The Language of Political Magic

Milton Model, Meta-Model and Verbal Sleight of Mouth in the Discourse of

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

(Second Article in the Lula Popular Leadership Model – LMLP – Series)

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Abstract

This article is the second movement in a research programme on the Lula Popular Leadership Model (LMLP). While the first paper focused on macro-strategies of influence, persistence and coalition (LMLID, LMLPER, LMLCOL) and on seven trainable competences (L1–L7), the present text zooms in on language.

We examine how Milton-Model patterns, Meta-Model precision and Sleight-of-Mouth reframes appear in the public discourse of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, using a corpus of inauguration speeches (2003, 2007, 2023), national addresses, interviews and crisis speeches, as well as corpus-linguistics studies of his rhetoric.

The article recaps the qualitative, corpus-based methodology adopted in the first paper; presents a concise theoretical overview of the Milton Model, Meta-Model and Sleight of Mouth; systematically maps Lula's utterances onto these language patterns, offering abundant real quotations (in Portuguese, with commentary in English); and proposes a set of "language lenses" that refine the LMLP's macro-strategies and competences (L1–L7).

We explicitly distinguish documented data (actual quotations, corpus-linguistics results) from NLP modelling inferences (classification of patterns and hypothesised cognitive processes). Finally, we discuss ethical and ecological implications of teaching such linguistic structures as part of leadership training.

Keywords: Neuro-Linguistic Programming; Milton Model; Meta-Model; Sleight of Mouth; popular leadership; political discourse; Lula.

1. Introduction – from LMLP to micro-surgery of the sentence

The first article in this series started from a simple and radical hypothesis, consistent with the tradition inaugurated by Bandler and Grinder (1975a, 1975b): what is commonly

labelled “political charisma” can be described as an architecture of cognitive, narrative, bodily and relational strategies. The result was the Lula Popular Leadership Model (LMLP), organised into three macro-strategies – LMLID, LMLPER, LMLCOL – and seven trainable competences (L1–L7), articulated with third-generation NLP (Dilts, DeLozier and Epstein, 2010), corpus linguistics and the anthropology of performance (Turner, 1969).

This second article explicitly assumes the LMLP as its background and moves down one level of granularity. In order to see how linguistic structure supports political strategy, we propose the following hierarchical scheme:

Figure 1. Hierarchical architecture of the LMLP

MACRO LEVEL (Strategy and Identity)

• LMLID: Influence and Discourse

• LMLPER: Persistence and Overcoming

• LMLCOL: Coalition and Perceptual Flexibility

▼ Sustained by:

MESO LEVEL (Tactical competences L1–L7)

• e.g. L1 (Sensory Translation), L4 (Pacifying Chunk Up), L6 (Origin Narrative)

▼ Executed through:

MICRO LEVEL (Linguistic Engineering – the focus of this article)

• Milton Model: metaphors, nominalisations (to inspire and unite)

• Meta-Model: numerical specificity, cause–effect (to defend and account)

• Sleight of Mouth: reframes (to manage crises and beliefs)

If the LMLP describes how the system operates on a large scale, here we ask how that system shows up in the sentence, the word, the micro-decision in phrasing. Rather than looking only at how he “translates the economy into images of barbecues and beans”, we ask:

• Which kinds of deletion, nominalisation, presupposition and metaphor appear in his key phrases?

• In which moments does he specify, instead of remaining vague, moving closer to the Meta-Model (Bandler and Grinder, 1975a)?

• How does he reformulate attacks, criticism and hostile framings – in moves that can be modelled as Sleight-of-Mouth patterns (Dilts, 1994)?

In answering these questions, the article serves a dual function:

Theoretical completeness – it turns the LMLP into a multi-scale model, ranging from macro (history, identity, coalition) to micro (metaphors, phrases, reframes). Practical applicability – it transforms what has been observed in Lula into a set of lenses and tools that can be used to model and develop the communication of other individuals in different contexts.

Throughout, we maintain the epistemological distinction established in the first article:

Documented data: what Lula said (short excerpts identifiable in speeches, interviews and national addresses) and what corpus studies have quantified (Moura, 2005; Sardinha, 2008, 2010; Trein and Mesquita, 2025).

Modelling inferences: readings in NLP terms (Milton Model, Meta-Model, Sleight of Mouth, Neurological Levels, Perceptual Positions).

Whenever we move from description to interpretation, we explicitly signal that we are proposing a modelling hypothesis, open to critique and refinement.

