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*Not Quite Everything About Everything
You Want to Know About the New Field of — **Neuro-Semantics®***

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

We first introduced the new cutting-edge field of **Neuro-Semantics** in our book *Mind-Lines: Lines that Change Minds* (1997). Since then we have also published other works in this field of *Neuro-Semantics*. These include *Figuring Out People: Design Engineering Using Meta-Programs* (1998), *Time-Lining: Patterns for Adventuring in Time* (1998), and *The Secrets of Magic* (1998).

In 1999 we first brought out pieces to highlight and distinguish **Neuro-Semantics** from NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) and GS (General Semantics). The most radical and revolutionary of is the work regarding the so-called "submodality" model.

Since we have had many questions about this new field, this paper will utilize the following questions that we most frequently hear people ask to navigate our way through the process of setting off the distinctive features of **Neuro-Semantics**. I have written this with the invaluable help of my colleagues, Bob Bodenhamer and Elvis Keith Lester.

- What is Neuro-Semantics & where did it come from?
- How does Neuro-Semantics differ from Neuro-Linguistic Programming?
- How does Neuro-Semantics differ from General Semantics?
- What uniquely distinguishes this new field?
- What central principles govern this domain?
- What is *The Institute of Neuro-Semantics®*?
- *Who are the principal players in the Institutes of Neuro-Semantics?*
- What is their agenda, motivation, and intentions?

What is Neuro-Semantics & Where did it Come From?

Neuro-Semantics began in 1997 as the brain-child of Michael Hall and Bobby Bodenhamer as we engaged in various conversations about *Meta-States*, *NLP*, and General Semantics. Out of those conversations we wrote several articles regarding the current state of affairs in NLP. The first one we entitled, "*The Downside of NLP.*" This article, as well as some follow up articles about the state of disarray, bad P.R., the Bandler lawsuit, the over-emphasis and vague emphasis on "installing learnings unconsciously," etc. were published in *Anchor Point*. Nelson Penaylillo (NLP Trainer in Australia), Peter Kean (NLP Trainer, Washington DC), Keith Lester (NLP Trainer, Tampa FL), and Robert Olic (NLP Trainer, Philadelphia, PA) were the first to thereafter joined in the conversation.

In extending, expanding, and enriching both NLP and GS, we (Hall and Bodenhamer) first sought simply to unite and synthesize the best pieces from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and General Semantics. Our passion was to get more credibility and validity for the field that seemed so disorganized and torn by competition in the USA. Simultaneously, we were developing numerous new patterns using *the Meta-States Model*. This was beginning to revolutionize things and it was Dr. Bodenhamer who first saw this vision in the Meta-States model. Consequently we choose the term **Neuro-Semantics** to designate the new enriched field.

Now the term *Neuro-Semantics* goes back to Alfred Korzybski. The father of General Semantics introduced both phrases, "neuro-linguistic" and "neuro-semantic," in 1936 in some of his papers. Later, they showed up in his 1941 Preface to his classic work, *Science and Sanity*. In Korzybski's writings, you will find both terms used pretty much synonymously. Here, however, following **the Meta-States Model**[®], we have arbitrarily chosen to use *Neuro-Linguistics* to refer to the Modeling, Methodology, and Technology that has grown out of the field of NLP and *Neuro-Semantics* to refer to the newer and more extensive Modeling, Patterning, Methodology, and Technology that has resulted from the Meta-States Model. In the next section you will find a fuller discrimination between NLP and Neuro-Semantics.

How does Neuro-Semantics differ from Neuro-Linguistic Programming?

NLP emerged as a happen-chance from a modeling project of Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir. This happened as the young college student, Richard Bandler, discovered his genius of imitation of their language patterns. Linguistics Professor, John Grinder, began working with Richard to model the structure of the therapeutic wizards. This brought them into relationship with Dr. Robert Spitzer, who became their first publisher (Science and Behavior Books). And that, in turn, led to their association with the genius of Gregory Bateson (anthropologist, linguist, cybernetician) when Spitzer moved them onto his property. They became neighbors of Bateson. And that connection, in turn, then led them to Milton Erickson and hypnosis.

