



## **The Behavior of the Listener**

*By Dr. Dave Palmer*

The function of speech is, in part, to induce verbal behavior in the listener—usually to speak along with the speaker. Listeners engage in such behavior when they "pay attention" to a speaker. Other discriminative behavior also occurs, often in a cascade of responses, as when the speaker is telling a story, and listeners follow along in a rich private "movie." Subsequent behavior of the listener must be understood as under control of both speech and the stimulus products of one's own listener behavior, verbal and nonverbal. Reader behavior is analogous, if not identical, in many respects, but whereas auditory stimuli are fleeting, a reader can control both the pace and frequency of presentation of textual stimuli. Such behavior is commonly unobserved, but even so the role of listener behavior cannot be neglected if we are to understand even the most commonplace of verbal phenomena.