

COMPARING A FREE-RESPONSE TEST USING AN OBJECT AND WITHOUT OBJECT CONDITION: FIRST STUDY EXPLORING THE “TOKEN-OBJECT” EFFECT ON AN UN- GIFTED SAMPLE

Alejandro Parra and Juan Carlos Argibay

Instituto de Psicología Paranormal
Buenos Aires
ARGENTINA

ABSTRACT

Psychometry is an anomalous cognition system for psi-detection. For example, psychics have often claimed to have the ability to obtain “impressions” about people from objects that they have owned. Many authors have suggested explanations for psychometry, which are in line with Roll’s “psi field.” Research has mostly been limited to qualitative analysis because psychometry is very difficult to research due to problems in evaluating “free response” material. To date, there has been little interest in the exploration of psychometry among “ordinary” people. In this study, psychometry-based experimental research and ESP hits were compared with visual images to assess strategies. “Psychometric” and “non-psychometric” procedures were counterbalanced. Seventy one unselected, ordinary people (age range= 18-77; Mean= 46.44; SD= 14.03) were recruited as participants by announcements. All participants underwent the two conditions of the psi experiment: the use of token-object and visual images. Test instructions were given to both participants and target persons. Four volunteers carried identical objects with them for fifteen days. Blind coding and recoding procedures were used by the experimenters. Participants “touched” four objects for impressions and completed four trials. Target persons blind scored the participant’s statements. A similar procedure was employed for the free-response test (visual). Targets for both the visual test and the token-objects, were randomly assigned. The non-psychometry condition ($p = .005$) resulted in higher scores than those obtained in the psychometry condition. The difference between both target conditions (no-psychometry vs. psychometry) was also significant (z -score= 2.65, $p = .008$, two-tailed). We conclude that this experiment offers some support for the claim that visual image stimulation is more psi-conductive, presumably at least among ordinary people. Psi seems to work better using visual imagery than in a “token object” condition. It may well be that the anomalous cognition with psychometry is a more complex cognitive process than we have considered it to be.

INTRODUCTION

Some people feel that they are “sensitive” and able to get impressions about the owners of objects through the use of some form of ESP. *Psychometry*, an anomalous cognition system for psi-detection, has also been called retrocognition, or, although less used, *pragmatic cryptesthesia* (proposed by Richet, 1922). The term is also used for the theories and techniques of psychological measurement. Throughout the history of psychical research, psychics have claimed the ability to get “impressions” from objects, these impressions constituting information about the owners and past histories of the objects other than what could be inferred from their known physical properties. Such claims, supported almost exclusively by anecdotal material, have been difficult to evaluate insofar as deciding whether some form of ESP must be postulated to account for the results.

Psychometry and precognition usually imply the factor of time (events past/future). The term “psychometry”, coined in 1842 by Dr. J. Rhodes Buchanan, describes a type of knowledge (or

extrasensory perception, ESP) which permits a psychic or sensitive to receive impressions using a physical object as inductor or instrument to express the information perceived (Buchanan, 1885), in contrast to other forms of ESP communication which are more questionable, such as the “psychic reading” face to face (of a consultant) or through control spirits (spiritualist medium) (Bentley, 1961; Rogo, 1974; Somogyi, 1974).

The first studies began around 1860. Professor William Denton described psychometry tests performed by his sister, Mrs. Ana Cridge (Denton, 1863). F.W.H. Myers, one of the founders of the (London) Society for Psychical Research, wrote in his monumental work *The Human Personality* (Myers, 1903) that “the objects that have been in contact with organisms preserve traces of them, and sometimes it seems like the inorganic nature could become luminiscent, so to speak, with the long history of its past.”

References to influences originating in objects can be found in the work of Mrs. Sidgwick discussing Hodgson’s reports on séances with Mrs. Piper. The longest and more methodical studies carried out employing psychometry were performed by Dr. Gustav Pagenstecher, of Mexico city, with Mrs. Maria Reyes de Zierold (Pagenstecher, 1920, 1922, 1924, 1928; Roll, 1967), whose results were so impressive that Walter Franklin Prince, president of the American Society for Psychical Research visited México and published some additional reports on the subject (Prince, 1920, 1921, 1922). Dr. J. Hettinger received his degree of doctor in philosophy, at the University of London, for his experiments described in his book *The Ultra Perceptive Faculty* (Hettinger, 1940) as well as developing a program for the investigation of psychometry (Hettinger, 1948).