2. NLP language tools – the minimal conceptual kit

2.1. Milton Model – the art of productive vagueness

The Milton Model describes patterns of vague, metaphorical and permissive language, inspired by the hypnotic practice of Milton H. Erickson (Bandler and Grinder, 1975b). Instead of trying to eliminate the imprecision of natural language, it orchestrates that imprecision in order to promote:

• transderivational search: the listener fills gaps with their own repertoire.

• benign generalisation: the same sentence can speak to different realities.

• installation of presuppositions: values and beliefs embedded in apparently neutral structures.

Typical patterns include: nominalisations (“dignity”, “hope”), deletions (“we will do what needs to be done”), generalisations (“no one can bear suffering any longer”), metaphors, truisms (“everyone knows that…”), complex equivalences (“if there is hunger, those in power lack shame”), and cause–effect and conditional structures.

2.2. Meta-Model – the art of precision and dismantling

The Meta-Model, presented in The Structure of Magic (Bandler and Grinder, 1975a), is a set of distinctions and questions aimed at revealing details that have been omitted, generalised or distorted in speech: “Who, specifically?”, “When, exactly?”, “Always? Never?”, “Compared to what?”, “How do you know?”.

In clinical work it functions as a linguistic scalpel; in public discourse it rarely appears as a literal interrogation, but can be observed when a leader:

• specifies numbers, time frames and criteria.

• dismantles crude generalisations.

• clarifies relations of cause and effect.

It is this subtler use that we investigate here.

2.3. Verbal Sleight of Mouth – the 14 patterns

Under the name Sleight of Mouth (SoM), Dilts (1994; 2017) described a family of verbal reframing patterns: ways of changing the meaning and implications of a belief or accusation without attacking it head-on, often preserving the positive intention originally involved.

Among the various lists, we work with 14 patterns:

1. Intention.

2. Consequences.

3. Another Outcome.

4. Counter-example.

5. Apply to Self.

6. Reality Strategy.

7. Model of the World.

8. Meta-frame.

9. Change Frame Size.

10. Hierarchy of Criteria.

11. Specify (chunk down).

12. Abstract (chunk up).

13. Metaphor/Analogy.

14. Redefine.

It is important to stress: we do not assume that Lula “studied Sleight of Mouth”. The modelling hypothesis is more modest: certain recurrent response, reframing and return moves evident in his speech can be described as instances of these patterns. This description is useful for both analysis and teaching.

3. Corpus and methodology – from macro to micro

3.1. Data universe

The primary corpus of this article largely replicates that of Article 1, now with a specific focus on language:

• three inauguration speeches (2003, 2007, 2023), in official transcriptions.

• national radio and TV addresses between 2003 and 2010, especially on the economy, social programmes and crises.

• long interviews (national and international press) between 2002 and 2023, in which Lula responds to criticism, discusses his biography, imprisonment and return.

• speeches in crisis contexts, such as addresses to supporters on the eve of imprisonment and public self-defence statements.

Additionally, we draw on corpus-linguistics and discourse-analysis work that has already compiled and examined thousands of presidential speeches, highlighting, for example:

• the predominance of JOURNEY, CONSTRUCTION and ORGANIC GROWTH metaphors in his treatment of development and the economy (Moura, 2005; Sardinha, 2008, 2010).

• the construction of an ethos of popular and unifying leadership in the three inauguration speeches (Trein and Mesquita, 2025).

• readability profiles and lexical diversity in Brazilian presidential speeches in historical perspective (Sardinha, 2008, 2010).

3.2. Analytical procedure

The procedure followed four complementary steps:

1. Extraction of key utterances: we selected sentences that were widely cited in the media, highlighted in corpus studies or that occurred at moments of confrontation.

2. Linguistic annotation: we identified nominalisations, deletions, metaphors, presuppositions, time markers, pronouns and so on.

3. Classification into NLP patterns: each excerpt was classified in terms of Milton-Model patterns, Meta-Model leverage points and Sleight-of-Mouth patterns, according to the toolkit set out in section 2.

4. Articulation with the LMLP: we then related these micro-linguistic patterns to the LMLP macro-strategies (LMLID, LMLPER, LMLCOL) and to the competences L1–L7, as depicted in Figure 1.

For readers in linguistics, discourse analysis or political science, it is important to emphasise: this is a qualitative case study supported by corpus-linguistics literature, not a new statistical investigation. The quantitative aspects we draw on are those already reported in previous work (Moura, 2005; Sardinha, 2008, 2010; Trein and Mesquita, 2025).