Using the new formulations of the then-emerging Cognitive Psychology Models, Bandler and Grinder tapped into the elegance of the TOTE Model of Miller, Galanter, and Pribram. This gave them a linear way to track the processes within "the black box" that Behaviorism had always avoided. Out of this came the NLP Strategy Model— a Model for Modeling Excellence. This model primarily operates like a flow chart of consciousness, tracking "mind" linearly. In Neuro-Semantics, we add the vertical dimension and so tease out the hidden meta-levels within the structure of subjectivity.

In the beginning, NLP sought to avoid all theory, explanatory models, and "the why" question by presenting itself as strictly focused on *how do you do that?* Accordingly, NLP arose first and foremost as a Communication Model. It explored how the body (*Neuro*, e.g. the nervous system, physiology, neurology, etc.) gets *Programmed* by the use of various *Languages* (linguistics).

By way of contrast, **Neuro-Semantics** goes beyond the linear "flow chart" analysis of *the Structure of Subjective Experience* by focusing more fully on the Meta-Levels that support and drive the movement of consciousness along its TOTEs. By tracking the *vertical dimensions* of human processing, it moves into higher level *Meanings* much more fully. Accordingly, it tracks and models the neuro-semantic structures of meanings at higher (and typically, unconscious) levels.

Both **Neuro-Semantics and NLP** operate as interdisciplinary approaches, utilizing models from many psychologies. This includes cybernetics, computer science, neuro-biology, family systems, anthropology, etc.

Neuro-Semantics highlights much more fully and extensively the existence of *multiple meta-levels and logical levels* than does NLP. Korzybski (1933/1994) labeled the higher level abstractions as "second order" and "third order" abstractions. He suggested that much study and exploration needs to be done in this area of reflexivity about how we evaluate and then evaluate our evaluations and by that create higher levels of "mind."

Bateson (1972) picked up on this in how he used meta-levels and logical types in his theories of schizophrenia, play, humor, aesthetics, etc. He and the Mental Research Institute (MRI) in Palo Alto laid so much of the foundation for NLP (especially in the 1974 book, *Change* by Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch).

NLP, as a meta-discipline itself, certainly has meta-levels (the Meta-Model, Meta-Programs). And co-developer, Robert Dilts has contributed numerous meta-level models. But nowhere in NLP had a fully descriptive and comprehensive model about Meta-Levels emerged until the development of *the Meta-States® Model* (Hall 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998). This was recognized by the International NLP Trainer's Association in 1995 in their award for Meta-States as "the most significant contribution to NLP in 1994—1995."

In many ways, *the Meta-States Model* has turned NLP upside down. And it has done so in such a simple way. By merely changing the operational metaphor of "depth" inherited from Transformational Grammar, and adopting the "height" metaphor, Meta-States reformulated NLP. Dr. Graham Dawes noted this in his early reviews of *Meta-States* and *Dragon Slaying* commenting that Meta-States will be the model that "ate NLP." Others have commented that Meta-States *outframes NLP* as it sets up higher frames for the processes of NLP. If this sounds like we think Neuro-Semantics will replace NLP, we would like to add that we see it in a different function, namely, as extending, continuing, and evolving the development that began with Korzybski, Bateson, Bandler, Grinder, Dilts, etc.

In the Meta-States Model, the nature of *self-reflexivity* has finally been given its full due. In this way, the model provides a way to track thoughts-about-thoughts, feelings-about-feelings, as our inevitable and inescapable meta-thinking, meta-feeling, and meta-responding generates layers upon layers of cognition. This flexible

model provides a way to identify the ever-changing hierarchy of human consciousness, without becoming a rigid way. The levels themselves shift and change. And true enough, while this makes for seeming *complexity* in human "mind" and experience, the ordering of the Meta-Level Principles formats and structures that complexity. This means that the plastic and flexible nature of meta-levels whereby any thought can *reflect back* onto itself or onto another thought at any level does not have to create confusion or chaos. We can track it. We can model it as a system.