W.G. Roll (1964, 2004) has suggested one line of theory that may explain psychometry. Roll theorizes that people and objects generate a “psi field” much the same as the earth generates a gravitational field. People may also impress or intermingle their own psi fields on objects they have frequently handled. A sensitive can read traces from this field by handling an object or by proxy come into the direct psi field of the owner.

The first attempt to disprove the “telepathy theory” of psychometry was made in experiments with the Polish clairvoyant, Stefan Ossowiecki, who was to demonstrate his abilities to an international conference on psychical research in Warsaw held in 1923 (Barrington, Stevenson, and Weaver, 2005). As a test, Eric Dingwall, research officer of the Society for Psychical Research, prepared a picture of a bottle in a frame, dated it August 22, 1925, wrote a sentence on the back of the picture and sealed it in three separate envelopes, each within the other. This packet was sent to Warsaw. Dingwall remained in England to offset the theory that Ossowiecki was telepathically tapping his mind. Ossowiecki was given the object and concentrated on impressions received from the contents. He was able to draw the bottle accurately, read the date, but not the month, and divine that there was writing on the drawing, but not what it said. This experiment is impressive, but since we now have considerable evidence of long-distance ESP, the test does not argue against telepathy.

W.H.C. Tenhaeff’s major contribution to the study of psychometry was not on *how* it works, but in fact, what causes it *not to work* (Tenhaeff, 1972). He believed that there are suggestions deriving from the object itself. For example, a knife might evoke scenes of a stabbing which may be wholly a fantasy suggested by common associations with the object. Secondly, telepathy from the object’s owner may get the psychic “off the track.” Thirdly, since most psychometrists report that they try to capture psychically induced mental images which they then *interpret*, they may in fact misinterpret these images or even confuse non-psychic with psychic images.

Osty (1923), a physician and later director of the Institut Metapsychique International, in his book, *Supernormal Faculties in Man*, discusses the remarkable results he obtained from several sensitives. Osty (1923) found that neither he nor his subjects were able to judge the accuracy of their impressions: “There is one only mode of estimating their value -- to write down the tenor of the words spoken and compare them with facts” (p. 213). This makes sense if the images that are evoked are the subject’s own.

Most studies on psychometry have been anecdotal. Because of the problems in evaluating “free response” material it is very difficult to research this ability. However, researchers like Tenhaeff, Osty, and Roll have attempted to make some sense of all this material by a qualitative analysis of psychic

readings. These studies, however, have concentrated on the nature of the object used during psychometry or on the abilities of the psychic.

Parapsychologists are becoming increasingly preoccupied with gifted subjects (mediums and sensitives), but little interest had been given to explore psychometry among “ordinary” people. Research with ordinary people seems to reveal new aspects of the ESP process, such as the distribution of the psychometry as ability, predicated by Buchanam and Denton the past century. In fact, psychometry is one of the main hopes for an empirical solution of the question whether human personality survives death. The ostensible ESP responses also produced by mediums and sensitives are usually verbal utterances and, occasionally, drawings or behavior by which the subject attempts to imitate some target person or situation.

The determination of probabilities by subjective judgments represents an uncertain and undesirable element in a statistical analysis. This type of material is much more difficult to appraise statistically than ESP card-guessing trials. J. G. Pratt (1969) replaced this by a procedure where the probability of each statement was determined by the group of target persons participating in the tests. In these experiments, where Mrs. Eileen J. Garrett was the subject, there were fifteen TPs. In a given test, one of these occupied a room adjacent to Mrs. Garrett while she produced a series of statements supposedly pertaining to him. After the completion of all sessions, each TP annotated all the statements according to whether or not they applied to his circumstances, but without knowing which statements had actually been made by Mrs. Garrett when the subject was in the next room. On the basis of these annotations, it could be determined which statements were true for one, two, three, four, etc., of the TPs and the statements were assigned probability values accordingly. Using Fisher's method for combining probabilities, Pratt then arrived at a total result. This method was an improvement over the Saltmarsh-Soal approach because it substituted an objective for a subjective determination of the probabilities of the individual responses. However, a difficulty remained. This was due to the possible interdependence between the subject's responses.

