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Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in the Perspectives of Philosophy, Neuroscience, Neuro-Psychology, and Tasawuf

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Abstract:

This study critically examines Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) through the lenses of philosophy, neuroscience, neuropsychology, and Islamic tasawuf. It explores how NLP conceptualizes the relationship between mind, language, and embodied experience, and the extent to which its foundations align with contemporary views of consciousness and neurocognitive processes. Using a qualitative, library-based analysis of key NLP texts by Bandler and Grinder, alongside philosophical insights from Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer and findings on neuroplasticity, mirror neurons, predictive processing, and affective regulation, the study shows that NLP offers a constructivist model of consciousness shaped by neural activity, language, subjective experience, and emotion. Yet its scientific validity is constrained by limited empirical evidence, reliance on anecdotal claims, and a tendency to oversimplify ontological issues while neglecting the ethical-spiritual dimensions emphasized in tasawuf. The exclusive use of textual analysis without empirical testing in therapeutic, educational, or spiritual contexts constitutes a major limitation. The study proposes a Neuro-Linguistic-Phenomenological-Sufi Programming framework and calls for a more rigorous, ethically grounded integration of NLP with neuroscience, neuropsychology, and tasawuf to support responsible, evidence-based, and spiritually sensitive applications in education, communication, and religious or spiritual studies.

Keywords: consciousness; embodied cognition; language; neuroscience; phenomenology; philosophy of mind; spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) emerged in the 1970s through the collaborative work of Richard Bandler and John Grinder, attempting to map communication patterns and mental structures that were believed to produce rapid and effective behavioral change (Bandler & Grinder, 1975). At the time of its emergence, NLP was positioned not only as a therapeutic technique or communication strategy but also as a conceptual framework explaining how humans construct reality through the relationship between thought, language, and action (Jahan et al., 2022). In this context, NLP is a philosophically rich approach because it positions human consciousness as a dynamic system shaped by the interaction of the body, perception, linguistic structures, and subjective experience. Thus, NLP can be

understood not simply as a practical method but as a gateway to a deeper understanding of the epistemology and ontology of consciousness.

The development of modern philosophical studies shows that questions about the relationship between mind, language, and the world have been at the heart of philosophical traditions since the classical era. In philosophical linguistics, Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted that the limits of one's language are the limits of one's world, a view that demonstrates how the structure of language influences the construction of reality (Ribes-Iñesta, 2006). NLP resonates with this idea because it believes that changes in language—whether words, metaphors, or mental structures—can alter one's experience and response to the world (Lake & Murphy, 2023). Similarly, Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasized that understanding reality means entering a hermeneutic circle, a process of interpretation that occurs through language and human historical experience (Gadamer, 1975). NLP operates within a similar framework: meaning is not something objectively discovered, but interpreted, created, and negotiated through mental and linguistic structures.

Furthermore, NLP is heavily influenced by the phenomenological tradition, particularly the views of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who emphasized the importance of lived experience as the basis of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). NLP starts from the assumption that humans do not interact directly with the objective world, but with representations or "mental maps" formed through sensory experience, language, and meaning structures (Kabrel et al., 2024). Thus, the NLP approach is phenomenological in the sense that it emphasizes the role of subjective experience as the primary source of knowledge and action. Experience is not simply a collection of sensory data, but a meaningful construction involving emotions, memories, and symbolic interpretations.

In recent decades, developments in modern neuroscience have strengthened the relevance of the NLP approach. Findings on neuroplasticity demonstrate that the human brain is not a static entity, but can change and adapt according to experience, language, and emotions (Doidge, 2007). This aligns with the NLP principle that changing meaning through reframing or using specific language can modify a person's emotional responses and behavior. Other findings from affective neuroscience, as explained by Antonio Damasio, confirm that emotions play a fundamental role in decision-making and identity formation (Damasio et al., 2012). This reinforces the NLP perspective, which views the integration of emotion, perception, and language as key to self-change.

Furthermore, embodied cognition theory asserts that the mind is not separate from the body, but rather shaped by sensorimotor experiences and interactions with the physical world (Lakoff et al., 1999). NLP accommodates this view through the concept of representational systems (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), which demonstrate how sensory experiences shape mental structures. Meanwhile, findings regarding the mirror neuron system by Gallese and colleagues suggest that empathy and social understanding arise from the brain's ability to imitate the actions and emotions of others (Gallese, 2003). This concept provides the scientific foundation for NLP techniques such as rapport, which emphasizes verbal and nonverbal synchrony to build deep interpersonal relationships.

