



**COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES**  
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**SEMANTIC SATIATION (VERBAL REPETITION)**

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Definition: Rapidly repeating a specific word over and over again in order to temporarily experience loss of meaning of the word.

Elements: Saying upsetting words quickly and repeatedly until they lose their meaning and any associated distress and become 'just a sound'.

Related Procedures: Cognitive defusion, exposure therapy

Application: In individual or group therapy to reduce the belief in and distress associated with depressive or anxious thoughts.

1st use? Titchener EB (1910), developed as a therapy method by Hayes et al (1999).

References:

1. Hayes SC, Strosahl KD, Wilson KG (1999) *Acceptance and commitment therapy: an experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford.
2. Masuda A, Hayes SC, Sackett CF, Twohig MP (2004) Cognitive defusion and self-relevant negative thoughts: examining the impact of a ninety year old technique. *Behav Res Ther*, 42, 477–485.
3. Titchener EB (1910) *A text-book of psychology*. New York: Macmillan.
4. Watson C, Burley MC, Purdon C (2010) Verbal repetition in the reappraisal of contamination-related thoughts. *Behav Cognitive Psychother*, 38, 337–353.

Case Illustration (Watson unpublished)

Michael (age 36) had obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) from age 16. He feared something bad would happen to his family members if he did something “unlucky” such as stepping on a sidewalk crack or finishing something on an odd number. For example, when knocking on someone’s door, Michael would knock either 2 or 4 times, fearing that if he knocked 1 or 3 times, then a family member would get sick or have an accident. He thought the number 13 was particularly unlucky and even seeing it embedded in another number (e.g., 2135) increased his anxiety considerably. Despite knowing that these beliefs were probably unrealistic he avoided many feared situations and objects to ensure bad things would not occur.

At the start of individual exposure and ritual prevention therapy for OCD, Michael was asked to notice what went through his mind after saying the word “milk”. He was then encouraged to say the word “milk” out loud over and over again as fast as he could for 30 seconds. Michael noticed that the associations seemed to vanish during the repetition and he was left with just a sound. He was encouraged to repeat this exercise of saying the word “thirteen” out loud. He thought this would probably evoke moderate distress but was willing to try it. Michael noticed that as he repeated the word “thirteen” out loud over and over again it too seemed to become somewhat less meaningful with a slight decrease in accompanying distress. He realized that “I guess

it's just a word like any other". He added this exercise to his hierarchy of objects and situations to expose himself to during the course of therapy.