this context.

This model can be utilized for several purposes, including integrating subconscious resources with conscious processes, modifying automatic thought patterns and behavioral stereotypes, reframing negative attitudes toward existing situations, disrupting stereotypical thought processes through subtle manipulation, and guiding cognitive activity toward more effective and beneficial outcomes.

Typical hypnotic and suggestive expressions employed within the Milton Model include phrases such as "Wouldn't it be wonderful if…?", "Perhaps, just as you were thinking…", "You probably want to solve this more than anyone else…", "Isn't it surprisingly easy?", "With your help…", "As you

already know…", "This will help you decide…", and "Can you imagine…?" These expressions are designed to invite internal reflection, stimulate imagination, and subtly direct attention, all while preserving the listener's sense of autonomy.

The Milton Model thus stands as a sophisticated linguistic tool within NLP, emphasizing creativity, subtlety, and psychological engagement. By promoting access to the subconscious mind through artfully vague language, it enables the discovery of new resources, perspectives, and behavioral options that may not be readily available through direct, conscious thought alone.

The Potential of Using the Milton Model in the Upbringing of Adolescents

As is well known, adolescence is a turbulent period characterized by conflict and emotional fluctuations, as described by S. Hall (1844–1924) (7, p.3). Moreover, with the passage of time, the specific features of this developmental stage have evolved accordingly. This implies that some classical methods used in approaching adolescents may now need to be replaced with newer, more effective strategies. In this context, we will focus on the subconscious-level influence made possible through the use of techniques from the Milton Model.

In fact, such subconscious influences are already being skillfully employed, especially via social media platforms. The goal is to become aware of these influences and to use them in a constructive and deliberate manner. The Milton Model relies on indirect forms of expression rather than direct communication, which can have a significant impact when interacting with adolescents. Traditional approaches typically involve advising, explaining, or even reprimanding, all of which engage the conscious mind and often provoke resistance from adolescents. In contrast, the Milton Model does not instruct the child on what to think or do. Instead, the objective is to guide the adolescent into a trance-like state and keep them in that state for as long as possible (5, p. 263). This state not only facilitates internalization but also creates a sense of ease in the listener, replacing tension with relaxation.

The Use of Deletions in the Milton Model During Adolescent Upbringing

One of the techniques employed in the Milton Model is the use of deletions. For example, the sentence "I know it's interesting for you" lacks a specific object. Since the object is not clearly defined, the listener is prompted to interpret the vague expression based on their own assumptions. In the case of comparative deletions, the criteria for comparison are also unclear. For instance, in the sentence "Living in the city is more difficult than in the countryside," the difficulty is not attributed to any specific person or factor, which creates ambiguity.

The use of deletions can be considered an effective communication method when interacting with adolescents. One of the fundamental principles in approaching adolescents is to distinguish behavior from intentions. This aligns with key NLP presuppositions such as "Every behavior has a positive intention (subjectively perceived by the individual)" and "Behavior is not identity." When we intervene solely at the behavioral level, the underlying intention may be overlooked. Behind every adolescent behavior lies a subjectively positive intention. Ignoring this and focusing exclusively on behavior can harm the relationship and lead to misunderstandings.

To encourage adolescents to re-evaluate their own intentions and adopt more functional approaches, the Milton Model can be used in the following ways:

"I know it's not always easy for you."

"Sometimes people may experience difficulties with this."

"What might be a better way for you to prepare for your classes?" (This example involves a presupposition—the focus is shifted to the method, implying that class preparation is already a given.)

"Sometimes staying quiet makes a person appear more confident."

"Living according to certain values is one of the key steps to success." *(Here, success—something the adolescent aspires to—is associated with values, thus encouraging value-based behavior.)*

In addition, using unspecified verbs in communication makes language more abstract. These verbs lack clear definitions and prompt the listener to interpret them subjectively. Examples include: *to solve, to fix, to act, to change, to be interested, to think, to sense, to know, to experience, to understand, to remember, to realize,* etc.

Unspecified referential indices are also frequently used in the Milton Model. In such cases, the noun being referred to is not clearly identified. Examples include:

"People can relax…"

"This can be learned easily…"

"You might get caught up in certain thoughts…"

Milton Model studies have shown that some words are inherently vague or ambiguous in nature. Words such as *interest, hypnosis, training, upbringing, love,* and so on carry implicit subjectivity. For instance, a student's academic failure can be reframed as a "challenge" instead of a "problem," which encourages a more constructive mindset. For example:

"I know there are some challenges in your studies, and I understand you want to overcome them. I don't know what resources you'll use to overcome these challenges, but I do know that you'll find what you need."

