

Free critical thinking about listener behavior

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



According to Skinner, the behavior of the speaker is verbal. This is because there is a specially conditioned listener who mediates the reinforcement of this behavior. The role of the listener in every verbal episode is not necessary verbal in any sense and that the behavior of a listener cannot be differentiated from other forms of his behavior. In language hypothesis however, is that the implicit idea of the listener is verbal. Skinner uses verbal behavior to demonstrate how a behavior analytic approach can be applied in call language. According to him verbal behavior is that kind of behavior that is reinforced through mediation of other person. It is where the actions of the speaker are reinforced by the mediation of the listener. In the above definition of verbal behavior as one reinforced by the actions of others, it does not specify the medium, form or mode. Skinner reinforces the fact that the listener should respond in a manner that is precisely conditioned to reinforce speaker's behavior. This implies that the actions of the listener are the actions that acquired as a member of the verbal community and that it is the vocal community that selects certain forms of verbal behavior like vocal configurations (Skinner, 1992).

Every aspect of communication, in the form of meanings, ideas and information places much attention on transmission to the listener. The behavior of the listener does not have any resemblance with the behavior of the speaker and it is not verbal as indicated in the definition of verbal behavior. The analysis of Skinner on the function of the listener in the listener-speaker verbal episode places a lot of focus on mediation of reinforcement for the behavior of the speaker. Reinforcement mediation, though necessary, may not be sufficient as definitional boundary of the

listener's role.

According to Skinner, it is very necessary to understand the role of the speaker in verbal relations. According to Skinnerian approach, the analysis of both the speaker and the listener is critical in order to comprehend the complete verbal episode. Verbal operant like tack mostly benefit the speaker. All verbal operants are placed under the control of the listener or the audience. Skinner stressed the role of the listener and the audience by dwelling more on the role and characteristics of the listener during verbal behavior. Conversation or dialogue is very critical for the general conception of verbal behavior according to Skinner. He defines it as a behavior that is reinforced by the behavior of other people. In every verbal community, the two people exchange the role of the listener and speaker or they do so in turns. Verbal behavior presents a distinction between the speaker and the listener (Sundberg, n. d).

The behavior of the speaker is functionally different from the behavior of the listener. Conditions regulating speaking are different from the conditions regulating listening. Skinner used the term rule governed behavior to explain the role and behavior of the listener during verbal behavior. The way that an individual speaks is determined by the consequences that are supplied by the listener. The focus on the speaker and the listener is the main theme of verbal behavior. Various psycholinguists and linguists are very much concerned about the listener's behavior; they practice this by placing much attention on how the words we utter matter to those who hear about them. The main concept behind any form of communication, whether it is meanings, ideas or information places a lot of emphasis on transmission to

the listener (Skinner, 1992).

Communication is considered to be very successful when the expression has similar meaning to both the listener and the speaker. The listener therefore has a very key role in complementing the behavior of the speaker; this may be achieved through the following ways:

Attention: The attention of the listener may be in the form of body position and eye contact.

Social reinforcement: This can be realized through body position, head nods and praise.

Mediator of reinforcement: This can be achieved when the listener responds to the speaker's mands; this may be by opening doors, getting things and other non-verbal behavior.

Listener can also perform such roles that may be negative. These are:

Extinction: The listener may choose to ignore the conversation by showing disinterest.

Social punishment: This might include such actions by the speaker like head nods, looking away, body position and frowning.

The listener is considered as the critical part of the state at which verbal behavior is observed. The listener is part of the occasion through which verbal behavior is reinforced and therefore controls the strength of the behavior. The listener provides discriminative stimulus. The listener is therefore a discriminative stimulus where the verbal behavior is reinforced characteristically in a strong manner. The listener is considered as a critical part of the situation in which verbal behavior is observed and hence it is also

a form of discriminative stimulus. The listener is part of the occasion in which verbal behavior is reinforced hence he/she is the part of the occasion that controls the strength of the verbal behavior. When the speaker has a conversation with the listener, the verbal stimuli is emitted in a form of discriminative stimuli. The listener is said to comprehend the speaker if he/she behaves appropriately.

A discriminative stimulus that is verbal has the likelihood of evoking intraverbal behavior, echoic or textual, transcriptive on the section of the listener. In the event of this verbal stimulus, the listener reverses roles by becoming the speaker. In this event, the listener behaves similarly as the speaker. The following are the basic roles of the listener in verbal behavior. The listener is necessary for every verbal episode: Verbal episode is the behavior of the listener and the speaker combined together. There is no combined behavior in a verbal episode that supersedes all behaviors of speaker and the listener; it will therefore be foolhardy to underestimate the power of the two parties. The role of the listener is to act physically in a manner will reinforce speaker's verbal behavior. According to Skinner, it is imperative to study the speaker while assuming the listener and vice versa. One does not need to examine the exchange the listener-speaker after having examined the speaker-listener. This is because the behavior of the listener needn't be verbal. He argues that the presence of the listener is not necessary for the emission of verbal behavior; when emitted in listener's absence, it might go unreinforced and thus subject to extinction (Sundberg, n. d).

The listener consequences the behavior of the speaker: The listener has the

role of mediating reinforcement. It is the duty of the verbal community to maintain the behavior of the speaker with a generalized reinforcement. The listener also functions as SD and MO for the sake of verbal behavior: The listener is the core part of the situation whereby verbal behavior will be observed, though discriminative stimulus. This role of the listener should be differentiated from the role of the listener to reinforce behavior. In verbal behavior, the listener will function as discriminative stimulus while at the same time playing the role of reinforcing behavior. In this aspect, the listener functions as audience in a situation where the verbal behavior is reinforced in a characteristically strong manner. The presence of discriminative stimuli will serve to reinforce the verbal behavior of the speaker hence the speaker will be forced to act in order to produce an audience. The audience will either act as none or all determinant of the verbal behavior, selector of the subject matter if the verbal behavior to be reinforced, the conditioned reinforce and the controller of the behavioral repertoire of the speaker. In verbal behavior, new audience doesn't occasion behavior. There is some case where the speaker becomes his own audience especially when the verbal behavior is not repressed (Skinner, 1992).

The listener also plays the role of additional action: Verbal behavior becomes pointless when the listener does nothing to reinforce the speaker emitting the conversation. The action taken by the listener regarding verbal response is considered to be more important for the speaker as opposed to only generalized reinforcement.

There are three actions that are utilized by the listener in performing their roles: Verbal behavior, nonverbal operant behavior and nonverbal

respondent behavior. The behavior of the listener is not verbal but the listener only reacts to verbal stimulus whether discriminated operant behavior or conditioned reflex; the listener only reacts to any environmental feature (Sundberg, n. d).

References

Skinner, B. F. (1992). Verbal behavior. Acton, Mass: Copley.

Sundberg, M. (n. d). The Role of the Listener in Skinner's Analysis of Verbal Behavior. Retrieved on 16th March 16, 2014 from: [www. marksundberg. com](http://www.marksundberg.com)