Recent developments in predictive processing theory have also enriched our understanding of NLP. This theory, pioneered by Karl Friston, asserts that the brain operates as a predictive machine, building an internal model of the world and continually updating it through sensory feedback (Friston, 2012). In the context of NLP, the processes of mental “framing” and “programming” can be understood as mechanisms for changing a person’s internal predictive model, thereby influencing how they interpret experiences and respond to situations (Dagan, 2024). Thus, the integration of NLP and predictive processing provides new insights into how language and meaning influence perception and behavior at the neurocognitive level.

However, NLP is not without its critics. Some consider it to lack a strong scientific foundation and some of its techniques have not been empirically proven (Leeson et al., 2019). This criticism is particularly relevant because many NLP practitioners use the approach technically without considering its theoretical foundations or methodological limitations. However, it is precisely these criticisms that open up the opportunity to view NLP not simply as an applied method, but as a philosophical approach that needs to be placed in critical dialogue with contemporary scientific and philosophical traditions. By positioning NLP within the perspectives of ontology, epistemology, and neuroscience, this approach can be reread as a conceptual structure that explains the dynamics of consciousness, rather than simply a communication technique.

In the context of religious studies and contemporary issues, NLP offers important contributions. Religious experiences, ritual practices, and processes of spiritual transformation are fundamentally intertwined with language, symbols, emotions, and the body—the four primary dimensions within which NLP operates. Understanding inner speech, the process of interpretation, and the formation of meaning are highly relevant to understanding the dynamics of modern religiosity. By integrating philosophy, linguistics, and neuroscience, NLP provides new

analytical tools for understanding how individuals construct spiritual realities and undergo transformative experiences in religious contexts (Alkhouri, 2024).

Based on this description, this study focuses on philosophical and neuroscientific studies of NLP to understand how this approach explains the structure of consciousness and how humans construct meaning. By examining the ontological and epistemological foundations, as well as the relevance of modern neuroscience to NLP, this article seeks to demonstrate that NLP can be positioned as a neurophenomenological framework that offers new insights into the relationship between body, language, and mind. This approach not only enriches theoretical insights but also provides a stronger foundation for NLP applications in academic, therapeutic, and religious fields.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach based on literature review (library research) with a philosophical orientation and conceptual analysis. This approach was chosen based on the characteristics of the object of study, namely Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) as a theoretical construct that lies at the intersection of philosophy, linguistics, and neuroscience. Because this research does not focus on empirical testing through experiments, but rather on deepening the meaning, concepts, and theoretical framework, qualitative methods are the most appropriate instrument to explore the complexity of the relationship between the mind, language, and human consciousness (Creswell, 2013). The literature review approach was carried out by exploring relevant primary and secondary academic sources.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth reading of books, journal articles, research reports, and scientific publications discussing philosophical and neuroscientific aspects related to NLP. Sources were obtained from academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and PubMed to ensure scientific quality and theoretical relevance. Each piece of literature was analyzed thematically, focusing on six main aspects: ontological foundations, epistemological foundations, axiological foundations, relevance to modern neuroscience, scientific critique, and directions for theoretical synthesis. This technique enabled researchers to structure the data in an organized manner and place it within a consistent argumentative framework (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic approach and conceptual analysis. The hermeneutic approach aims to explore the structure of meaning that emerges from the interaction between text, reader, and context (Palmer, 1969). Using this method, researchers can interpret theoretical concepts in NLP such as "representational system," "anchoring," and "reframing" in relation to contemporary philosophical and neuroscientific theories. Meanwhile, conceptual analysis was conducted to dissect key terms and discover their underlying logical structure. This technique is important because NLP has a unique terminological structure that is not always compatible with formal academic terminology, so conceptual reconstruction is necessary to achieve stronger theoretical coherence (Thagard, 2012).

The study's limitations are also clearly defined. First, this study does not attempt to test the effectiveness of NLP techniques in a clinical or practical context, as this would require an experimental study with a quantitative or mixed-methods design. Second, this study does not assess the full range of NLP practices currently developing in the world of training and motivation, as many modifications lack a clear theoretical basis. The study's focus is limited to the philosophical framework and neuroscientific relevance, ensuring that the analysis remains focused and in-depth. Third, this study does not involve field data analysis, so all findings are the result of a critical interpretation of the available literature.

