

# **SENSORY MODALITIES MODEL (VAKOG) APPLICATION IN CLASSES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES OF THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF LIBEREC**

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## **Abstract**

Representational systems are part of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) which explores the human processing of information. NLP specialists list visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory senses as parts of this system, which provides educators with a tool to study how individuals attach meaning to events, and how they formulate ideas in words. The predominant method of data processing is a mixture of the first three basic modes mentioned above. The main idea of this article is to show a repertoire of tasks and types of classroom activities which utilise some elements of NLP theory and the notion of multiple intelligences. It will be demonstrated how to use these exercises with university students learning Business English and English as a foreign language in order to spur their constructivist mastery of learning strategies, language development, and communication patterns change.

## **Introduction**

In times of over-burdened university facilitators who struggle hard with multi-tasking (e. g. lecturing, research and management agenda, increasing amounts of administrative tasks and roles, large classes with students of mixed abilities), it is necessary to utilise all available resources effectively.

Moreover, research findings (for example, Sternberg, 1982) demonstrate that outcomes reached through isolated language intelligence may be rather limited. This in fact means that when we, as language teachers, purely focus on the linguistic domain, we can only address a minority of our students. That is why we have to provide a wide repertoire of stimuli, which can trigger core mental operations and enhance our students' foreign language development. According to Puchta and Rinvulcri (2005:16) "Student motivation depends partly on how addressed they feel in class and on how meaningful they think the activities are to them. " As long as we only process isolated pieces of information in some way that renders them memorable, we may not remember much. Therefore it is necessary to address the sensory store as the initial repository of information, from which data eventually enter the short-term and long-term stores. That is why we have to devote our full attention to this area. It is the purpose of this article to present suitable class activities to enhance the sensory input and stimulate language awareness of students.

## **1 VAKOG Model and its Significance in EFL**

VAKOG stands for Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, Olfactory and Gustatory human sensory systems. By providing stimuli for these senses of our students we avoid that their language development is becoming stunted. When we enable our students to learn a foreign language by drawing on a variety of intelligences, we can foster their ability to activate themselves more. Since we can hardly predict what kind of thought processes will be triggered, we should strive to offer as wide a repertoire of stimuli as possible and let our students process the information according to their predominant sensory stimuli. Such an approach will activate our students to be creative while processing and storing information. So we can rightly expect them to outperform others who are placed in more conventional instructional conditions that do not fully match their patterns of abilities.

After this brief introduction of some major postulates of the VAKOG model, let us now analyse individual areas where our students will flourish. We will mainly focus on learning outcomes and the development of awareness.

When we trigger the students' active processing of information, we will help them to master self-study activities better and help them to internalise a set of positive self-statements. This happens due to the raised awareness of their strengths and the mastered techniques for compensating their weaknesses. Students will become more self-motivated and even the more diffident ones will be ready to take more risks, contribute to discussions and develop their meta-cognitive awareness. Making them adopt a higher degree of engagement in the learning process and visualise mental pictures, we will address their ability and their capability of formulating ideas more precisely. However, by no means are we proponents of some bombardment with visual stimuli. Yet, it is our deep belief that mental images are inseparable from successful learning process, and they serve learners well if enough time for consolidation is provided. By linking stimuli for all senses, we will supply the required timeframe, help to prolong students' attention span and contribute to the development of cross-curricular thinking skills, which go far beyond the use in the language classroom.

Being guided like this, students will go on constructing their intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences by mastering approaches for building rapport and by becoming more flexible and aware of others. Finally, the element of enjoying a critical approach to learning in a stimulating environment will also help their memory-fixing process. As Arnold, Puchta and Rinvoluceri (2007) have pointed out, language mastery becomes more efficient when learners create as many referential connections between the studied language and the surrounding world. We process sensory data input better and translate it through our emotional responses to the experiences for later language reception and language production.

## **2 How to Apply Theory in the Classroom?**

Since contact hours with university students are often scarce, it is rather difficult to spend too much precious time together on awareness raising per se. University educators, for the sake of time restrictions, often assume that their adult students have already become aware of their dominant learning mode and strategy during their school socialization. However, we may have some doubts if these assumptions are based on reality, yet we have to accept them as a fact. Teachers-realists must narrow down the repertoire of the existing tools and instruments to be able to utilize them meaningfully in the limited timeframe they have at their disposal. Yet, we do consider this area to be so significant to claim that educators must select at least some activities addressing this issue. Let us proceed to examine several tasks used in the classes of English at our university in more detail and illustrate the manifold opportunities for exploiting them.

