The Official Publication of the Verbal Behavior Special Interest Group

Welcome to our 2013 VB SIG Meeting and our newest edition of VB News!

Since our last meeting at the 38th Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) conference in Seattle, our special interest group’s (SIG) council members have worked to accomplish some of the goals set forth in the previous year and deliver on its promises to members. This year, we are very excited to report that our website was successfully launched, and features the most up-to-date information on the SIG’s activities. We encourage you to check out our new website at http://verbalbehaviorsig.org.

Editorial

Laura Grow, Ph.D., BCBA-D
University of British Columbia

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Officer Updates

Website Coordinator – Sarah Dickman, M.S., BCBA
Children’s Health Care of Atlanta/Marcus Autism Center

Check out the VB SIG’s new website at http://verbalbehaviorsig.org. We changed our hosting service to provide the most up-to-date information and content for our members. The new page allows us to analyze our web presence and make changes to allow us to better serve our members. The aim of the page is to provide relevant and useful information to members- so please feel free to contribute! Questions, comments, or ideas can be sent to Sarah at Sarah.Dickman@choa.org

We are seeking feedback regarding our current services and input on ways to improve them. We are asking members to take 5 minutes to complete a brief survey about the VB SIG. Ideas for future events, services, or benefits of membership are also requested. Your feedback and ideas drive the SIG and we wish to hear from you! Thank you for your input! http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NBW8DNV

Treasurer – April Kisamore, Ph.D., BCBA
Caldwell College

Since the last business meeting in May 2012, we have received $1,418.00 in dues and donations. Money from dues and donations were used to: 1) fund the SIG research grants and awards and 2) purchase a plaque to honor Dr. Mark Sundberg for his contributions in verbal behavior. The SIG council is currently devising new ways to raise funds to help increase the SIG’s cash flow.

If you would like to become a member of the VB SIG or make a donation to support our student grants and awards, please send a membership application and/or check to:

Dr. April Kisamore
Center for Autism and ABA
Caldwell College
120 Bloomfield Ave
Caldwell, NJ 07006
akisamore@caldwell.edu
Highlighted Events in Verbal Behavior

# 13 B. F. Skinner Lecture Series

Gary Lupyan, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He received his Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University under the advisement of Jay McClelland and subsequently completed postdoctoral work at Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania. He received an early investigator award from the American Psychological Association and a “Rising Star” award from the American Psychological Society. Dr. Lupyan’s primary research interest is understanding the degree to which human cognition and perception depend on or are augmented by language. An additional research program investigates the ways that specific languages evolve to fit the social and ecological environments in which they are learned and used.

Abstract: This talk will focus on a fundamental property of language: using words to refer to objects in the environment. What consequences does such labeling have on cognitive and perceptual processes? To what extent is “normal” human cognition, actually language-augmented cognition? The talk will review evidence indicating that verbal labels do more than communicate information between individuals, but in fact actively modulate conceptual representations brought online during tasks that seem on their surface to have nothing to do with language. Using words to refer to objects affects the learning of new categories, memory for object details, and reasoning about familiar categories. Disruptions of linguistic processes likewise appear to affect performance on a variety of apparently nonverbal tasks. Strikingly, verbal labels also affect performance on even the most basic visual tasks. Together, the findings point to pervasive effects of language on ongoing cognition and cognition and perception.

# 295 Invited Presenter

Mark L. Sundberg, Ph.D., BCBA-D, received his doctorate degree in applied behavior analysis from Western Michigan University (1980), under the direction of Dr. Jack Michael. Dr. Sundberg serves on the board of directors of the B. F. Skinner Foundation. He is the author of the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP), and co-author of the original Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills (ABLLS) assessment tool and the book Teaching Language to Children with Autism or Other Developmental Disabilities. He has published more than 50 professional papers, including a chapter titled, "Verbal Behavior" in Cooper, Heron, & Heward (2007). He is the founder and past editor of the journal The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, a twice past-president of the Northern California Association for Behavior Analysis, a past-chair of the Publication Board of ABAI, and was a member of the committee that developed the Behavior Analyst Certification Board Task List. Dr. Sundberg has given more than 500 conference presentations and workshops, and taught 80 college courses on behavior analysis, verbal behavior, sign language, and child development. He is a licensed psychologist, who consults for public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area that serve children with autism. His awards include the 2001, Distinguished Psychology Department Alumnus Award from Western Michigan University.