Thus, this research method is designed to allow for an in-depth exploration of the conceptual structure of NLP and its links to philosophy and neuroscience. A qualitative, literature-based approach allows researchers to interpret complex concepts regarding consciousness, language, and mental representation in an integrative manner. Through hermeneutic, conceptual, and comparative analysis, this study seeks to provide a new and more robust understanding of NLP's position within the landscape of contemporary philosophy and modern neuroscience. The results are expected not only to enrich theoretical debates but also to provide a more scientific foundation for the development of NLP as a relevant neurophenomenological framework in academic studies and in religious contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Philosophical Foundations of NLP

The philosophical foundation of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) holds that the reality experienced by humans is not objective and independent but rather a perceptual construct formed by thought, language, and

subjective experience. From an ontological perspective, NLP assumes that humans never directly relate to the world as it is, but rather through mental representations formed by sensory systems and linguistic interpretation (Girju, 2023). This view aligns with Alfred Korzybski's idea that "the map is not the territory," namely that a person's representation of the world is never completely identical to the world itself (Korzybski, 1958). Thus, reality in NLP is relative, dynamic, and formed through a constructive process involving perception, imagination, and language. This connection demonstrates the strong influence of the constructivist tradition, which asserts that truth is not a fixed entity but the result of mental construction based on individual experience and interpretive frameworks (Fried Schnitman et al., 1995). Furthermore, the phenomenology of perception, as formulated by Merleau-Ponty, asserts that reality is present to the subject through the body, which directly experiences and interprets the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This reinforces the fact that, within the NLP framework, reality is the result of an active interaction between the body, perception, and language.

In the epistemological dimension, NLP starts from the idea that knowledge is not only constructed by abstract cognitive processes but also originates from the body, emotions, and sensory experiences. This view aligns with the theory of embodied cognition developed by Lakoff and Johnson, which asserts that the way humans think and understand the world cannot be separated from the structure of the body and the patterns of physical experience that accompany it (Lakoff et al., 1999). In the context of NLP, knowledge is understood as the result of representational systems—namely, patterns of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic information—that shape how a person interprets and makes sense of experiences (Amirhosseini & Wall, 2022). This means that every experience has sensory roots that are then processed into symbols, language, or internal narratives. This process demonstrates that knowledge is a combination of direct experience and symbolic representation. Thus, NLP epistemology positions the body and language as two main pillars in shaping understanding and action. The process of constructing meaning in NLP is inextricably linked to the sensory patterns experienced by the body, from visual images generated by the mind to the inner dialogue that influences how a person understands the world (Berger & Packard, 2022). This idea challenges traditional epistemology, which places reason alone as the primary source of knowledge, and suggests that knowledge is embodied, situated, and interactive.

The axiological dimension of NLP touches on aspects of values and ethics by positioning language as an instrument for transforming consciousness. NLP views language as an act capable of changing the way humans feel, think, and behave. This view aligns with J. L. Austin's speech act theory, which asserts that language is not merely a tool for conveying information, but is an act in itself—to say something is to do something (Austin, 1962). In the context of Gadamer's hermeneutics, language is understood as an existential medium that shapes how humans understand the world and themselves (Gadamer, 1975). NLP adopts this view by observing that changes in internal language—whether through reframing, metaphor, or inner dialogue—can alter the structure of experience and open up new possibilities for action.

Therefore, NLP can be understood as an axiological practice of awareness, namely the process of changing values, attitudes, and behaviors through linguistic and symbolic transformation. This transformation positions language as both an ethical and strategic space, as its use in interpersonal communication can be used to build empathy and understanding, but it can also potentially become an instrument of manipulation if not used responsibly (Truba et al., 2024). Thus, the axiology of NLP demands ethical awareness in communication practices, particularly in the context of therapy, education, and interpersonal relationships.

Thus, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of NLP demonstrate that this approach not only offers practical techniques but also presents a profound philosophical framework for how humans construct reality, acquire knowledge, and transform themselves through language. NLP views consciousness as a structure formed by the interaction of body, mind, and language, so that changes in one aspect can affect the entire human experience (Stuart, 2024).

NLP in the Perspective of Modern Neuroscience

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) gains new relevance when placed in the context of modern neuroscientific findings. One of the most fundamental intersections between NLP and neuroscience is the concept of representational systems—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (V-A-K)—which NLP uses to explain how humans process experience (Birknerova et al., 2022). Neuroscientific findings indicate that the brain processes information through distinct sensory networks: the visual cortex, the auditory cortex, and the somatosensory system, which processes touch, movement, and bodily sensations (Permezel et al., 2023). These three systems do not operate in

isolation but interact within the multisensory association cortex, where integration of different sensory modalities occurs to form a coherent perception (Stein et al., 1993). Thus, the V-A-K structure in NLP aligns with scientific understanding of how the brain converts sensory input into mental representations that influence how humans interpret the world. In this context, representational systems are not simply linguistic metaphors but reflections of the neurocognitive architecture that governs human subjective experience.

