



The Role of Multiple Control in Fluent Speech

By Dr. Dave Palmer

Almost all verbal behavior is multiply controlled. Even the elementary verbal operants seldom occur in pure form outside the laboratory or classroom. Consequently, our task is seldom to categorize observed verbal responses but to identify the various sources of control at each moment. This exercise is particularly important in understanding extended strings of verbal behavior, as in “sentences,” or fluent speech. Since such strings are commonly emitted rapidly, stimulus control changes with lightning speed. Furthermore, most are also novel, thereby posing a challenge to a scientific account. A consideration of prosody, together with Skinner’s concepts of multiple control, “autoclitic frames” and “additivity of response strength” offers one possible interpretation of how rapidly shifting sources of stimulus control can generate novel but orderly sequences of fluent speech.