4. Milton Model in Lula's discourse – metaphors, strategic vagueness and "wall-quote" phrases

4.1. Nominalisations that condense processes

A recurrent feature of inauguration speeches and national addresses is the use of nominalisations to condense complex subjective processes into "things" that can seemingly be managed. In his 2003 inauguration speech, Lula famously promised:

"We are going to restore the dignity of the Brazilian people, recover their self-esteem."

Here, "dignity" and "self-esteem" are processes transformed into nouns. From a Milton-Model perspective, this:

• erases the how ("how exactly is dignity restored?").

• turns the concept into a flexible container, ready to be linked to subsequent sensory imagery.

• allows each listener to associate "dignity" with their own experiences.

Within the LMLP, this is a characteristic move of LMLID, in interaction with L1 (Radical Sensory Translation) and L6 (Origin and Destiny Narrative): an abstract promise which will be "filled" with concrete images of food, family and work.

4.2. Evocative generalisations: "never before in the history of this country…"

Phrases of the type:

"Never before in the history of this country we have invested so much in sanitation." are broad temporal generalisations ("never before") that compress a contrast between past and present. This is artful vagueness with a strong comparative charge.

Typical Milton effects:

• creation of a memetic catchphrase that sticks in everyday speech.

• installation of a comparative frame (before/after).

• embedding of a complex equivalence ("more investment now = new political era").

In LMLP terms, it functions as an identity marker of historical rupture, reinforcing the leader as the hinge between "old" and "new".

4.3. Structuring metaphors: journey, construction, organism

Corpus-linguistics studies (Moura, 2005; Sardinha, 2008, 2010) show the predominance, in Lula's economic and developmental discourse, of three metaphorical fields:

• JOURNEY: moving forwards, changing the country's course, not going backwards.

• CONSTRUCTION: rebuilding the country, laying brick upon brick, foundations, pillars.

• ORGANIC GROWTH/HEALTH: a country that is "ill" or "healthy", an economy that "breathes".

In line with Lakoff and Johnson (1980), these metaphors structure political thinking through familiar sensory experiences – walking, building, bodily states. They facilitate understanding (L1) and support pacifying chunk ups (L4) by framing policy debates as shared journeys or reconstruction work.

4.4. Truisms and presuppositions: "everyone knows that…"

Another typical Milton resource is the use of truisms, statements that present themselves as self-evident, such as:

"Everyone knows that a country where people cannot eat will never be truly great."

The expression "everyone knows" is an impersonal presupposition. In Milton-Model terms, such truism:

• lowers immediate critical resistance.

• reinforces an implicit moral standard.

• creates a "floor of obviousness" on which later arguments can stand.

Analytical note: the expression "lowers critical resistance" does not imply necessarily malicious manipulation, but points to a core feature of mass rhetoric: all effective discourse seeks to establish shared premises that need not be debated at every turn, in order to build consensus.

5. Meta-Model in Lula's discourse – the flexibility of "gear shifting"

Although Lula's language is predominantly Milton-like (inspirational and vague), its effectiveness lies in flexible alternation. We observe what can be metaphorically described as a gear shift: he moves from dreamy vagueness ("hope", "dream") to the surgical precision of the Meta-Model when he needs to defend himself, account for actions or anchor reality.

It is this dance between macro-vagueness and micro-specificity that characterises a key communicative competence in the Lula Model as expressed through the LMLP.

5.1. Numerical specificity: "over thirty million"

When he replaces “many people going hungry” with formulations such as:

“Over thirty million Brazilians do not know what they will eat tomorrow.”

he performs an abrupt chunk down. He moves from a vague quantifier (“many”) to a concrete number. This:

• implicitly meta-models his own narrative (“many” → “how many, specifically?”).

• communicates seriousness and connection to data.

• anchors indignation in a measurable criterion.

Within the LMLP, this reinforces L5 (Multi-level Rapport): the same sentence speaks both to the stomach of those who are hungry (through sensory resonance) and to the cortex of analysts (through numeric precision).

5.2. Dismantling mystical causes: hunger as political decision

In various contexts, Lula insists that hunger is not destiny:

“Hunger is not a punishment from God; it is the result of choices society makes.”

Here, he uses a Meta-Model move to challenge the underlying cause–effect structure of a popular belief. He:

• negates a mystical/fatalistic cause.

• reframes hunger as the effect of human, verifiable decisions.

In Neurological Levels terms, the problem is shifted from an immutable Spiritual level (“God’s will”) to the levels of Behaviour and Environment, where change is possible. This is consistent with LMLPER (Persistence and Overcoming): suffering is framed as avoidable, contingent on choices.