The concept of anchoring in NLP also has a strong biological basis when compared to the Hebbian learning theory in neuroscience. Anchoring refers to the process of associating a particular stimulus with a specific emotional response, so that when that stimulus reappears, the same response can be triggered automatically. This mechanism aligns with Hebb's famous principle, "neurons that fire together wire together," which suggests that synaptic connections between neurons strengthen when two experiences occur simultaneously or sequentially (Hebb, 1949). This strengthening of synaptic connections is known as long-term potentiation (LTP), a neurobiological process that strengthens connections between neurons through repeated activation (Bliss & Lømo, 1973). Research on emotional conditioning has shown that certain visual or auditory stimuli can trigger strong physiological responses when associated with significant emotional experiences (LeDoux, 2003). Thus, anchoring in NLP can be understood as a practical application of the biological mechanism of LTP, which forms associations between stimuli and emotional responses at the neural level.

Meanwhile, the concept of reframing in NLP shows a direct correlation with the phenomenon of neuroplasticity. Reframing is the process of changing the meaning of an experience, thereby altering the emotional response and accompanying behavior. In neuroscience, this change in meaning is associated with changes in neural connectivity, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in cognitive appraisal, emotion regulation, and decision-making (Richelli et al., 2025). The mechanism of neuroplasticity suggests that the brain can build new connections or weaken old ones in response to experience, learning, or reinterpretation of events (Doidge, 2007). This effect is evident in trauma research, where cognitive reinterpretation of traumatic experiences can significantly reduce fear-related amygdala activity (Ray, 2015). This aligns with the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which emphasizes the importance of cognitive restructuring to alter emotional and behavioral patterns (Ryum & Nikolaos Kazantzis, 2024). Thus, reframing in NLP is not merely a linguistic technique, but a profound neurocognitive process that underlies behavioral change and psychological recovery.

Another neuroscientific dimension relevant to NLP is the concept of rapport, the ability to build interpersonal relationships through verbal and nonverbal synchronization (Novotny et al., 2021). Findings about the mirror neuron system provide a scientific basis for this concept. Mirror neurons—first discovered by Rizzolatti and colleagues—are neurons that activate when a person performs a specific action or when they observe another person performing the same action. These neurons play a crucial role in empathy, imitation, and understanding others' intentions (Gallese, 2003). In the context of NLP, rapport is understood as the process of adjusting body language, intonation, speech rhythm, and language patterns to create psychological closeness. Neuroscientific findings suggest that this interpersonal synchronization is rooted in the brain's ability to "reflect" another person's state through the mirror neuron mechanism (Kaur, 2024). Thus, rapport is an integrative process involving the linguistic, motor, and affective systems in human interaction, biologically mediated by neural networks that enable empathy and social connection.

The most recent aspect of the dialogue between NLP and neuroscience is the link to predictive processing theory. This theory positions the brain as a predictive machine that continuously builds an internal model of the world and updates it based on sensory information (Lee et al., 2021). Perception, in this framework, is not simply the reception of sensory data, but rather an "active hypothesis" created by the brain to interpret reality. This aligns closely with NLP principles, which emphasize that human experience is shaped by "mental maps," internal representations that influence how a person understands and responds to situations (Ali & Al-Muslimi, 2024). From a predictive processing perspective, NLP techniques such as framing and reframing work by altering these internal predictive models, thereby changing how the brain processes, interprets, and responds to sensory stimuli. In other words, changing the way we speak, think, or assign meaning can lead the brain to produce different predictions and experiences. Framing has a direct impact on how a person perceives reality and responds to it, as the brain's predictions are heavily influenced by the linguistic and interpretive context surrounding one's experience (Johnson & Barlow, 2024).

Reading Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) through the lens of modern neuroscience opens up a rich dialogue between communication practices and biological understandings of the human brain. All the fundamental mechanisms of NLP—from the representational system, anchoring, reframing, rapport, to framing in the context of predictive processing—find parallels in neurocognitive findings that explain how the brain processes information,

forms associations, and constructs subjective experiences (Beinborn & Hollenstein, 2024). By examining these concepts within a unified framework, it becomes clear that many NLP techniques are not merely psychological metaphors but have biological roots that can be explained through observable neural mechanisms. To facilitate mapping these relationships, the following table summarizes the key links between NLP concepts and contemporary neuroscience findings.

