

Quick Reference Guide Verbal Behavior

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What is Verbal Behavior (VB)? VB is language and communication and is viewed as learned behavior. The analysis of verbal behavior, first proposed by B.F. Skinner in 1957, described different communicative response classes (e.g., mands, tacts, intraverbal, echoics) and how they are established and maintained in an individual's behavioral repertoire through operant conditioning/learning (learning through reinforcement, shaping, & other teaching strategies) (Mason et al, 2018). Verbal behavior is behavior reinforced through the mediation of other persons (Skinner, 1957). It includes any spoken (vocal) or non-spoken (i.e. gestures) form of communication that helps people to get what they want and avoid what they don't want (Mayer et al., 2014).

Where	Who/Why
<p>-Anywhere! VB can be applied to complex forms of behaviors such as interacting socially, solving problems, thinking (covertly speaking), grammar, literature, and detecting and understanding simple and complex topics such as history, politics, religion, and pop culture. These are all heavily dependent on verbal skills (Bailey & Wallander, 1999; Mayer et al., 2014).</p> <p><u>Verbal Behavior (language is learned) vs. Leading Language Theories (language is innate)</u></p> <p>Vargas (1992) derived from Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior that language is behavior and it is prescribed, shaped, and maintained by others. In how to speak effectively (what to say and when to say it) it is not enough to only have the innate ability to do so. To behave verbally requires the behavior of others.</p> <p><u>Applications of Verbal Behavior (Cooper et. al. 2007)</u></p> <p>-VB has changed how clinicians and researchers approach and ameliorate problems related to language.</p> <p>-VB has been applied to areas of typical language and child development, elementary, high school, & college education, literacy, composition, second language acquisition, clinical interventions, behavior problems, traumatic brain injuries, artificial intelligence, behavioral pharmacology and the most prolific being language assessments (e.g. VB-MAPP) and intervention programs for children with autism or other developmental disabilities.</p>	<p><u>Language - Function or Topography?</u></p> <p>Skinner (1957) placed emphasis on a verbal operant (mand, tact, intraverbal, and echoic) by its functional relations to antecedents and consequences rather than by topography.</p> <p>Skinner defined verbal behavior by the function of its response, rather than by its form (Cooper et al., 2007).</p> <p>VB seeks to analyze the function behind "language" and "communication" (Bailey & Wallander, 1999).</p> <p>Verbal behavior is shaped and maintained by the same selection mechanisms that shape and maintain nonverbal behavior (Skinner, 1957)</p> <p><u>"Speaker" and "Listener" (Cooper et al. 2007; Skinner, 1957)</u></p> <p>-Verbal behavior involves social interactions between speakers and listeners. Verbal behavior places greater emphasis on the role of the speaker.</p> <p><u>Speakers:</u> gain access to reinforcement and control their environment through the behavior of listeners.</p> <p><u>Listeners:</u> The listener must learn how to reinforce the speaker's verbal behavior, meaning that listeners are taught to respond and interact with speakers. Listeners provide consequences for the speaker (rather than the natural environment).</p>

Verbal Operants ("Skinner's Six Elementary Verbal Operants") (Cooper et. al. 2007)

Mand	Asking for reinforcers that you want. Saying <i>shoe</i> because you want a shoe.
Tact	Naming or identifying objects, actions, events, etc. Saying <i>shoe</i> because you see a shoe.
Echoic	Repeating what is heard. Saying <i>shoe</i> after someone else says shoe.
Intraverbal	Answering questions or having conversations in which your words are controlled by other words. Saying <i>shoe</i> when someone else says, <i>What do you wear on your feet?</i>
Textual	Reading written words. Saying <i>shoe</i> because you see the written word shoe.
Transcription	Writing and spelling words spoken to you. Writing <i>shoe</i> because you hear <i>shoe</i> spoken.

Skinner (1957) also identified complex areas of verbal behavior which include: tact extensions (generic, metaphorical, metonymical, & solistic), convergent multiple control, divergent multiple control, thematic and formatic verbal operants, autoclitics (speaker functions as listener of own behavior).

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