5.3. Refining moral generalisations

When faced with generalisations such as “all politicians are thieves”, Lula has responded with counter-examples along the lines of:

“If every politician thought only of themselves, we would not have a minimum wage, pensions or public schools.”

In Meta-Model terms, this is a classic counter-example move, breaking a universal quantifier (“every”) by pointing to institutional gains historically associated with politics. At the level of the LMLP, it protects the identity of politics as a possible tool for transformation, rather than conceding the frame that politics equals corruption.

6. Verbal Sleight of Mouth – the 14 patterns with typical examples

To organise the analysis of verbal prestidigitation, we first present an overview table with the 14 Sleight-of-Mouth patterns, followed by a brief analytic deepening of three

particularly sensitive patterns. All pattern attributions are, by definition, modelling inferences.

6.1. Overview: SoM patterns and typical manifestations

Sleight of Mouth Patterns in Lula's Discourse

SoM pattern	Core idea	Typical manifestation in Lula's discourse (modelling inference)
1. Intention	Highlight the positive intention behind a belief or behaviour.	When responding to fear or resistance, he acknowledges the wish to "protect the country" before reframing.
2. Consequences	Show the future impact of keeping or changing the belief.	Argues that abandoning social programmes would have unacceptable human costs.
3. Another Outcome	Maintain the intention, change the means.	States that fiscal responsibility is necessary, but so is social responsibility, proposing both together.
4. Counter-example	Break a generalisation through exceptions.	Recalls historical moments when different choices produced worse outcomes.
5. Apply to Self	Turn the belief back on the source.	Questions whether critics would accept for themselves the conditions they propose for the poor.
6. Reality Strategy	Ask how the person knows the belief is true.	Requests concrete data, numbers, evidence behind catastrophic predictions.
7. Model of the World	Show that the belief reflects only one map.	Opposes the view that "the poor are a problem" with "in my view, the poor are part of the solution".
8. Meta-frame	Change the frame in which the belief is judged.	Reframes attacks on social spending as implying that poor people "do not deserve to eat".
9. Change Frame Size	Broaden or narrow the temporal/spatial frame.	Places short-term criticism within a longer trajectory of social progress.
10. Hierarchy of Criteria	Introduce a higher-order value.	Asserts that paying debt is important, but feeding the

		population is more important.
11. Specify (chunk down)	Go to concrete details.	Asks which policy, which number, which decision is at stake, grounding the debate.
12. Abstract (chunk up)	Move to a shared, higher-level value.	Says that, whatever our differences, "we are all Brazilians", appealing to identity.
13. Metaphor/Analogy	Use a story or image to reorganise meaning.	Compares unemployment or hunger to tangible everyday situations to make them visceral.
14. Redefine	Change the meaning of a key term.	Reframes "handouts" as "investment in the productive base of the country".

6.2. Model of the World – "the poor as problem" versus "the poor as solution"

When Lula states, in various formulations, that some people see the poor as a problem while, in his view, the poor are part of the solution, he explicitly contrasts two models of the world:

• one in which poverty is essentially a burden and security threat.

• another in which including the poor in the economy is seen as an engine for growth.

In Sleight-of-Mouth terms this is a Model of the World reframe. At the LMLP level, it expresses LMLID (Influence and Discourse) and L6 (Origin and Destiny Narrative), reorganising the semantic field of "poverty" around productive potential and shared future.

6.3. Meta-frame – when criticising the programme becomes criticising the people

In speeches defending social policies, Lula has used formulations that imply that when someone is against helping the poor, they are effectively saying that the poor do not deserve to eat. Here he changes the frame in which the criticism operates. The debate ceases to be merely about the efficiency or design of a programme and becomes a question about the value attributed to human lives. This is a classical Meta-frame manoeuvre.

Within the LMLP, such manoeuvres belong to LMLCOL (Coalition and Perceptual Flexibility): they raise the discussion to a value level where disagreement is morally and politically risky, forcing interlocutors to acknowledge a humanitarian baseline (L4 – Pacifying Chunk Up).

6.4. Redefine – dignity versus conditional freedom

A widely cited statement made in the context of imprisonment and legal negotiations is the idea that he would not exchange his dignity for his freedom. In modelling terms, this:

• redefines "freedom": conditional or negotiated freedom is reframed as less valuable than integrity.

• reorders the criteria hierarchy: dignity (coherence with one's history and values) is placed above immediate physical freedom.

From the standpoint of the LMLP, this is a culmination of LMLPER (Persistence and Overcoming): biographical suffering is integrated into a narrative of moral steadfastness, contributing to symbolic antifragility.