Table 1 NLP in the Perspective of Modern Neuroscience

NLP Concept	Relevant Neuroscience Findings	Brief Explanation
Representational System (V-A-K)	Visual, auditory, somatosensory cortex; multisensory association cortex	The brain processes information through different sensory channels, which are then integrated into coherent perceptions. The structure of NLP aligns with the brain's sensory architecture.
Anchoring	Hebbian learning; long-term potentiation (LTP)	Stimulus-response associations in NLP correspond to the process of synaptic strengthening: neurons that fire together, wire together. Emotions can be conditioned through repetition.
Reframing	Neuroplasticity; regulation of emotions by the prefrontal cortex	Changing the meaning of experiences can alter neural connectivity and emotional responses, a finding consistent with cognitive restructuring in CBT and trauma research.
Report	Mirror neuron system; interpersonal neural synchronization	Interpersonal relationships are built through subtle imitation and mirror neuron-mediated nonverbal synchronization, creating empathy and social connection.
Framing & Predictive Processing	The brain as a prediction machine; internal sensory models	Perception results from the brain's predictions. Changing the frame of meaning changes how the brain predicts and interprets reality, in line with the principles of NLP mental mapping.

Table 1 shows that several core principles of NLP have a direct correspondence with neurobiological mechanisms long studied in neuroscience (Mondal, 2024). The representational system has been shown to reflect the brain's multisensory processing structure; anchoring aligns with the LTP mechanism that strengthens neural associations; reframing shows a close relationship with neuroplasticity and emotion regulation processes; rapport is strongly based on findings regarding the mirror neuron system; while framing and predictive processing align with current understandings of the brain as a prediction machine that continually revises its internal models.

Thus, although NLP is often criticized for lacking empirical evidence in some aspects, its integration with neuroscience provides a conceptual foundation that strengthens many of its fundamental assumptions. In this context, NLP serves not only as a practical technique but also as a neuro-linguistic framework closely related to the biological dynamics of the brain and the process of meaning construction in human consciousness (Gran, 2021). This integration provides space for the development of a more scientific NLP while also opening the door to more comprehensive multidisciplinary research in the future.

Philosophical and Epistemological Implications of NLP

One of the most important philosophical implications of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is its ability to bridge the mind-body dualism that has dominated Western philosophy since René Descartes. In the Cartesian tradition, the mind and body are viewed as two separate substances: the mind is immaterial and the body is mechanistic (Camargo, 2025). NLP rejects this dichotomy by viewing consciousness as an embodied phenomenon, the result of the interaction of linguistic, sensory, and neurobiological processes (Subotić, 2023). Subjective experience does not exist outside the body, but emerges through interconnected neural networks, emotions, and language (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In other words, every meaning constructed by an individual is directly related to patterns of neural activation, physiological reactions, and sensorimotor interactions. This view

aligns with the direction of contemporary philosophy that views humans not as fragmented beings, but as holistic entities that construct the world through a speaking body and a thinking brain (Varela, 1991). Thus, NLP offers an alternative framework that overcomes dualism and leads to a more integrative understanding of consciousness.

Beyond overcoming dualism, NLP also raises important epistemological implications by understanding consciousness as a self-organizing algorithmic system (Moleka, 2025). From this perspective, the mind does not operate randomly, but rather follows structured patterns at the linguistic, sensory, and neurocognitive levels. This concept is closely related to the cybernetic philosophy developed by Norbert Wiener, who views biological and social systems as operating through feedback mechanisms and self-organization (Moraru & Di Leo, 2021). NLP reflects this principle through the idea that small changes in language or perception can produce overall changes in a person's behavioral patterns, much like the dominance effect in complex systems (Mihalcea et al., 2024). Furthermore, systems theory asserts that every element of the human being—mind, emotions, body, memory—influences each other in an internally organized network (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). NLP operates on a similar logic: consciousness is viewed as a series of algorithms that can be reprogrammed through reframing, anchoring, or manipulation of linguistic structures (Drigas & Mitsea, 2021). By understanding consciousness algorithmically, NLP opens up new avenues for interpreting thought processes as the result of a configuration of biological mechanisms that can be modified to produce more adaptive changes.

A further implication is the integration of symbolic and biological dimensions in the formation of meaning. NLP rests on the assumption that linguistic meaning, inner metaphors, and mental symbols are not merely abstract but rooted in neural processes. Neuroscientific findings indicate that words, metaphors, or symbolic representations can activate specific brain areas associated with emotion, memory, or sensory perception (Lakoff et al., 1999). This suggests that meaning resides not only in the symbolic realm but is also embedded in the brain's biological structures. Conversely, neural processes themselves acquire meaning through the linguistic and symbolic interpretations given by individuals. Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between symbols and biology: symbols activate neural networks, while neural networks provide the foundation for the emergence of symbols and meaning. This symbolic-biological integration has broad implications, including how humans communicate, build morality, and develop spirituality (Ivić, 2024). In religious contexts, for example, transcendental experiences are often mediated by ritual language, sacred metaphors, and symbolic structures that influence a person's emotional responses and spiritual perceptions (Barrett, 2023). In the context of morality, value language such as “goodness,” “justice,” or “sanctity” can trigger specific affective responses that guide ethical decisions (Gray et al., 2022). NLP is relevant here because it helps explain how religious or moral symbols can be internalized and result in changes in behavior and life orientation.

