

What is Verbal Behavior?

Skinner (1986)



TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF LANGUAGE

Focus on the **structure** of language

Syntax, Phonemes, Morphemes, Lexicon, Grammar, and Semantics



In 1957, **B.F. Skinner**

introduced a behavior analysis of

Verbal Behavior



Language is classified with respect to function

candy = 

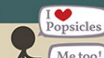
Not structure

candy = noun

Various classes, *known as verbal operants*, are defined by **controlling variables** such as



Popsicle



prior verbal stimuli



I want a POPSICLE!

motivational variables



I want ANOTHER POPSICLE!

consequences

Skinner's system has direct applications

to teaching language!!

Questions often asked by traditional linguists are...

In contrast, a behavior analyst asks

How can a person **understand** language?



What is the meaning of their **words**?



What variables can I change to **teach** language that is **beneficial** to the speaker

Some forms of verbal behavior include



Speaking, Signing, Pointing, Writing, Gesturing, and many more!

Verbal behavior is behavior reinforced **through others**



BUT, not all interactions between human beings involve verbal behavior

To qualify as verbal behavior the behavior needs a **trained listener**



So...



"...when does behavior become verbal?"

When it was **shaped** and **maintained** by a verbal environment transmitted from one generation to another (when it became part of a 'language')."



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