

Behavior Analytic Interpretations of Grammar

For example, children appear to acquire complex verbal constructions with little explicit tutelage. In Chapter 11 we propose that automatic reinforcement plays an important role in the acquisition of such constructions. (We use the term "automatic reinforcement" only to mean reinforcement arising from the stimulus products of one's own behavior. There is nothing special about such reinforcement. The term merely emphasizes that some important sources of reinforcement are not arranged by other people.) For another statement of the case, click **Achieving Parity: Automatic Reinforcement** below. Under normal conditions, speakers hear themselves as they speak; the stimulus products of their vocal behavior are the very ones that affect other listeners in critical ways. These are optimal conditions for the automatic shaping of behavior.

In the section of the text on verbal rules, we introduced the concept of a frame, a characteristic verbal sequence consisting of both fixed and variable elements, such as "give the X to the Y," where X and Y can take a very wide variety of forms. Skinner called such verbal units "autoclitic frames," a term we avoided in the text. The invariant elements of such frames provide a structure to the sequence, but the frame itself is presumably under stimulus control of distinctive circumstances and is therefore functional. (The ubiquity of such frames, each with its structural properties, may account for the appeal of structuralist accounts of verbal behavior.) The role of such frames in verbal behavior and of automatic shaping is discussed in two of the papers below. (**Speaker as Listener**, and **What is the Function of Structure?**.)

For a brief and speculative **behavioral interpretation of pronouns**, see "**On Pronouns**."