A Series of psychometry-based experiments were designed by us. They allowed us to explore new strategies for using and appraising “token-object” effect both, individually or in groups. ESP hits were compared to assess both, “psychometric” vs. “non-psychometric” procedures in ordinary people; in this case, the aim is explore whether there is a significant difference between ESP tests using objects (“token-object” effect) and enveloped images as ESP stimuli. Another additional purpose is to describe the technique design employed in the hope that it may be of value to other researchers. This experiment also illustrates how parapsychological testing procedures may be adapted to the particular needs and abilities of the samples of subject – adaptations which are, unfortunately, rare in contemporary parapsychological research.

The theoretical position underlying the present experiments has been outlined elsewhere by William G. Roll (Roll, 1964). Very briefly, the theory postulates that every material object possesses a “psi field”; that events in the history of the object leave traces in its psi field; that these traces constitute stored information which is retrievable, under the right conditions, by certain sensitives, using some form of ESP; and that these traces give an object “psychic distinctiveness” to a sensitive in direct proportion to the distinctiveness and intensity of the persons (owners) and events which have been associated with the object's history. Informal observations of some sensitives and the “folklore” of psychical research suggest that photographs, in particular, have traces associated with the persons or events depicted in the photograph. No conjectures about the nature of psi fields, or the mechanism whereby information is retrieved from them, will be made here.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 71 participants (63.4% females and 36.6% males) who were all well-educated, psi-believing participants. The ages ranged between 18 and 77 (Mean= 46.44; SD= 14.03). Each attended two tests, token-object and photos). Personal experiences suggestive of psi were reported by the majority of the subjects, such as ESP “feelings” around sick people (56%), around past place events (50.8%),

around “token” objects (34.7%), around unknown people (69.4%), around “token” photos (38.3%). Seventy-eight percent of the participants have had some training in meditation or other techniques involving an internal focus of attention.

Participants were recruited by media announcements and the mailing list. An announcement was also placed on the internet (*www.alipsi.com.ar*). The announcement had a brief explanation of the ESP test procedure and encouraged them to have an interview with us in order to gain more information about the topic.

Participant Orientation

Two-hour encounters (or workshops) each week were organized at the IPP with the people who were recruited. Fourteen free-of-charge, separate groups were conducted by AP and JCA over a period of two years. Between 5–10 participants each group were involved. Participants took part in weekly two-hour workshop activities. The participants received some information about the series tests. AP and JCA created a friendly and informal social atmosphere, engaging in conversation with the participants before the test. All of the participants filled out personality and psychological inventories and questionnaires whose results will be published otherwise.

Test instructions

Participants. The experiment was described to the participants. They were told that two different kinds of ESP tests were being undertaken, with two conditions: one using an object (psychometry condition), and the other using images as psi-stimuli (non-psychometry condition). Participants were informed that both situations can stimulate psychic abilities in people, and that this research was exploring both situations in one research project, so that their relative importance in stimulating psychic abilities could be evaluated. Before the start of the session, each participant underwent 9–minutes relaxation exercise for both conditions, which included progressive autogenic phrases (Jacobson, 1974) using the voice of one of us (AP). Psychometry and non-psychometry conditions were also counterbalanced for each group of participants.

Target Persons. Explanations of the experiment were given to the person-targets. They were four adult volunteers, two males and two females, who have ordinary lives. None of them had extraordinary events (that we know about) during the course of the experimental series. They were told to carry with them for fifteen days an identical object (a leather and metal key ring) each, which they had acquired in a gift store. They received one object each on day 1. On day 16, they returned the object in a box to AP.