While the recursive nature of thought-feeling does create *complexity*, it does not create chaos. Systemic complexity contains *structure*. So even though it may at first appear as the complexity of chaos, with a meta-level model like Meta-States we can easily discover an ordering at a higher level. And as this distinguishes different *levels* of "thought"— this provides a new and profound understanding in NLP. We have designated this as the beginning of **Neuro-Semantics**. This Meta-Level Model thus provides a way of distinguishing such mental phenomena as:

- Beliefs — Validated Thoughts-about-Thoughts
- Values — Valued Thoughts-about-Thoughts
- Understandings— Extensive systems of Thoughts-about-Thoughts
- Decisions — Choiced Thoughts-about-Thoughts
- Identity — Beliefs about Thoughts-about-"Self" Concepts
- Concepts — Extensive (simple or complex) Understandings about Domains of Understandings
- Categories — conceptual sorting of Concepts
- Reasons —higher level structures *used as* explanatory constructs
- Etc.

As an aside, I should here mention the extreme limitation of the term "thought." By itself, the term reflects a very limited, Aristotelian, and primitive term—an Elementalism. Using the principles of General Semantics, we know that "thought" includes "emotion," hence the awkward yet more sane mapping of *"thought-feeling."* So to use "thought" sanely we have to do so from a non-elementalistic perspective. For people in NLP, this provides a new piece straight from GS that was not in the original Meta-Model. You will find it in the expanded Meta-Model in *The Secrets of Magic*.

With the systemic nature of *self-reflexive thought-feeling* looping recursively back onto itself creating layers of consciousness and the higher level structures (the "mental" phenomena), we have states-about-states or Meta-States. This sets up systemic processing. It generates logical levels in our "thinking-emoting." It sets up *attractors in a self-organizing system*. And these run by certain higher level principles— all articulated as the Meta-Stating Principles.

Now we can begin to sort out different *kinds of meanings*. We can sort out *linkage "meaning,"* previously known as Pavlovian conditioning or *Associative Meanings*. It goes further. It introduces *Contextual Meanings*— the meanings that arise from higher mental contexts. These higher level abstractions of "meanings" into which we categorize and attribute significance to things thereby generates our *Semantic or Conceptual States*. And with this, we introduce yet another new distinction in NLP.

I trust that by now you can recognize that in these ways, **Neuro-Semantics** incorporates higher level "meanings" into the structure of subjectivity. Our "states" involve the primary level neuro-linguistic thoughts-and-feelings in response to something out there in the world. That defines a Primary State. A Meta-State involves more. It involves our thoughts-feeling about our thoughts, emotions, states, memories, imaginations, concepts, etc. It involves our meta-responses to previous responses.

There is a lot more to Neuro-Semantics than this (and more being developed every week), but this does begin to offer a set of distinctions. In summary, notice the following chart.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming	Neuro-Semantics
Linear Processing of the Structure of Experience	Meta-Level Processing
TOTE Strategy Analysis	Vertical Logical Levels Analysis
Linear Flow Chart Tracking Consciousness	Recursiveness/ Reflexivity
Separate Models for various meta-phenomena (i.e. Values, Beliefs, etc.)	Systemic & Holistic Model embracing all of the Meta-Phenomena
Confusion of All "States" as the Same	Distinction between Primary States, Meta-States, Gestalt States
Lack of how Meta-Model & Meta-Programs Relate & Interface	Clarification about the three Meta-Domains as Interactive & Redundant — The Systemic 3 Model.
"Sleight of Mouth" Patterns	Mind-Lines— Conversational Reframing ordered in a logical level format that includes deframing, reframing, outframing, etc.
Confusion of Orientational Metaphor— up and down: depth (core) and height	Clarity about the Orientational Metaphors—
"Submodalities" — Patterns, Technologies, etc.	Recognition of the <i>representational distinctions</i> as actually <i>Meta-Modalities</i> Introduction of <i>Meta-Detailing</i> as the heart of genius Meta-Programs revitalized as early formations of Meta-States Canopies of Consciousness and Attractors of Self-Organizing Systems

How does Neuro-Semantics differ from General Semantics?