## 2.1 VAKOG Dictation

Should we be in a situation that at least a minimum time slot can be dedicated to the awareness raising area, a *VAKOG dictation* can be a very simple method to be used. The traditional way of the dictation will be altered and students, instead of simply writing the words, link the way they write with their first associations to the individual senses.

Apart from practising spelling, students work with growing awareness on their preferred learning style, and they can use the written information for a follow-up discussion with their peers. The categorisations and links do assist their storage and retrieval abilities.




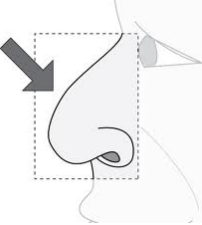

				
Hawaii	forecast	takeover	laboratory	smoking
shares	pirates	conference	ocean	
capital	secret	product		
distributor		merger		

Figure 1 Sample VAKOG dictation product

Another simple, yet powerful activity can be used even with students at lower language levels. They will get cards with letters of the alphabet and they will be told to act as a *magnified computer screen*. The teacher dictates words and students with the correct letter have to stand up and spell the word. Apart from a spelling practice focus, a lot of fun is introduced and physical movement helps with brain stimulation.

## 2.2 Picture-Story Recycling

Numerous specialists have studied how effective recycling of *pictures* can be. Reducing the whole topic profoundly, we want to emphasise that pictures do not only help to address the linguistic, but also the cultural and emotional intelligences, which is a welcome opportunity for encouraging further holistic development of adult students and for enhancing their motivation.

In discussions about products and their maintenance, the following task based on a story with pictures was introduced in class. Students were invited to draw a ground floor of an English house. Then they learned that they would read a letter sent to a mother by her son informing her about some things that went wrong round the house in her absence. Their task was to predict what disasters they would hear about, and then they compared their versions to the picture version of the story and finally the letter itself.

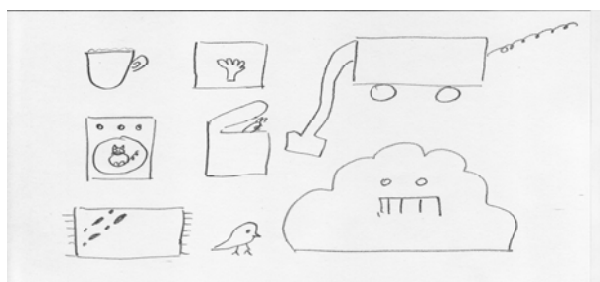


Figure 2 Picture story

What followed was a detailed discussion of how things can become damaged or faulty, and what possibilities for repairs exist. This activity prompted a revision and reinforcement of vocabulary areas and topics one could hardly predict accurately. We dwelled on types of problems (things broken, shabby, worn, with cracks), materials and instruments used for fixing (wallpaper, glue, nails, screwdrivers), professions invited to help (plumber, painter, carpenter, cat psychologist, exorcist). The discussions that followed led to issues such as bringing up children, developing responsibility, contrasting students' individual experience with their parents' behaviour in similar situations, and also to summaries of writing rules connected with various genres and registers (e.g. letter writing).

We claim that such a task provided enough stimuli to address all aspects of Sternberg's (1995) triarchic theory of intelligence. Students were creative, analytical and practical. They used their mental images connected with experienced situations; they worked both with the visual and with auditory clues.

### 2.3 ICT in Class

Modern computer technology (ICT) provides teachers and/or students with challenging alternatives to apply Buzan's *mental maps* (1993). The software wordle is one valuable option to produce *word clouds* which sum up the most important words from the studied text. Such clouds provide a good memory anchor for our students and will help them reformulate and paraphrase the new ideas and language areas they have studied.



Figure 3 Word cloud created by the author for her class

## 2.4 Figurative Speech

Examples of figurative speech and elements of stylistics offer an endless range of addressing the senses. For example, students can compare various ways of expressing an idea seen from different angles and study how clear or ambiguous the expressions seem to be for individuals.

Here are two examples for lack of understanding and for learning concepts:

*I take a dim view of that. That's uncalled for. That doesn't grab me. I've got a blind spot about..., I'm deaf to..., and I'm closed to/not open to...*

or

*.... an idea was planted in my head.... the light finally switched on..., it was as if I peeled of another onion layer and I started getting closer, I struggled with the ideas and then finally pinned them down and captured.*

As in the other types of activities described above, students explore and master lexical *chunks* (Lindstromberg, Boers, 2008), the understanding of which will assist them to use their foreign language more naturally and fluently. In this way we will almost naturally proceed to studying features of both spoken grammar and authentic language which students will encounter in real-life communication. This approach will help us to avoid the frequent complaint of students that even if they master the language in the textbook, they have problems in real-life communication acts.

