

The 3rd International NLP Research Conference

By Melody Cheal



In July, I attended the 3rd International NLP Research Conference held this year at the Fielder Centre, part of the University of Hertfordshire campus. The conference has expanded into two days this year providing some requested sessions on how to 'do' research on the first afternoon.

As with previous years the conference attracted delegates and speakers from across the world including the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and Scandinavia. The global nature of the event was very apparent and the buzz very exciting.

Paul Tosey kicked things off by introducing us to the 'Research Onion' (Saunders *et al*, 2012). This simple but elegant diagram did help to clarify some of the important considerations needed when undertaking research. Watch out for an article in the Winter 2012 issue with more information on this model.

We then had the opportunity to choose one of three sessions to focus in on specific research topics led by Suzanne Henwood, Richard Churches and Paul Tosey. Suzanne and Richard each led sessions on Designing Research, in Suzanne's case qualitative and Richard's quantitative. Paul's topic was that other tricky skill, Critical Reading of Literature. All three sessions provided practical information for new researchers supplying some very real foundations for the future. The plenary debrief afterwards allowed us all to share ideas and ask further questions.

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One of the highlights for me was the evening networking and meal together. The atmosphere was relaxed and yet full of energy. It provided a chance to chat with old friends and new. The informal, friendly feel of the whole conference made sure everyone felt welcome.

Day two began with a key note speech delivered by Michael Hall, a familiar face to anyone who attends conferences regularly. Michael is the author of more than 40 books and has been a major contributor to NLP for over 20 years. Today he shared some of his ideas about the importance of benchmarking and how this might be accomplished.

The main part of the day was taken up with three sets of parallel sessions each with workshops running in four rooms. Within each room there were either two or three presentations creating a dilemma for me, who did I want to hear more from.

The choices were amazing with streams such as educational contexts, professional development, meta-programmes, research methods, neuroscience and many more. Although we had to make choices, it was

useful to know that all the sessions were being recorded and would be made available to delegates via ANLP at some point after the conference.

My favourite session was delivered by Richard Gray and was called 'Four findings from Neuroscience that expand and explain NLP techniques'. Rick is an extremely engaging and passionate speaker. Looking around the audience I could see that I was not the only one hanging on his every word. His style as a speaker draws you in and leaves you wanting more.

This presentation builds on work presented at previous conferences including the RTM-VK/D protocol. He explained a number of interesting aspects of memory and in particular 'reconsolidation'. This relates to the strengthening and weakening of memory connections and how this can be used deliberately to make useful changes for people suffering from PTSD. My description here is an over-simplified snapshot of the presentation however Rick has very generously posted the entire article and his slides on his website: <http://richardmgray.home.comcast.net>. Do download it for the full details on this fascinating topic.

The conference included one session as a symposium led by Sian Weaver called 'What do we mean by research in NLPt?' This session was lively and interactive with all participants taking part in the discussions. This session was very popular and I suspect could have continued much longer than the allotted time.

This was followed by the NLP R&R Project Update led by Rick Gray and Lisa



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Wake. It was disappointing to hear that there had been some obstacles around a grant in the USA, however, it sounds as if the team are still positive and motivated to keep going.

The NLP R&R Project has produced a book drawing on the expertise of many different well known NLPers called *The Clinical Effectiveness of Neurolinguistic Programming: A Critical Appraisal*. All the profits are going straight back into the project.

One of the ideas put forward was the suggestion that there is a need for a more competency based framework to drive up professional standards. The ANLP and NLP R&R project are keen to engage with the wider NLP community to discuss what that might mean. There is an opportunity to get involved in such discussions if you go the NLP Research Conference LinkedIn group, which was originally set up by ANLP to promote such discussion.

For the final part of the conference there was a plenary session for everyone followed by an engaging and interesting keynote closing speech from Melita Reiner sharing some of experience of research from an NLPt point of view.

As always I came away from the conference feeling motivated and excited about possibilities for the future. I will definitely be attending the 4th International Research Conference in 2014 and I recommend you join me! It will be well worth your time and money! ■



'I went to Richard Churches' session on quantitative research methods I learned loads and it demystified a lot of it for me. And the other thing...being around great NLPers.' Jeremy Lazarus

'I'm not a professional researcher and I think the highlight was listening to a lot of people who know an awful lot more about research than I do and are very willing to share their experience. And not only that, they'll actually help you with your research programme and I think that's amazing!' Olive Hickmott

'My highlights have to be some of the people who came not sure what they were doing and who have gone away with a real idea of how they are going to conduct a research project. Giving them that confidence, clarity and they've gone away fired up. If half of those come through as real projects it will have been worthwhile.' Suzanne Henwood

'One of the highlights was actually the realisation that there's a lot of NLP research out there. What we need to do is find some way of gathering that together because that cumulative effect could actually start pushing people to thinking "Hey! There's something in this after all.'" Pam Keevil

'The highlight for me I think was out of conversations with Michael Hall and Richard Churches we were looking at the Wikipedia definition of NLP and beginning to look at could we between us create a definition to take off Wikipedia and shift things there and maybe roll that forward to the NLP Leadership summit. So that kind of got me excited because it's a doable thing and it could make a significant difference to the credibility of the field.' John Seymour