Abstract: The experimental analysis of motivation is mostly absent from the 55 years of research in the Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior. Research has only recently begun to appear in the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, but it too has been historically absent from that journal. However, Skinner made it clear in Behavior of Organisms (1938) that antecedent motivational variables were separate from stimulus variables. Keller and Schoenfeld (1950) further developed this distinction in the section, “A drive is not a stimulus” (p. 276), and suggested the term "establishing operation" be used to distinguish the effects of deprivation, satiation, and aversive stimulation on behavior. Skinner elaborated on motivation with three chapters in Science and Human Behavior (1953), and throughout Verbal Behavior (1957). However, as Michael (1982, 1993) pointed out, motivational variables have been neglected in behavior analysis resulting in, "a gap in our understanding of operant functional relations" (1993, p. 191). The current presentation will focus on Skinner’s treatment of motivation in the book Verbal Behavior, where he describes its critical role in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The failure to address motivation leaves our field vulnerable to claims that ABA is impoverished or incapable of addressing motivation in treatment programs. Suggestions for applications and future research also will be presented.
“Motivating operations (MOs) are environmental variables that have two effects on behavior: (1) they alter (increase or decrease) the operant reinforcing effectiveness of some specific stimuli, objects, or events (the value-altering effect); and (2) they alter (increase or decrease) the current frequency of all behavior that has been reinforced by those stimuli, objects, or events (the behavior altering effect).

Concepts & Principles of Behavior Analysis

Michael, J., p.12

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Interview Series – Caio Miguel, Ph.D.

Thank you, Caio, for participating in our interview series. The purpose of the interview is for you to share your ideas about behavior analysis and verbal behavior so that our readership can get to know you better. We hope that your responses will inspire new research questions about verbal behavior.

Q. How did you become interested in the study of verbal behavior?
A. The area of expertise of my undergraduate advisor in Brazil was verbal behavior, but it was not until I took Jack Michael’s legendary Verbal Behavior class, that I decided to study language. So I abandoned the rats*, and developed a study evaluating automatic reinforcement of vocal behavior which turned out to be my thesis and later published in TAVB (Miguel, Carr, & Michael, 2002). As you know, I have continued studying verbal behavior ever since. I am proud to have been trained by Jack Michael and to have served as his teaching assistant for so many years. I just hope I can somehow pass on all the knowledge I acquired from him to my students.

*Ok, I never really abandoned the rats, as my graduate assistantship was teaching the operant rat lab. I did, however, stop doing basic research with animals.

Q. In your opinion, what areas of research are most needed in the area of verbal behavior?
A. We need studies that would actually answer important questions about language development. One of the problems with single-subject designs is that we end up publishing papers with 2 or 3 participants, and sometimes results are mixed. We tend to explain variability by invoking some “participants’ characteristics.” But in the end we do not know what these are and we never follow up with studies trying to assess whether our results are actually a function of these “characteristics.” For example, we have a body of applied verbal behavior research that suggests that procedure X works most of the time, but not all of the time. We need studies with more participants and we need to better document their characteristics. I have continued to make the same mistake over the years. But editors should encourage studies with more participants, or at least encourage replications. People should be directly replicating other studies. This is the key for the generality of our findings.

We also need between group studies, and we need to publish in non-behavioral journals. Easier said than done. But I keep asking my students to pay attention to their statistics classes and we may start designing more traditional between group design studies in the future. None of the really important language development researchers know who we are, or that Skinner’s analysis is still alive and generating a sizable body of research (see increased numbers of submissions of TAVB). We need to make ourselves known, and we need to start addressing topics of interest to those outside of our field. What we really need is to go beyond the basic verbal operants.