Distorted cause-effect relationships are another strategy in the Milton Model. These involve establishing connections between clauses that are not logically related. For example:

"As you hear the sound of my voice, you begin to relax."

"As you sit there smiling, you can slowly begin to concentrate."

"Standing up and sitting down twice will make you feel more at ease."

Another widely used technique is mind reading, where the speaker claims to know the listener's internal experience. For example:

"What I'm about to say will interest you."

"I know you're curious about this topic too."

Lost performatives involve statements where evaluative criteria are omitted, leading to vague assertions. For example:

"It's good that you can understand easily."

"There's no need to invest yourself so much in studying."

A. The Use of Generalizations in the Milton Model During Adolescent Upbringing

This category of the Milton Model includes expressions such as "every," "always," "never," and "no one." For instance:

"And now you can fully direct your attention to me..."

"All of your thoughts will lead you into deeper focus..."

Modal operators that limit choice, such as *must, should, need to, cannot, will not,* are also widely used. For example: "Are you aware that you cannot open your eyes?"

Indirect suggestions are formed using conjunctions, participial structures, and other linguistic particles such as *while, before, after, as, when, during,* etc. For instance:

"Would you like to stand up while learning?" — Here, the listener's attention is drawn to the act of standing up, while learning is implicitly suggested.

"Before you finish this task, I'd like to discuss something with you." — This sentence presupposes that the task will be completed.

"Let's have tea or coffee before reviewing these documents." — This presupposes that the documents will indeed be reviewed.

Suggestive adverbs and verbs like *begin, stop, continue, move forward, currently, still,* etc., can also be used to imply specific mental or physical states:

"You can continue relaxing." — Implies the person is already in a relaxed state.

"Are you still interested in hypnosis?" — Suggests that the person has previously been interested in hypnosis.

Suggestive adjectives and adverbs include expressions like:

"You can do it easily…"

"That was a very wise move…"

"Free-spirited people live joyfully…"

Modal phrases such as *fortunately, luckily, it is necessary that, I am sure that,* also function as indirect suggestions**:**

"Fortunately, I don't need to know the full details of what you want in order to help you get it."

"I'm sure this will positively affect your other subjects as well."

Temporal sequence expressions, such as *first, second, third, next, then,* imply a planned or expected order of actions:

"I'm curious to know which of the things I said you'll do first." — Suggests that all actions mentioned will eventually be carried out.

Alternative statements like *or, either, or else, whether* can be used to imply that at least one of the proposed options will happen:

"I don't know whether it will be your right or your left hand that rises with a subconscious movement." — Suggests that one of them certainly will.

"Will you shower first, or brush your teeth?" — Here, both actions are presupposed; only the order is questioned.

Directive and suggestive expressions are also used, including phrases like *to know, to realize, to notice, to become aware of,* to gently imply the desired idea:

"Are you aware that your subconscious has already started learning?"

"Did you know you've been in a trance for a while now?"

"Can you feel that your attention is now fully on me?"

The more suggestive elements used in a sentence, the stronger the impact of the suggestion. The increased complexity of the sentence makes it harder for the listener to analytically process the content, leading to deeper absorption. Additionally, subtle or ambiguous logical links make understanding even more difficult, increasing the suggestive power. For example:

"And I don't know how quickly your subconscious will recognize what it has learned. Because before you shift effortlessly into a listening state, it's not important whether you realize that you'll be allowing yourself to learn something else that is both enjoyable and useful."

B. The Use of the Distortion Pattern of the Milton Model in the Process of Adolescent Education

This category primarily includes indirect instruction patterns**.** One of these is *indirect commands*, which involve embedding instructions within broader sentence structures rather than delivering them directly. For example, instead of saying "You can relax," one might say, "After this activity, you'll be able to relax even more." Instructions presented in this expanded form sound more polite and subtle, and the listener often does not consciously realize that a command is being given.

A particularly effective technique for eliciting information from listeners is the use of the word *interest* in question forms — known as indirect questions**.** For instance:

"I'm very interested to know what you expect from this lesson."

"I wonder what you think about this class."

The inclusion of the word *interest* attracts the listener's attention more effectively and encourages them to provide information.

Another powerful linguistic tool in instructional contexts is the use of negative verb forms. This distortion pattern in the Milton Model manifests in two main ways:

1. When a specific behavior is *desired,* using a negative verb form can paradoxically encourage the exact behavior one supposedly discourages. For example:
   - Saying "Please, don't cry when I leave" is likely to *increase* the chance that the person will cry.
   - Telling someone "You don't have to tell me everything, just what you want to share," may encourage them to reveal *more*, possibly everything.
2. When a specific behavior is *not* desired, negative forms should be avoided altogether, as they can have the opposite effect. For instance:
   - Telling a child "Don't lie" may draw attention to the concept of lying rather than promote honesty.
   - Saying "Don't fidget while listening to the lesson" may actually remind the child to fidget.

