VERBAL LEARNING

Verbal learning is different from conditioning and is limited to human beings. Human beings, as we must have observed, acquire knowledge about objects, events, and their features largely in terms of words. Words then come to be associated with one another. Psychologists have developed a number of methods to study this kind of learning in a laboratory setting. Each method is used to investigate specific questions about learning of some kind of verbal material. In the study of verbal learning, psychologists use a variety of materials including nonsense syllables familiar words, unfamiliar words, sentences, and paragraphs.

Methods used in Studying Verbal Learning

① <u>Paired-Associates Learning</u>: This method is similar to S-S conditioning and S-R learning. It is used in learning some foreign language equivalents of mother tongue words. First, a list of paired associates is prepared. The first word of the pair is used as stimulus, and the second word as the response. Members of each pair may be from the same language or two different languages. A list of such words like GEN-LOOT, BEM-TIME, JIT-LION etc.

The first member of the pairs (stimulus term) are nonsense syllables (consonant-vowel-consonant), and the second are English noun (response term). The learner is first shown both the stimulus-response pairs together, and is instructed to remble remember and recall the response after the presentation

of each stimulus term. After that a learning trial begins. One by one the stimulus words are presented and the participant tries to give the correct response term. In case of failure, s/he is shown the response word. In one trail all the stimulus term are shown. Trails continue until the participant gives all the response words without a single error. The total number of trails taken to reach the criterion becomes the measure of paired-associates learning.

② Serial Learning: This method of verbal learning is used to find out how participants learn the lists of verbal items, and what processes are involved in it. First lists of verbal items, i.e. nonsense syllables, most familiar or least familiar

words, interrelated words, etc. are prepared. The participant is presented the entire list and is required to produce the items in the same serial order as in the list. In the first trail, the first item of the list is shown, and the participant has to produce the second item. If s/he fails to do so within the prescribed time, the experimenter presents the second item. Now this item becomes the stimulus and the participant has to produce the third item that is the response word. If s/he fails, the experimenter gives the correct item, which becomes the stimulus item for the fourth word. this procedure is called serial anticipation method. Learning trails continue until the participant correctly anticipates all the items in the given order.

③ Free Recall: In this method,

participants are presented a list of words, which they read and speak out. Each word is shown at a fixed rate of exposure duration. Immediately after the presentation of the list, the participants are required to recall the words in any order they can. Words in the list may be interrested or unrelated. More than ten words are included in the list. The presentation order of words to varies from trail to trail. This method is used to study how participants organise words for storage in memory. Studies indicate that the items placed in the beginning or end of the list are easier to recall than those placed in the middle, which are more difficult to recall.