Psychometry procedure

Target security. One hundred identical objects were pooled to be randomized. Four “token objects” were coded as 1–4 by AP, but this procedure was blind for JCA, who was not aware of the person-targets. After day 16 AP delivered all of the objects to JCA, who recoded them. This procedure was also blind for AP. Before the participant’s sessions JCA delivered all of the token-objects to AP in a little box, so that the test was conducted blind: AP who was in contact with each participant during the test period, did not know which codes JCA had recoded the “token-objects.” Also, JCA also did not enter the test’s room during the test performance and was in a nonadjacent, sound-attenuated room. Once the test period ended, AP delivered the token objects to JCA, who recoded them again as he had found them before the test session. JCA and AP kept paper-and-pencil records isolated, sensory-cues proof during all randomization procedure and handling procedure of the token-objects.

Test Procedure. Two rooms were necessary for this test procedure; one for AP and the participants, and the other for JCA. The participants remained seated in a chair. AP delivered the “token-objects” to the participants in little boxes. The instructions for each participant during the test were simple: “remain with eyes closed, quiet, waiting for mentations about object during few minutes.” AP remained silent in the room to observe the testing period, which usually lasted 60 minutes. Each participant “touched” the object. Afterwards the participants wrote his/her ‘impressions’ on a blank space on a form. Each participant completed four trials. Four forms were used for each participant. Once participants completed the four trials, AP gave the boxes and the forms back to JCA for coding. JCA enveloped the forms of the group participants for each person-target to judging procedure. Each form was individually signed by participants. Participants were not given trial-by-trial target feedback of the person-target's scores during test period. No information about PTs were given; total scores were returned at the end of the workshop series (PTs remained unidentified).

Judging procedure. AP delivered forms filled out by participants to the target person. Some instructions were given for this. He asked them to rank carefully each statement as they consider they adjust to their own psychological, physical, or any other trait written by the participants. A score of “1” was assigned to the candidate the participant believed has the strongest similarity to his impression; a score of “4” was given to the candidate participant who was least like the experience. Score 4 was also given if the participant did not write any statement on the form, however, each form had at least five to fifteen sentences each for evaluation. Person-targets did not know who the participants were but knew that one of the four statements per form corresponded to his/her token object. They scored participant’s statements blindly so that they also did not know which statement each participant had written. After this procedure was completed, the envelopes were returned closed and wax-sealed. Once target- persons had completed the judging procedure, they gave the forms back to AP. After the judging procedure, each target-person contacted AP in order to deliver the forms and scores for evaluation.

Non-Psychometry procedure

Target security. Two thousand well differentiated images such as animals, people making things, landscapes, religion symbols, scenics, structures, and caricatures and humoristic cartoons were pooled to be randomized. In a double blind procedure, images were recorded and selected prior to the experiment by co-experimenter JV. All images were re-clustered into eight clusters. In his house, JV selected eight images, from which two of them were randomly selected to serve as the target-image. All of eight images were printed on glossy-paper (from a CD clip art). Before the test period, visual targets were adequately screened in materials known to be opaque (black cardboard), pressed with two posterboards to avoid marks on the paper image, and placed inside an envelope closed and wax-sealed by JV. Afterwards, JV delivered the envelopes to JCA. Before the session, JCA then delivered the envelopes to AP containing two target images for each participant. AP (who was in contact with the participant during test period), did not know which target-images the co-experimenter had enveloped. JCA and JV kept paper-and-pencil records isolated. The records of target selection, once made, were kept locked away when the experimenter was out of the room. This procedure was used for five reasons: 1. the pictures were easily clustered; 2. to facilitate the randomization process; 3. target-pictures were characterized by their diversity and visual attractiveness to serve as good targets for a GESP experiment; 4. to avoid any sensory (visual) cues; 5. to avoid any target manipulation, mainly during the target-viewing and the judgment processes.

Test Procedure The participants remained seated in a chair. AP remained silent in the receiver's room to observe the testing period. AP delivered the "image" to the participants. The instructions for each participant during the test were simple: "remain with eyes closed, quiet, waiting for mentations about image for a few minutes." AP remained silent in the room to observe the testing period. Two forms were used for each participant. Once each participant completed the trials, AP gave the envelopes back to JCA for coding. Participants were not given trial-by-trial target feedback of the target's identity during test period; they were given at the end of the series meeting. Information about the target identity was given at the end of the session.

