

# Department of Psychology

## Brown Bag Discussion

### How Can Behavior Analysts Account for Structural Regularities in Verbal Behavior (i.e., Grammar)?



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As the focus of discussion, I would like to ask whether basic behavioral principles are sufficient to account for the subtleties of grammar. For example, (following Pinker) why do we find "I gave the library the manuscript" to be fine, but we find "I donated the library the manuscript" to be odd, or even ungrammatical? Can we find behavioral translations for standard concepts like *agent*, *action*, *object*, and *indirect object*, or the more abstract concepts like *subject* and *predicate*? I will suggest that the correlated nonverbal behavior of the speaker (i.e., the cascade of discriminative responses to the verbal and nonverbal context) is a fruitful, but experimentally intractable, source of stimulus control for on-going verbal behavior, but whether it can take the place of grammatical concepts is surely open to debate.

**Friday, Sept. 29, 2017**

1710 Wood

12 p.m.



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