The philosophical and epistemological implications of NLP demonstrate that this approach is not merely a technical tool of popular psychology, but a conceptual framework capable of integrating language, body, and brain as a unified consciousness (Carrara, 2025). NLP rejects dualistic views and replaces them with a holistic model that views humans as mutually constructing linguistic-biological systems. By integrating symbols and biology, NLP broadens understanding of communication, spiritual experience, and the process of meaning-making in contemporary human life (Coletta, 2025).

Philosophical and Scientific Critique of NLP

Although Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) offers an appealing and integrative conceptual framework, this approach has not been immune to criticism, particularly from scientists and philosophers who question its empirical, ontological, and ethical foundations. The first criticism comes from the empirical side, highlighting the lack of consistent experimental evidence supporting claims of NLP's effectiveness. Since the 1980s, several research reviews have found that many NLP techniques—such as representational systems and eye-accessing cues—lack repeatability in laboratory studies (Heap, 1988). This indicates a gap between the theoretical claims put forward by NLP's founders and objectively verifiable scientific evidence. Many NLP techniques are also based primarily on anecdotal observations or practitioner experiences, rather than measurable empirical data. These criticisms suggest that most NLP propositions remain speculative, requiring more systematic research to gain acceptance within the broader scientific community (Sharpley, 1987). Thus, NLP's scientific status remains ambiguous—between a subjectively effective practical approach and an unproven psychological theory.

From an ontological perspective, criticism of NLP concerns the lack of clarity regarding the nature of consciousness, which underpins its entire approach. While NLP attempts to model how the mind operates through language and sensory representations, it has yet to provide a deep philosophical answer to what

consciousness is and how the relationship between subjective experience and biological processes fundamentally occurs. In the philosophy of mind, questions about qualia, subjectivity, and the mind-brain relationship are fundamental issues that cannot be resolved simply by explaining linguistic or sensory patterns (Chalmers, 1996). Some philosophers also consider NLP reductive because it reduces complex phenomena such as consciousness, emotion, or identity to mere "language patterns" or "mental maps," without addressing their deeper existential and ontological dimensions (Searle, 2004). In other words, the ontological critique asserts that while NLP is practically useful, the approach still requires philosophical exploration to avoid falling into simplifications that ignore the complex structures of human consciousness.

Another critical aspect arises from ethical issues. NLP, which focuses on the influence of language and communication patterns, is often considered to have the potential for misuse in the context of persuasion, interpersonal manipulation, and politics (Bassi et al., 2024). Because NLP provides a deep understanding of how language can influence a person's perceptions and emotions, these techniques can be used unethically to control the decisions or beliefs of others without their awareness, particularly in marketing, political campaigns, or unbalanced interpersonal relationships. These ethical risks are exacerbated when NLP is used by therapists who lack a strong scientific basis, thus creating the potential for misuse of psychologically vulnerable individuals. In this context, ethical criticism emphasizes the importance of regulation, a code of ethics, and the precautionary principle to prevent NLP practices from becoming a tool of manipulation that harms others (Prabhumoye et al., 2021). The presence of anchoring, reframing, or rapport techniques can have a significant impact on an individual, so their use without ethical and professional competence can pose serious risks.

In addition to empirical, ontological, and ethical criticism, NLP has also faced criticism from a philosophical perspective. Many scholars believe that NLP's theoretical framework lacks methodological coherence and does not demonstrate a clear connection between theoretical concepts and scientific data (Shan, 2025). NLP is considered a closed system that develops its own terms and concepts without verification through rigorous scientific procedures (Cogliati et al., 2005). From a hermeneutical and phenomenological perspective, NLP is also considered too focused on linguistic structures and insufficiently attentive to the historical, contextual, and intersubjective dimensions of human experience. Therefore, a number of philosophers argue that NLP requires deeper integration with the traditions of phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty), hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur), and contemporary neuroethics, which address the moral aspects of interventions into human consciousness and behavior (Churchland et al., 2012). This critique highlights the importance of remapping the relationship between NLP techniques, psychological theory, and neuroscientific findings to give this approach stronger scientific and philosophical legitimacy.

Thus, these critiques demonstrate that while NLP has great potential as a practical approach and conceptual framework, it still requires strengthening in the empirical, ontological, ethical, and methodological areas (Haridy et al., 2023). This critique actually opens up space for further development of NLP as an approach that is not only practically appealing but also scientifically and philosophically sound.