Judging procedure. AP delivered the envelopes and the forms to JCA, who opened all envelopes. AP delivered the envelopes to each participant, who viewed the four potential targets (the actual target and three decoys) which were re-enveloped and presented in four random sequences by JCA before delivering them to AP. The participants, viewing each candidate, associated to the item as though it were the actual target, describing perceived similarities between the item and the mentation. A score of "1" was assigned to the candidate the participant believed had the strongest similarity to his mentation; a score of "4" was given to the candidate the participant felt was least like his/her experience. Each form was individually signed by participants. The distribution of the four candidates (the image-target and three decoys) was also randomized, so that neither AP nor participant knew any image position and to avoid place preference during judging procedure. It did not use a duplicate of the target set for judging when the target was handled separately from the decoys.

Target randomization

The randomness source was an electronic random number generator (RNG) for both targets, visual and token-objects. Randomization procedures were applied before each session tests. Randomization procedure of targets was considered adequate. The position of the (visual) target within the target set as presented to the judge was also randomized.

Consent Form

As a part of the recruiting procedure, the participants filled out a Consent Form: "The study is being conducted by Alejandro Parra and Juan Carlos Argibay of Institute of Paranormal Psychology at Buenos Aires. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Participation in the study is typically strictly anonymous. All responses are treated as confidential, and in no case will responses from individual participants be identified. Many individuals find participation in this study enjoyable, and no adverse reactions have been reported thus far. Participation is voluntary, refusal to take part in the study involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled."

RESULTS

The non-psychometry condition, where images were employed as ESP targets, elicited better results than the psychometry condition, where token objects by person targets were employed ($p = .005$ vs. $p = .03$). The difference between both target conditions (no-psychometry vs. psychometry) was also significant (z -score = 2.65, $p = .008$, two-tailed) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: COMPARING PSYCHOMETRY PROCEDURE VS. NO-PSYCHOMETRY PROCEDURE
(N= 71)

	HITS		TOTAL	z-score*
	YES	NO		
PSYCHOMETRY	63 (22.18%)	221 (77.81%)	284	-1.03**
NON-PSYCHOMETRY	49 (34.50%)	93 (65.4%)	142	2.52***

* Correction for continuity was applied.

** $p = n.s.$, one-tailed

*** $p = .005$, two-tailed

DISCUSSION

This experimental series studied two different targets comparing a psychometry procedure with a “token” object to a GESP technique (clairvoyance) with a free-response test. We would conclude that this experiment offers some support for the claim that visual image stimulation is psi conducive in the case we find a significant difference between the psychometry and the no-psychometry condition but notably in a positive direction for the visual image condition ($p = .005$, two-tailed). The difference between both conditions was also significant ($p_{dif} = .008$).

Psi seems to work better in the visual than the “token object” condition. It may be that a visual condition is more in line with the way that ESP functions. Furthermore, a visual condition possibly adds motivation compared with the “token object” condition which could facilitate the psi task. Clearly the non-psychometry (visual) condition favors psi because it was more ecologically valid. Also, a substantial number of participants indicated having had some training in meditation or other techniques involving psychic abilities and/or an internal focus of attention. However, some problems were involved in terms of the participant’s impressions, some of them having difficulties expressing feelings, sensations, or making a description of the target person (through imagery or any extrasensorial way), or psychological resistance (fear of psi), or in terms of target person’s as judges, such as misinterpretations or of the participant’s statements.

At any rate, psychometry continues to be an area for exploration into ESP and there is a logical basis for further experimentation into this area. However, at this time it may require the services not only of parapsychologists but of –particularly– biologists, neurologists and physicists. Certainly a bio-physical approach to the problem of ESP seems called for.

Taking this into consideration, we think that the anomalous cognition with psychometry is a more complex cognitive process than we considered it to be. It seems to depend not only on the inductor object, but the very personality which has impressed it. Although it seems to be a mixture of both clairvoyance and telepathy, we designed a test in order to avoid a “clairvoyance” and “telepathy” hypothesis. Perhaps a psychometry procedure needs the support of a mind-to-mind connection to work better, or a sort of link between person-target, token-object and receiver, as occurs in a psychometry session with psychics. The link seems to be psychic (i.e. more emotional), physical (i.e. face-to-face) or both.