General Semantics began with Alfred Korzybski (1933) and continues today as a viable discipline and field in its own right. As an engineer, Korzybski sought to redesign the old Aristotelian *language* as our primary way of *mapping* the territory. He wanted to do this to increase our ability at effective adjustment to increase humanity's sanity. The old mapping involved several unsane factors: identification, elementalism, confusion of levels, etc.

NLP brought over many of the features of General Semantics into its Meta-Model of language. More recently, we have identified many of the Korzybskian linguistic distinctions not brought over and have added them to the Meta-Model (Hall, *Secrets of Magic*, 1998).

Neuro-Semantics differs from General Semantics by its NLP emphasis on modeling excellence and designing patterns, technologies, and new methodologies for human design engineering (a phrase, by the way, originated by Korzybski, 1921). In Neuro-Semantics we have begun to create a *Merging of the Models* (NLP and GS). What we began in November 1998 in London as a three-day training program under the title, *The Merging of the Models*, will eventually result in a second modeling — or Engineering Training using other as-of-yet unmined treasures of Korzybski.

What Uniquely Distinguishes this new field?

Neuro-Semantics stands out as both "enriched" NLP and "enriched" General Semantics. Returning to the sources of NLP, General Semantics, Bateson's works in anthropology, schizophrenia, Levels of Learning, and cybernetics, MRI Institute, Cognitive Psychology (Miller, Galanter, Pribram), etc., we have sought to establish Neuro-Semantics on solid, scientific, and highly researched studies.

NLP, for a variety of reasons, has seemed to have received lots of negative and harmful Public Relations and General Semantics has seemed to locate itself in a small and isolated community. For these (and other reasons), we have sought to step aside *just enough* from NLP and GS so that we can both continue the adventure of modeling and engineering human excellence but not tied down to the limitations of the two source disciplines.

I should mention here that we in the *Institute of Neuro-Semantics* are not the only ones who have been moving in this direction. Canadian Dennis Chong, M.D. and Roye Fraser of Blue Dell Systems, both NLP trainers, have in recent years written about *Neuro-Semantic Programming (NSP)*. As noted on our web site (www.neurosemantics.com), Dr. Chong has written several books mentioned NSP, *Don't Ask Why*, *Language Elegance*, and *Knife Without Pain*. While we have some differences with these gentlemen, the basic thrust and emphasis corresponds to an amazing degree.

Neuro-Semantics has also found new life and excitement in Chaos theory, Self-Organization Theory, the newer developments in Cognitive Psychology, Performance Coaching, Brief Psychotherapy, REBT, Glasser's Reality Therapy/ Control Theory, and many other fields.

What Central Principles govern this domain?

First and foremost of the principles that govern *Neuro-Semantics* is the Bateson principle that "*The higher levels govern (modulate, drive, organize) the lower levels.*" Meta-levels serve as *the frame-of-reference* for the activity (thinking, feeling, responding) that occurs at the levels lower to the frame. The meta-level thus operates as an attractor in a self-organizing system. From this we have identified numerous other principles.

Someone (or something) will always set the frame of reference. The question becomes, "*Who set the frame?*" Count on your Meta-State becoming your unconscious frames— your "way of being in the world," your *attitude*.