Synthesis: NLP as Neuro-Linguistic-Phenomenological Programming

The conceptual synthesis between NLP, philosophy, and neuroscience leads us to understand NLP as Neuro-Linguistic-Phenomenological Programming, a framework that integrates three main dimensions of consciousness: neuro, linguistic, and phenomenological. The neuro dimension emphasizes that consciousness has a biophysiological basis, located in constantly changing neural networks and sensory dynamics. This view is supported by research on neuroplasticity, which shows that experience and language can modify brain structure and function (Doidge, 2007). The linguistic dimension is present through the idea that meaning, interpretation, and symbols are the basic structures that shape human experience, as emphasized in modern philosophy of language (Gadamer, 1975). Meanwhile, the phenomenological dimension refers to direct subjective experience—lived experience—which is the foundation for the formation of meaning in everyday life (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These three dimensions do not stand alone, but are interconnected in shaping the structure of human consciousness. Thus, this synthesis positions NLP not simply as a communication technique, but as a philosophical-neuroscientific framework that maps consciousness as the intersection of body, language, and experience.

Through the integration of these three dimensions, NLP can be understood as a holistic model of consciousness that operates through a spiral interaction between the body, perception, language, meaning, action, and feedback (Guerrero et al., 2025). In this model, the body provides the sensory basis for perception, perception

shapes linguistic representations, language produces meaning, meaning guides action, and action generates feedback that in turn influences the body and neural networks (Sanna, 2025). This spiral cycle suggests that small changes in any one dimension—for example, through reframing language or changing sensory patterns—can gradually alter the overall pattern of consciousness. This spiral model aligns with systems theory and self-organization, which view consciousness as a dynamic process that continually shapes itself through internal and external interactions (Varela, 1991). Within this framework, NLP can be understood as a strategy for intervening at key points in the spiral of consciousness—for example, inner language, sensory memory, or symbolic action—to encourage self-transformation that is more adaptive, constructive, and aligned with the individual's neurobiological state (Nualláin, 2014).

This neuro-linguistic-phenomenological synthesis has important implications for the study of religion and contemporary issues. In a religious context, NLP offers a new lens for understanding spirituality as a body-language experience, not simply a doctrinal system (Leyton, 2022). Religious experiences are often mediated by inner language, emotions, bodily rituals, and symbols that form structures of transcendental meaning (Butler et al., 2025). NLP helps map how certain religious symbols, prayers, mantras, or rituals activate specific neural responses that create feelings of spiritual closeness, peace, or ecstasy. In the study of ritual, NLP can be used to understand how sensory patterns, body movements, and symbolic narratives work together to form sacred experiences (Bruehler, 2022). Similarly, in the study of religious consciousness, NLP techniques such as reframing or anchoring provide insights into how individuals interpret spiritual experiences, internalize moral values, or process transformative experiences within the framework of their inner language (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2024).

Amidst contemporary issues such as identity crises, social anxiety, and shifts in digital culture, this synthesis becomes increasingly relevant because it demonstrates that self-transformation occurs not only through changes in the mind, but also through the simultaneous engineering of language, body, and sensory experience (Walther & Lew, 2022). NLP, in its integrated form with philosophy and neuroscience, provides a richer framework for understanding humans as neuro-symbolic beings who construct reality through embodied experience and linguistic interpretation (Bhuyan et al., 2024). Thus, this perspective opens up new space for multidisciplinary research that connects spirituality, culture, psychology, and neuroscience in understanding the dynamics of modern human consciousness.

To clarify the conceptual position of NLP as Neuro-Linguistic-Phenomenological Programming, this section summarizes the key points discussed in tabular form. This summary aims to provide a more concise and systematic visualization of the three main dimensions that form the foundation of this synthesis: neurobiological, linguistic, and phenomenological aspects. Furthermore, this table also maps how the integration of these three dimensions produces a holistic model of consciousness that operates in a spiral and dynamic manner, as well as its contribution to the study of religion and contemporary issues. This concise presentation is expected to help readers understand the conceptual relationships between the sections and see NLP's position within a broader multidisciplinary framework.

Table 2 Summary of NLP Synthesis

Part	Key Points
1. Three-Dimensional Integration	• Neuro: Awareness based on neural networks & sensory dynamics. • Linguistic: Meaning is formed by language, symbols, and interpretation. • Phenomenological: Lived experience as a source of meaning.
2. Holistic Model of Consciousness	• Consciousness works as an interactive spiral: body → perception → language → meaning → action → feedback → back to the body. • Describes consciousness as a dynamic & self-organizing system. • Changes in one element (e.g. inner language) affect the entire system.
3. Contribution to Religious Studies & Contemporary Issues	• NLP maps spirituality as body experience + inner language. • Relevant to understanding rituals, symbols, and structures of religious meaning. • Useful in analyzing changes in religious consciousness, moral values, and transformative experiences.