Q. For students who are studying verbal behavior, is there a particular paper/book that you think is a “must read”?
A. My papers? Just kidding (kind of). After carefully studying Skinner (1957), I'd say Horne and Lowe (1996). Other works by Skinner (1953; 1974) are also relevant to understand his monistic approach. Skinner’s analysis of verbal behavior can only be fully understood and appreciated once the reader can completely rid him/herself of the dualistic worldview that assumes that body and mind (or soul, or language) are separate entities.

Q. Please describe your areas of interest in the field of behavior analysis and verbal behavior.
A. My lab has four lines of research as described below (also see http://www.verbalbehaviorlab.com):

**Verbal Mediation**
This line of research focuses on the role of verbal behavior, more specifically the interaction between speaker and listener repertoires (i.e., naming) in the development of visual categorization and analogical reasoning.

**Teaching Procedures**
We are evaluating different methodologies to teach basic verbal operants and listener behavior. Most of our teaching techniques aim at producing generative language or emergent performances.

**Behavioral Stereotypy**
These studies are conducted in collaboration with the research department at the New England Center for Children. We are testing different parameters of the Response Interruption and Redirection procedure (RIRD) to reduce vocal and motor stereotypy.

**Applied Animal Behavior**
We have started to explore some commonly used techniques to assess and train domesticated animals. Whether we will continue doing this will depend on time and students’ interest.
Research on Verbal Behavior and Emergent Relations at the Marcus Autism Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Advisor: Alice Shillingsburg, Ph.D., BCBA-D
Advisees/Collaborators: Addie Androus, Crystal Bowen, Caitlin Delfs, Sarah Dickman, Cassy Gayman, and Diana Shippee,

Research in the Language and Learning Clinic at the Marcus Autism Center is informed by the complex problems that arise during language intervention with children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The primary goal of the research is to identify effective and efficient procedures for establishing functional vocal verbal behavior among learners with ASDs. The results from many of the research studies help shape future verbal behavior programming at the clinic. We also disseminate our research findings by providing recommendations to teachers and caregivers about promoting language in our clients’ everyday life.

Our lab is working on a programmatic line of research in the area of emergent verbal behavior. We are currently working on four studies related to emergent verbal behavior

1. The emergence of tact resulting from receptive object labeling;
2. The emergence of tacts resulting from receptive labeling based on feature, function, and class;
3. Emergence of intraverbals from receptive labeling based on feature, function, and class and tact training;
4. Tact-to-mand and mand-to-tact transfer with adjectives (e.g., big and little).

In the future, our lab will explore methods of establishing attention as a reinforcer. In some cases, learners with ASD avoid social interaction, which poses problems with working on joint attention and social referencing skills. The goal of this research is to identify procedures for establishing attention as an effective reinforcer.

Please feel free to contact me at: alice.shillingsburg@choa.org with any questions.

New Student VB SIG Group!

Judah Axe, Ph.D., BCBA-D
Simmons College

We are please to announce the formation of the Student VB SIG Group! The group was formed based on recommendations at the VB SIG Business Meeting at ABAI last year. The goal of the group is for students to share their ideas, ask questions, get involved with the VB SIG, and have a national and international verbal community of fellow students studying verbal behavior. Its members and others will shape the group along the way. Judah Axe (Chair Elect) will organize the group for the time being and hopes to nominate a student leader shortly.

The following students were nominated to the student group:

Angelica Aguirre, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Kristopher Brown, Youngstown State University
Charisse Lantaya, California State University, Sacramento
Brittany LeBlanc, University of Oregon
Melissa Nissen, University of Houston, Clear Lake
Jeffrey Oliver, University of South Florida
Sarah Pastrana, University of British Columbia
Kelly Stone, Western Michigan University
Timothy Yeager, Columbia University