Whoever sets the frame will govern the experience (run the game!). Since higher frames govern—and since somebody also sets it, the person who sets the frame thereby takes charge of the subsequent experiences. The resulting thoughts, ideas, concepts, beliefs, emotions, behaviors, language, problems, solutions, and experiences derive their existence from the frame. *Frames govern.*

The whole determines the parts and from the parts, the whole emerges. This speaks about the systemic nature of the mind-body system. It speaks about the *gestalt* nature of our neuro-linguistics processes. The system that emerges from the meta-levels that govern the lower levels brings about an overall gestalt (or configuration of interactive parts) which in turn, define the character of the whole.

In outframing, we set up a higher level frame-of-reference that will take over. The power to identify a frame enables us to step aside from a frame and to set a whole new frame. Doing this transforms everything. It performs meta-level "magic" in that it installs a new self-organizing attractor at the top of the semantic system.

What we call "experience" differs radically and significantly at each level. Korzbyski described these in his "levels of abstraction" model regarding how the nervous system *abstracts* at different levels. We can use the same word/s at the different levels as *multiordinal terms* —terms that have no specific meaning until we specify at which level we refer.

Reflexivity endows consciousness with systemic processes and characteristics. Reflexivity describes the mechanism that drives these levels of abstraction and these meta-level experience. This refers to the fact that our consciousness can *reflect back* onto itself or its products (thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values, decisions, specific concepts, etc.). As it does, it sets up feed-back and feed-forward processes and thereby creates a circular system.

Meta-level disorientation and conflict can create living hells. Generally speaking (numerous exceptions do exist), whenever we bring *negative* thoughts-and-feelings (states) against ourselves or any facet of ourselves, we put ourselves at odds with ourselves. And when our self-relationships (relation to ourselves) become disturbed, we begin to loop around in vicious downward self-reinforcing cycles. And when self-disturbed (self-condemning, self-contempting, self-repressing, self-hating, etc.), this then creates a disturbance for all of our relationships with others. This creates neurosis, psychosis, personality disorders, character disorders, etc.

Paradox frequently governs meta-level solutions for health, integration, balance, and empowerment. The only way to rid ourselves of unwanted thoughts, emotions,

behaviors, habits, etc. involves, *paradoxically*, welcoming, accepting, appreciating, and celebrating that very thought, emotion, behavior, etc. By welcoming it into consciousness we can take counsel of it, reality check it, learn from it, etc. To *not* reckon with it leads to unuseful suppression, repression, self-rejection, etc.

Setting a frame necessitates neuro-linguistic energy & repetition. How do we actually *set* a frame or establish a meta-level State? Merely "thinking" or even "feeling" will not do it. We can think, know, feel, and have awarenesses that do *not establish* a higher level frame-of-reference. Here we need to utilize the natural processes of how our brains operate—we need to use drama, energy, repetition, etc.

Altering higher level frames alters Identity and Destiny. You can't change what you *do* (so that it lasts in a pervasive and generative way), without also changing *who you are*. Does your higher frame of self-definition support the change? Your behavior is like a printout of your Operating Programs.

What are some of the New Techniques & Patterns that have already emerged from Neuro-Semantics?

At this point in time we have not made a full account of the scores of patterns and technologies that have arisen. Every month in *Meta-States Journal* we have published at least one new or adapted pattern. There you will find more than twenty fully described patterns. (We also have most of those in outline form in *Secrets of Meta-States*, the Training Manual). You can locate 16 new *Time-Lining* Patterns in the book by that title, and technologies in the remaking of Meta-Programs (*Figuring Out People*).

- *Conceptual Positions* (the Perceptual Positions reformatted as a Logical Level System and incorporating Semantics.
- *Meta-Yesing: A Ten-Minute Belief Change Pattern.*
- *Inserting Resources Pattern*
- *Meta-Detailing: The heart of Genius (see Meta-Stating Genius)*
- *Modeling with Meta-Levels (see NLP: Going Meta)*

What is *The Institute of Neuro-Semantics*® ?

