BCBA® CHEAT SHEET · CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES · B.19

Verbal operants: mand, tact, echoic, intraverbal

Sort verbal behavior by why a response happens, not by the words that are said.

Start with the antecedent

- **A motivating operation: the speaker wants something now** → **Mand** — Reinforced by the specific thing it names.
- **A nonverbal stimulus: something seen, heard, smelled, tasted or touched** → **Tact** — Maintained by generalized reinforcement, such as praise.
- **A verbal stimulus with no point-to-point correspondence** → **Intraverbal** — Answers, song fill-ins, conversation.
- **A verbal stimulus with point-to-point correspondence** → **Echoic, textual or transcription** — Check the modes: heard to said, written to spoken, spoken to written.

Key ideas

- Verbal behavior is defined by function: behavior reinforced through another person, the listener. Speech, sign, picture exchange, writing and devices all count.
- Only the mand is controlled mainly by an MO. It mainly benefits the speaker; the tact mainly benefits the listener.
- Tacts and mands are functionally independent: a learner who labels a cup may not ask for a drink when thirsty.
- Mand training needs an MO: capture one, or contrive one, such as a favorite toy in view but out of reach.

One word, "water," as each operant B.19

Operant	Controlled by	Point-to-point	Formal similarity	Example
Mand	A motivating operation	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	Amara has not had a drink since lunch. She says "water," and her grandmother hands her a cup.
Tact	A nonverbal stimulus	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	She sees a fountain on a walk and says "water." Her RBT says, "Yes, there's the fountain!"
Echoic	A spoken verbal stimulus	Yes	Yes: heard to said	The RBT says "water," and Amara says "water."
Intraverbal	A verbal stimulus	No	No	"What do fish live in?" Luis says, "Water."
Textual	Written words	Yes	No: written to spoken	Dana reads the label "WATER" on a bottle aloud.
Transcription	Spoken words	Yes	No: spoken to written	Kenji hears "water" and types it.
Autoclitic	The speaker's own verbal behavior	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	N/A (no verbal antecedent)	"*I think* it's salt water" tells the listener how strong the claim is.

Copying written text and imitating a sign also have both point-to-point correspondence and formal similarity. The autoclitic is secondary verbal behavior: it modifies how other verbal behavior affects the listener.

Exam traps

Classifying by the word. "Cookie" is not automatically a mand. Look for the MO and the specific reinforcer.

Mand or tact at the playground? Waiting for a turn and being pushed on the swing means mand. Seeing the swing and hearing "Yes, a swing!" means tact.

Echoic or textual? Both have point-to-point correspondence; only the echoic has formal similarity. Reading crosses modes.

Textual or transcription? Written to spoken is textual. Spoken to written is transcription.

Any answer to a question is a tact? If a verbal stimulus evokes it and no nonverbal stimulus controls it, it is intraverbal.

Receptive identification is not a tact. Pointing to the dog when someone says "dog" is listener behavior, not a speaker operant.

Read the free lesson

B.19 The verbal operants: mand, tact, echoic, intraverbal, and more

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