## 2.5 Pantomiming and Psychodrama

To assist learners, who better process information through motion, *acting* out chunks and letting the others guess which chunk they are trying to *mime* has proved to be an efficient method. This approach can also be used to *illustrate idioms*. To address other learners' needs, we might invite them to prepare pictures for idioms or chunks and let the others guess the meaning, as, for example, in the Google picture illustrating the phrase "*beat around the bush*".



Figure 4 Google picture

Another powerful area to be utilized in teaching is represented by introducing features of *psychodrama* and working with *tapescripts*. This is a safe way where learners can play other roles or take on a new identity. They can react to other people and cooperate in teams, say only what they want and see things from another perspective.

Furthermore, a combination of drama with *music* can be introduced to classes very effectively. Numerous language teachers have used gapped versions of song lyrics, but this activity might be expanded. Comparing types of figurative examples from English and Czech has also proved to be very useful in our language classes. This will help us focus attention on culture within another language.

## 2.6 Songs and Lyrics

Students can work with lyrics in a number of creative tasks. For example, Eric Clapton's song *You are wonderful tonight* can be transformed into a dialogue between a detective interrogating a crime and a witness providing an account of what happened.

Lyrics of the *Heavy Fuel* song of Dire Straits offer a powerful springboard for developing mental maps of the lifestyle of the main character, his diet, life experiences and philosophy. The text lends itself easily to making detailed descriptions of the person's appearance. Starting from a rather stereotypical idea shared by many that the main character might be clothed in leather, showing a prominent tattoo and so on, we will accomplish a lot of work if we try to provide him with an image change he might need should he need to take part in a reception at the Buckingham palace.

The previously mentioned activity, alongside with others, brings to mind the relatively newly coined buzzword CLIL. It appears to be a new concept, yet, in our opinion it is partly only a new label for something rather obvious that has been existing in teaching languages for a long time. Educators should teach not only the language for the sake of it, but true communication; thus cross-curricular linking and focus on interacting with the world surrounding us are a key.

Approaches similar to those mentioned above can naturally be applied to working with *poetry* or *tongue twisters* where we emphasise the rhythm, stress patterns, rhymes and different types of images. Omitting individual words one by one and then team reconstructing of the original text provides a powerful peg system in students' memory.

We have selected Debjani Chatterje's poem from the collection of Gaby Morgan (2005) to illustrate our approach.

### Postcard from Lilliput

Much news but  
little space  
on Lilliput  
cards, so use  
imagination. Gulliver.

## 2.7 Dialogues with Formal Constraints

From our experience, we evaluate rather positively tasks where students are supposed to create *dialogues with some formal constraints*. Students have been invited to work in pairs and prepare dialogues consisting of only questions, or of one-word utterances. Another arbitrary restriction could be that they write dialogues where individual speech acts start with letters according to their order in the alphabet, or dialogues consisting of several words in the first remark and their number gradually decreasing with every single response following. To change the type of an utterance, students can be invited to write an endless sentence, where the only restriction is that it must be grammatically correct.

A spoken alternative of this task can instruct students to discuss an issue with a partner and after a time limit *change a partner and discuss the same issue once more*.

This approach provides an opportunity for repetition, colligation reinforcement and for cohesion development when expressing thoughts. Although initially fairly difficult, this task required students to communicate actively, that means first to *listen to somebody and then to sum up his or her speech*.

Further on, a *simple skeleton for a story* can be offered and students are to complete it by adding details about what the situation looked like, what sounds one could hear etc. To *list alphabetically the sounds one hears* in the morning and during the day is a real challenge for

intermediate students. For tasks like this an invaluable source to be utilized is the Google search for sensory words and sensory language.

## Conclusion

The above listed classroom activities demonstrate clearly that to achieve true learning outcomes in class, it is necessary to construct a picture in the mind by linking words in L1 and L2. Students' short-term memory repertoire will be shifted to the long-term memory when they visualise meanings through fairly obscure and absurd images; the more absurd these are, the more likely students will recall meanings and words. Students must be encouraged to write down vocabulary entries in an imaginative way. They are to be invited to chain images and connect them into a storyline. If they chunk them and use categorical clustering to organise them in some meaningful way (e.g. by using keywords and peg word systems for images), it will be easier for them to retrieve the lexical items.