7. Other language and NLP elements detectable in Lula's speech

Beyond the three main sets (Milton, Meta, SoM), the discourse exhibits several other patterns that can be fruitfully described using NLP concepts:

• Pronoun play: strategic alternation between "I", "we" (government), "we" (people) and "they" (opposition, elites, unnamed adversaries), modulating inclusion and distance.
• Modal operators of necessity and possibility: markers such as "we cannot accept", "we must never allow" function as collective injunctions, programming perceived duties and permissions at a societal level.

• Temporal markers (timeline): frequent structuring of experience in "before", "now" and "future", crucial for redemption narratives (from suffering to achievement).

• Sensory anchors: recurring images (weekend barbecues, beans and rice, family around the table) evoke specific affective states and anchor motivation (Sardinha, 2008, 2010).

These patterns complement the LMLP macro view: they are the "texture" through which macro-strategies are concretely enacted.

8. The Linguistic Application Protocol of the LMLP (LAP-LMLP)

Based on the analysis, we propose a Linguistic Application Protocol for the Lula Popular Leadership Model (LAP-LMLP), designed as a modelling tool for leaders, educators, therapists, coaches and communicators in other contexts. The aim is not to copy Lula's style, but to apply the structural insights of the two articles.

8.1. Stage 1 – Mapping context and purpose

• Clarify who your "people" are: citizens, students, employees, clients, patients?

• Define the mission and time horizon (electoral cycle, organisational change, educational journey).

• Identify the core values and pains of this group to avoid empty rhetorical fireworks detached from lived reality.

8.2. Stage 2 – Linguistic modelling

• Map the group's sensory vocabulary (what images, sounds, experiences resonate?).

• Choose structuring metaphors (Journey? Construction? Healing?) coherent with your context.

• Design Milton-type phrases that can unify, without lapsing into manipulation or mere slogans.

• Anticipate objections and prepare Sleight-of-Mouth reframes that preserve intentions and raise the level of dialogue.

• Decide when and where to employ Meta-Model precision (numbers, criteria, causal structures) to demonstrate seriousness and accountability.

8.3. Stage 3 – Rehearsal, embodiment and feedback

• Rehearse the discourse paying attention to voice, rhythm, pauses and posture, integrating insights from phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1999) and performance anthropology (Turner, 1969).

• Seek feedback not only on "what was said", but on how it felt to different audiences – cognitively and emotionally.

• Refine metaphors, examples and reframes based on this feedback.

8.4. Stage 4 – Ecology and ethics

• Ask explicitly: "Would I feel comfortable if someone used this level of linguistic sophistication with me, my family or my community?"

• Examine whether the intended change is ecological at different levels (individual, group, institution, wider system).

• Make room for critical literacy in influence: teach, when appropriate, the very tools you are using so that others can recognise and question them.

9. Integrating the two articles – from the Lula Model to a meta-model of modelling

With this second article, the Lula Popular Leadership Model (LMLP) research programme acquires a more complete structure:

• Article 1 offers the systemic architecture: three macro-strategies (LMLID, LMLPER, LMLCOL) and seven competences (L1–L7), situated within third-generation NLP, corpuslinguistics and performance studies.

• Article 2 provides the engineering tools: Milton Model, Meta-Model and Sleight of Mouth as lenses for micro-analysis of political language, plus the LAP-LMLP protocol for practical application.

Together, they form a meta-model of modelling that can be used to:

• analyse other leaders in different countries and historical periods.

• design leadership-development programmes aligned with explicit values and ethics.

• support coaches, therapists and educators in crafting more conscious, responsible communication.

The Lula Model (LM), as formalised in the LMLP and expanded here at linguistic level, thus becomes both:

• a case study in popular leadership under conditions of high polarisation; and

• a template for modelling communicative excellence in other domains: education, organisational change, civic engagement, community leadership.

10. Final considerations

This article has sought to show that, behind Lula's charisma, there lies a fine-grained fabric of linguistic choices that can be described and taught. By integrating third-generation NLP, corpus linguistics and rhetorical analysis, we have produced not a handbook for manipulation, but an invitation to critical literacy in influence.

The challenge for future research is twofold:

1. Empirical deepening: expanding quantitative studies of metaphor evolution, prosody and framing in different phases of Lula's trajectory, and comparing him with other leadersusing the same framework.

2. Ethical choice: deciding consciously what kinds of leadership we wish to model, replicate and teach – in the service of which values and futures.

If the first article revealed the structure of political magic, this second article has explored its grammar. Both together form a contribution to the study of how language, body, narrative and system intertwine in contemporary popular leadership – and to how these same tools may be used responsibly in other spheres of human action.

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