In this sense, it is more effective to construct educational and behavioral instructions using a positive linguistic style. Rather than criticizing undesirable behaviors by naming them, educators should promote appropriate behaviors through suggestion. This is because the subconscious does not process negation directly; it focuses on the core concept of the phrase. For example, both "Imagine the color blue" and "Don't think of the color blue" evoke the same mental image — the color blue.

Repetition in speech is another commonly used distortion technique within the Milton Model. Repetition helps establish coherence between sentences and ideas within a text. It is also a persuasive strategy frequently employed by political leaders [4, p. 41].

Psychological studies confirm the persuasive power of repetition. Even when a repeated message is factually incorrect, people are still more likely to believe it due to its repeated exposure [3, p. 107] and [8, pp. 393–407].

II. Conclusion

The Milton Model is fundamentally based on the principle of *suggestion*. Suggestion plays a significant role in influencing the subconscious mind. On one hand, it challenges the information previously “memorized” by the conscious mind; on the other hand, it transmits more functional and beneficial messages to the subconscious.

Milton H. Erickson’s *explicit suggestions* can be illustrated with the following examples:

“We all possess potentials we are not aware of, and we often do not know how to utilize them.”

“Your mind may review many feelings, memories, and thoughts related to this issue, but you do not yet know which will be most useful for resolving the problem you are dealing with.”

“You may find yourself wandering through the past, present, or future; meanwhile, your unconscious will select the most appropriate ways to handle it.”

“He doesn’t know what he is learning, but he is learning. And it wouldn’t be right for me to say to him, ‘Learn this or that.’ Let him learn whatever he wants, in whatever order he chooses.”

(1, pp. 26, 111).

Thus, the Milton Model — one of the core techniques of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) — can be effectively applied in the educational process, particularly in adolescent development, by adapting its various patterns to the context and individual characteristics of the learners.

References

[1] Erickson, M. H., & Rossi, E. L. (1979). *Hypnotherapy: An exploratory casebook*. New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., pp. 26, 111.

[2] Grinder, J., & Bandler, R. (1981). *Trance-formations: Neurolinguistic programming and the structure of hypnosis*. Moab, Utah: Real People Press.

[3] Hasher, L., et al. (1977). Frequency and the conference of referential validity. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 16, 107-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371(77)80012-1

[4] Huseynzada, G. (2023). The impact of repetitions in the speeches of leaders. *ADU Scientific Bulletin (Humanities and Social Sciences), No. 3*, 196, p. 41.

[5] Kishlak, G. P. (2024). *NLP: Let the magic touch your life without*. Istanbul: X Publisher, p. 263.

[6] Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton H. Erickson (1975). 2 vols.

[7] Santrock, W. J. (2017). *Adolescence*. Ankara: X Publisher, p. 3.

[8] Schwartz, M. Repetition and Rated Truth Value of Statements. The American Journal of Psychology, 95(3), 1982, pp. 393–407 https://doi.org/10.2307/1422132

[9] Uzuner, C., & Uzuner, S. (2009). *Hypnotherapy*. Istanbul: X Publisher, p. 7.

Elmir Isgandarov, Psychologist

Founder and Director of NLP Academy Psychological Services and Training Center, NLP Master, Trainer, Psychologist

He is a psychologist, completed his bachelor’s degree at Baku State University in 2003, followed by a master’s degree in 2005, both with distinction. In 2013, he founded a children’s publishing house, where he led the company for three years, becoming the author and editor of over 50 books related to children’s literature.

In 2018, he was accepted into the doctoral program in pedagogical psychology at the Education Institute of the Republic of Azerbaijan, successfully completing his studies in 2022. That same year, he established the NLP Academy Psychological Services and Training Center, where he has been serving as director, providing psychological services and training since then.

He has participated in numerous training sessions both within Azerbaijan and internationally, including in the United States and Turkey. He has also attended various international seminars, conferences, and symposiums. He is the only Azerbaijani to have received certification signed by Dr. R. Bandler, the founder of NLP.

In 2019, he launched the “Psychologist Elmir Isgandarov” YouTube channel, which remains the first and only one of its kind in Azerbaijan. With more than 50,000 subscribers, the channel continues its operations successfully.

He is the author of the book *“Attention, There Is a Child at Home”* on child rearing. He also continues his scientific work on NLP and adolescence.