We truly believe that it is not required to consider pattern drill, copying, and translation activities as taboo. Repeating lexical chunks to a rhythm, using songs and chants full of imaginary, sounds and visual mental images are excellent methods to activate motor functions. Movement enhances motivation and emotions trigger the brain. When we create an optimum learning environment and provide numerous opportunities for recycling, we will contribute to an easier storage system in the long term memory, which will enhance retention. The key to success lies in increasing student involvement, enabling creativity, and raising their awareness of what tools are available and can be applied for genuine learning.

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## **APLIKACE MODELU SMYSLOVÝCH MODALIT (VAKOG) V HODINÁCH NA KATEDŘE CIZÍCH JAZYKŮ TU V LIBERCI**

Reprezentální systémy jsou jedním z modelů používaných v neuro-lingvistickém programování (NLP), které se zaměřují na studium toho, jak lidská mysl zpracovává informace. Neuro-lingvisté uvádějí vizuální, auditorní, kinestetické, olfaktorické a chuťové smysly jako součásti tohoto systému, který poskytuje pedagogům jeden z nástrojů ke zkoumání, jak lidé přiřazují význam k událostem a jak jej následně formulují verbálně. Nejčastěji používaný způsob zpracování dat je směs prvních tří základních smyslů uvedených výše. Hlavním cílem tohoto příspěvku je ukázat repertoár úloh a aktivit používaných při práci se třídou, kdy se využívá prvků z teorie NLP a rozmanitých inteligencí. Příspěvek ukáže, jak tato cvičení využívat s vysokoškolskými studenty, kteří se učí obchodní angličtinu a anglický jazyk jako jazyk cizí. Můžeme je využít pro konstruktivistický přístup k budování jejich jazykových strategií a jazykových dovedností a vést je ke změně jejich vzorců vyjadřování.

## **SINNESMODALITÄTSMODELL (VAKOG) ANWENDUNG IN KLASSEN AN DER ABTEILUNG VON FREMDSPRACHEN DER TU LIBEREC**

Repräsentationssysteme sind Teil der in der neurolinguistischen Programmierung (NLP) verwendeten Modelle, die erforschen, wie menschliche Wesen Informationen verarbeiten. Neurolinguisten führen visuelle, auditive, kinästhetische, olfaktorische und gustatorische Sinne als Bestandteile dieses System an, das den Pädagogen ein Instrument bietet zu erforschen, wie die Menschen Geschehnissen eine Bedeutung zuordnen und diese anschließend verbal formulieren. Die am häufigsten angewendete Art der Datenverarbeitung ist eine Mischung aus den ersten drei oben angeführten Grundsinnes. Das Hauptziel dieses Beitrags besteht in der Vorstellung eines Repertoires an Aufgaben und Aktivitäten für den Fremdsprachenunterricht sowie in der Klärung, wann bestimmte Elemente aus der neurolinguistischen Theorie für die vielfältigen Intelligenzen genutzt werden können. Der Beitrag zeigt, wie diese Übungen von Hochschulstudenten angewendet werden können, die Englisch als Fremdsprache und als Wirtschaftsfachsprache lernen. Die Anwendung dieser Übungen unterstützt die konstruktivistische Beherrschung von Lernstrategien, die Sprachentwicklung und den Wechsel von Kommunikationsmustern.

## **ZASTOSOWANIE MODELU MODALNOŚCI SENSORYCZNYCH (VAKOG) NA ZAJĘCIACH PROWADZONYCH W KATEDRZE JĘZYKÓW OBCYCH NA TU LIBEREC**

Systemy reprezentacyjne należą do modeli stosowanych w programowaniu neurolingwistycznym (NLP). Wykorzystywane są do badania sposobu przetwarzania informacji przez ludzki umysł. Neurolingwiści opisują zmysły wzrokowe, audytywne, kinestetyczne, węchowe i smakowe jako elementy tego systemu, który udostępnia dydaktykom jeden z instrumentów do badania sposobu, w jaki ludzie przyporządkowują znaczenie różnym zjawiskom i w jaki je później opisują werbalnie. Najczęściej stosowanym sposobem przetwarzania danych jest połączenie trzech wyżej wymienionych podstawowych zmysłów. Głównym celem niniejszego opracowania jest przedstawienie zespołu zadań i działań podejmowanych w trakcie zajęć z klasą, w ramach których wykorzystywane są elementy teorii NLP oraz teorii wielorakich inteligencji. Opracowanie to wskazuje na możliwości wykorzystywania tych ćwiczeń w ramach zajęć ze studentami, którzy uczą się biznesowego języka angielskiego oraz języka angielskiego jako języka obcego. Możemy wykorzystać je w celu konstruktywnego podejścia do budowania ich strategii i umiejętności językowych, prowadząc ich jednocześnie do zmiany wzorców ich wyrażania się.