Who are the Principal Players in the Institutes of Neuro-Semantics?

It began when Michael Hall and Bob Bodenhamer filled for *trademarks* for Neuro-Semantics and Meta-States in 1997. The Registration of the Trademarks were finally obtained in 1998 (Registration numbers: 2,210,336 and 2,199,913). During this time, Dr. Bodenhamer established *The First Institute of Neuro-Semantics* in Gastonia NC, and Elvis Keith Lester established *LEARN USA Institute of Neuro-Semantics* in Tampa, Florida. Later, Robert Olic (Olic Performance Seminars) began sponsoring Neuro-Semantic Trainings by Michael Hall on the east coast.

Since that time, **The Institute of Neuro-Semantics** has established two Web Sites, and has begun to align with other promoters and trainers (Cynthia Tuma,

Houston, *Evergreen Educational*; Ginia Polygos, *Logos Development Group*, Charlotte, NC; Dr. Philip Nolan and Denis Bridoux, *Post Graduate Professional Training* in the UK).

We established *Meta-States Journal* in 1997 as a monthly publication for **Neuro-Semantics**. It promotes and markets much of the current research and discoveries, training schedules, responses from around the world, and much more.

E.T. Publications has become one of the facets of Neuro-Semantics as we have continue to seek to publish and promote products. Lester's [LEARN USA](#) Institute also creates and promotes products of Neuro-Semantics as does Olic Performance Seminars.

We have also created a Web Site at <http://www.neurosemantics.com>. Dr. Bodenhamer constantly updates this site monthly with articles and techniques from several authors. He does this to offer the new developments in Neuro-Semantics and to create a forum for feedback.

What is the Agenda, Motivation, and Intentions of those Associated with Neuro-Semantics?

The purpose (agenda and motivation) of *The Institute of Neuro-Semantics* is to continue the exciting research and modeling into the adventure of human design engineering using the tools of General Semantics, NLP, and Meta-States.

The design of this? To *Engineer Human Excellence* by modeling the best, by identifying the structure of Excellence, and by designing afresh new forms of human excellence in all fields.

And the meta-outcome of that? To enable people to find, discover, and actualize their best — to consciously enter into more experiences of Flow (Czikszentmihalyi), Positive Addiction (Glasser), Genius (Bandler, Grinder, Dilts, etc.), to empower people to run their own brains and to manage their meta-minds, and to achieve high performance whether it be in career, relationships, personal development, spirituality, health, or whatever.

Historical Development of the Meta-States Model

(Compiled by Denis Bridoux, NLP Trainer with Post-Graduate Professional Education, Harragat, England)

1933: Alfred Korzybski coined the phrase *neuro-linguistic training*, postulated his theory of the levels of abstraction, constructed his theory of second-order abstractions, third-order, etc. in his classic word *Science and Sanity*.

1972: Gregory Bateson's classic work *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* that brought together all his revolutionary studies on double-bind theory, applications of Logical Theory of Types, *going meta* to meta-levels, the levels of Learning Model, etc.

1975-1983: John Grinder & Richard Bandler utilizing the idea of *going meta* in their NLP model beginning with the Meta-model—an explicit model *about* how language and VAK representations work in human experience. They distinguish sensory-based

level from the evaluative level, the importance of meta-parts, and the strategy model for modeling "the structure of subjective experience."

1994: Michael Hall specifies how meta-levels of *mind-body neuro-linguistic states* factor into the structure of subjective experience and bring over Korzybski and Bateson ideas into the strategy model. This arose from modeling resilience and discovering that within it people have embedded numerous layers and levels of consciousness and states. Awareness by the International Trainers Association of NLP (1995) for the most significant contribution to NLP during 1994-1995.

Additional Recommended Reading: [Dimensions of Modeling: How Modeling Evolves from Strategies](#) - Neuro-Semantics Series and "[How Meta-States Enriches Logical Levels in NLP.](#)"

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