

What do you hear? Teaching children with autism to tact auditory stimuli

The tact is a verbal operant maintained by generalized social reinforcement and evoked by nonverbal discriminative stimuli (Skinner, 1957). A nonverbal discriminative stimulus can be one that is seen, felt, tasted, smelled, or heard; nevertheless, most of the research on teaching tacts to children with autism/autistic children focuses on teaching tacts controlled by visual stimuli. Therefore, more research is needed on teaching tacts of other stimuli. The project I will describe focused on teaching children with autism to tact auditory stimuli, and it is a replication of Hanney et al. (2019). We explored whether two elementary-aged boys with autism acquired auditory tacts when auditory stimuli were presented alone and with corresponding visual stimuli. We used an adapted alternating treatments design embedded within a concurrent multiple probe across sets design and found that both participants acquired the auditory tacts no matter the stimulus arrangement with one set. With one participant, we used a concurrent-chains preference assessment to assess whether he preferred instruction with one arrangement. Although he selected one condition more frequently, the data did not suggest a clear preference. I will discuss the stimulus arrangement, stimulus-control probes, and implications for teaching auditory tacts in practice.

The cat is being brushed by the dog: The role of automatic reinforcement in grammar

Because humans amass amazingly robust verbal behavior repertoires, it is not plausible that all verbal behavior is acquired through socially mediated reinforcement. Parity, a condition which occurs when a speaker's verbal behavior matches with the models provided by the verbal community, offers a potential mechanism for acquisition and audience control. Previous research examined the acquisition of novel or unfamiliar grammatical constructions in the absence of or in competition with socially mediated reinforcement. In this presentation, I will describe a study that builds upon previous literature on the emission of passive-voice autoclitic frames. An example of a tact with a passive-voice autoclitic frame is the response "The cat is

being brushed by the dog” when shown a picture of a dog brushing a cat. In this study, we assessed the effects of modeling on the emission of passive-voice autoclitic frames by 13 children assigned to either a control, replication, or vocal-imitation group using a pre- and post-test design with multiple training and testing phases. Participants in the control group never used passive voice autoclitic frames, but most of the participants in the replication and vocal-imitation groups did after the training phases. I will compare these results to those found in previous studies and discuss potential mechanisms to account for the emission of passive voice autoclitic frames.