In this respect, perhaps the most fitting remarks about psychometry were written by G.N.M. Tyrrell (1947): “Object reading would appear to be evidence therefore, for the faculty of telaesthesia [telepathy initiated by the psychic, not the agent]. But there is one more lesson to be drawn from it, namely, that a close connection must exist between telepathy and clairvoyance. Somehow the presence of the physical object assists the operation of this telaesthetic form of telepathy. But the relation between a physical object and the extrasensory faculty is just the puzzle set by clairvoyance. If only we knew how the object affected the telaesthesia we should have made a great step towards understanding clairvoyance. But that is just what we do not know. All we can say is that it points strongly towards the view that there must be a vast amount of something behind the physical object as it appears to our senses. In fact, the sense

presentation of the physical world must be the thinnest and most conventionalized of abstractions if we accept the evidence for clairvoyance and object reading.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Bial Foundation for financial support of this research project. Thanks also are due to the generous collaboration of Juan G., Eduardo P., Romina M., and Magdalena V. who served as target persons.

REFERENCES

- Barrington, M.R.; Stevenson, I. and Weaver, Z. (2005). *A world in a grain of sand: The clairvoyance of Stefan Ossowiecki*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Buchanan, J.R. (1885). *Manual of psychometry: The dawn of a new civilization, second edition*. Boston: Press of the Roxbury Advocate.
- Bentley, W.P. (1961). Research in “psychometry” in the US and England. *International Journal of Parapsychology*, 3, 75-103.
- Denton, W. (1863). *The soul of things*. Author: New York.
- Hettinger, J. (1940). *The ultra perceptive faculty*. London: Rider.
- Hettinger, J. (1948). A program for the investigation of psychometry. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 12, 90-95.
- Myers, F.W.H. (1903). *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Osty, Eugène (1923). *Supernormal Faculties in Man*. London: Meuthen (Spanish version was used).
- Pagenstecher, G. (1920). A notable psychometric test. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 14, 386-417.
- Pagenstecher, G. (1922). Past events seership: A study in psychometry. *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 16, 1-136.
- Pagenstecher, G. (1924). *Aussersinnliche wahrnehmung*. Halle: Carl Marhold. (Italian version was used).
- Pagenstecher, G. (1928). *Die geheimnisse der psychometrie: Oder hellsehen in die vergangenheit*. Leipzig: Oswald Mutze.
- Pratt, J.G. (1960). Methods of evaluating verbal material. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 24, 94-109.
- Pratt, J.G. (1969). On the evaluation of verbal material in parapsychology. *Parapsychological Monographs No. 10*, New York, NY: Parapsychology Foundation.
- Prince, W.F. (1920). Experiments in psychometry. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 14, 100-105.
- Prince, W.F. (1921). Psychometric experiments with Señora María Reyes de Z. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 15, 189-314.
- Prince, W.F. (1922). Psychometric experiments with Señora María Reyes de Z. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 16, 5-40.
- Richet, C. (1922). *Traite de metapsychiquè*. Paris: Alcan. (Spanish version was used).
- Rogo, D.S. (1974). Psychometry: Getting psychic impressions from objects. *Psychic*, 5(4), 19-22.
- Roll, W.G. (1964). The “psi field.” Presidential address read at the Seventh Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association, Oxford, England.
- Roll, W.G. (1967). Pagenstecher’s contribution to parapsychology. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 61, 219-240.

- Roll, W.G. (2004). Early studies on psychometry. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 18, 711-720.
- Somogyi, S. (1974). Esperimenti di psicomertria con un soggetto non-professionale. *Metapsichica*, 33, 124-127.
- Tenhaeff, W.H.C. (1972). *Telepathy and clairvoyance: Views of some little investigated capabilities of man*. Springfield, Ill. Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Tyrrell, G.N.M. (1947). The modus operandi of paranormal cognition. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 48, 65-120.

Corresponding author: rapp@fibertel.com.ar