Table 2 summary shows that NLP has broader potential than simply communication techniques or psychological therapy. When understood as an integration of neurobiological, linguistic, and phenomenological

aspects, NLP can serve as a theoretical framework to more comprehensively explain the dynamics of human consciousness. NLP's spiral model of body–perception–language–meaning–action demonstrates how small changes in inner language or symbolic interpretation can result in significant personal transformation (Munsoor, 2021). Furthermore, NLP's contribution to the study of religion and contemporary issues demonstrates that this approach can map spiritual experiences, rituals, and changes in religious consciousness through an analysis of the body, emotions, and symbols (Felipe-Ruiz, 2024). Thus, the table above not only provides a conceptual summary but also confirms NLP's position as a multidisciplinary framework relevant to various fields of modern study.

CONCLUSION

A study of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) from a philosophical and neuroscientific perspective demonstrates that this approach has intellectual significance far beyond its popularity as a communication method or self-development technique. NLP can be understood as a conceptual framework that positions human consciousness as the integration of neurobiological processes, linguistic structures, and phenomenological experiences. Through ontological, epistemological, and axiological analysis, it is clear that the foundations of NLP thinking align with contemporary philosophical developments that reject dualism and view humans as beings who construct reality through the body, language, and sensory interactions. Thus, NLP is not only a practical technique, but also a philosophical approach that provides new insights into how humans construct and interpret the world.

From a modern neuroscience perspective, research demonstrates a strong relevance between the concepts of representational systems, anchoring, reframing, rapport, and predictive brain models with scientific findings on neuroplasticity, sensory systems, mirror neurons, and predictive processing. These findings reinforce the understanding that many NLP principles are rooted in real biological dynamics and can be explained through observable neural mechanisms. While some NLP claims still require more rigorous empirical verification, the connection between NLP concepts and neuroscience opens up space for productive multidisciplinary dialogue. This integration demonstrates that changes in language, interpretation of meaning, and sensory experience can influence brain structure and function, providing a scientific basis for the potential for self-transformation through linguistic and embodied experiential approaches.

However, this study also uncovers several important criticisms that cannot be ignored. Empirically, many techniques in NLP are still considered insufficiently supported by rigorous experimental research and tend to be anecdotal. Ontologically, NLP does not yet provide comprehensive answers regarding the nature of consciousness and still requires philosophical in-depth study to avoid falling into reductionism. Ethically, the potential misuse of linguistic and psychological techniques demands moral awareness and professional regulation to prevent NLP from being used as a tool of manipulation in therapeutic, political, or interpersonal contexts. Methodological criticism from a philosophical perspective also reminds us that NLP needs to build stronger internal coherence and a more systematic connection with scientific findings and the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition. These criticisms are not intended to undermine NLP, but rather serve as a foundation for developing this approach in a more scientific, ethical, and philosophical direction.

The synthesis of philosophy, linguistics, and neuroscience leads us to understand NLP as Neuro-Linguistic-Phenomenological Programming, a framework that connects neural dynamics, symbolic meaning, and subjective experience in an integrated manner. Through a spiral model of consciousness involving body, perception, language, meaning, action, and feedback, NLP presents a conceptual structure that maps self-change within a framework of self-organization. This perspective demonstrates that transformation occurs not only at the cognitive level but is a holistic process involving all dimensions of human existence. Changes in meaning or inner language, for example, not only alter the way of thinking but can also influence emotional responses, behavior, and neural configuration.

In the context of religious studies and contemporary issues, this synthesis opens up new space for understanding spirituality as an embodied experience mediated by symbols, language, and rituals. NLP provides analytical tools for understanding how individuals interpret transcendental experiences, how religious rituals operate through sensory and symbolic manipulation, and how changes in religious consciousness are shaped through inner language and emotional experiences. Thus, NLP contributes significantly to bridging the study of spirituality, psychology, anthropology, and neuroscience in understanding humans as neuro-symbolic beings.

Overall, this research confirms that NLP has the potential to be a rich, multidisciplinary conceptual framework relevant to modern scientific developments. While still facing empirical and philosophical criticism, the integration of NLP, philosophy, and neuroscience provides a strong foundation for further development. NLP can

serve as an important bridge connecting the dimensions of body, language, and consciousness, and provide new insights into how humans construct reality, make sense of experiences, and transform themselves in the context of contemporary life.

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