quite separate sets of circumstances are revealed, then there are two responses having the form “length” since a single verbal response-class is not defined by its phonetic form alone but by its functional relations. (p. 419)

Others would undoubtedly identify several other significant aspects of this paper, as there are many. One final point is the tone of the paper and its context in a written symposium. One might imagine Skinner orally presenting this paper much in the same way that he presented his last invited address at APA in 1990. Once again, “striking a blow for the cause.”

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**Historical Corner:**

**A fastidious focus on activity**

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One of the first introductory psychology texts, *Psychology,* published in 1921, instructed the first several generations, including Skinner’s (as Skinner reveals in *The Shaping of a Behaviorist,* 1979). In the opening pages of *Psychology,* R. S. Woodworth offers this helpful reminder:

> Instead of "memory" we should say "remembering"; instead of "thought" we should say "thinking"; instead of "sensation" we should say "seeing, hearing," etc. But, like other learned branches, psychology is prone to transform its verbs into nouns. Then what happens? We forget that our nouns are merely substitutes for verbs, and go hunting for the things denoted by the nouns; but there are no such things, there are only the activities that we started with, seeing, remembering, and so on. Intelligence, consciousness, the unconscious, are by rights not nouns, nor even adjectives or verbs; they are adverbs. The real facts are that the individual acts intelligently—more or less so—acts consciously or unconsciously, as he may also act skillfully, persistently, excitedly. It is a safe rule, then, on encountering any menacing psychological noun, to strip off its linguistic mask, and see what manner of activity lies behind.

(Woodworth, 1921, pp. 5-6)

Here, reification is presented as both tempting and dangerous, thus we encounter yet another thorny issue of studying behavior. Our constrained linguistic structure presents limitations in talking about process and activity. The structure of Western languages, including English, necessitates segmenting the world around us into categories of verbs that are required to be organized around nouns.

Importantly, the science of behavior is not alone. These arbitrary segmentations that emphasize discrete, unidirectional actions across time, instead of ongoing, multiply determined processes, likely obfuscate (or perhaps create) the counterintuitive nature of the dynamics of the universe at the subatomic level in physics (probably the “other learned branches” Woodworth was referring to).

As noted in *Language, Thought, and Reality* by the linguist Benjamin Whorf (1956), “Modern thinkers have long since pointed out that the so-called mechanistic way of thinking has come to an impasse before the great frontier problems of science” (p. 238). To be sure, as the science of behavior continues to progress, we will need words. And some of those words will necessarily have to be nouns. As this early comment by Woodworth emphasizes, however, a fastidious focus on activity will help avoid confusing our subject matter with the words we must use to describe it.