

A CONTENT ANALYSIS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES USED IN DIFFERENT FORTUNE TELLING SYSTEMS

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Abstract

The art of reading people and their personality is always exciting for general public as well as Psychologists. This study is an attempt to find out the psychological techniques used for describing their client's personality by professional fortune tellers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Investigator approached fortune tellers in their place, gave their professional fees for consultation. The sample consisted of 8 fortune tellers from different systems like palm reading, face reading, prayer reading, and Pakshisashtam. Sample selected based on convenient sampling method. Investigator recorded their responses (personality description of investigator) using mobile phone voice recorder system without fortune teller's awareness. That recorded data converted to text form and later printed on paper. These contents analyzed with standard content analysis method. The result of content analysis clearly showed different linguistic deception techniques used by fortune tellers.

Keywords: Fortune Telling, Cold Reading, Content Analysis.

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Reading people's personality is a comparatively simple process, once it is analyzed and thoroughly understood. This knowledge accomplished by personal experience (contact with others) and by a study of human behavior. Each person presents an individual problem, yet the pattern of life and behavior is pretty much the same in some areas. The life of every individual has much in common with all other individuals that makes us to being in the category of 'human beings. Variations of their behavior are caused by well defined factors. The skilled reader must be trained to observe, classify and analyze these factors of 'tell-tale' signs, and interpret them into future activity.

Psychologists have made lot of studies, recorded thousands of case histories, and have come to very definite conclusions about human behavior. However, long before such scientific investigation was made into the behavior pattern, fortune tellers started their work based on observation of character and popular wisdom. In their own way, they made very much the same analysis as have the latter day psychologists into our daily lives. These people understand human nature and its shortcomings and thus met a natural demand. This study is an attempt to explore the psychological techniques used by fortune tellers to describe personality.

Major implication of the present study is it provides a new method to study about the effectiveness of fortune telling process. In subjective evaluation, most of the fortune telling looks like real. But when the content analyzed, we can understand the truth about this. This study result gives insights about culture and social norms. It also reveals different linguistic deception techniques used by fortune tellers. Knowledge about these deceptions helps the society to become more aware about this.

Objective

To find out the number and percentage of Psychological techniques used in different fortune telling systems

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 8 cold readers from different systems like palm reading, face reading, prayer reading, and Pakshisasthram. The subjects selected from different areas of Kerala and one from Tamilnadu. Age range of sample was 35-65. Total 8 contents are used in this study based on its clarity and diversity of techniques. Sample selected based on convenient sampling method.

Materials

1. Mobile phone with voice recorder system
2. Printed data for content analysis
3. Pencil

Procedure

Investigator approached cold readers in their place, gave their professional fees and recorded their reading about the investigator using mobile phone voice recorder system without their awareness. That recorded data converted to text form, printed on paper. These data compared with previously defined techniques commonly used by fortune tellers all over the world. These contents analyzed with standard content analysis method.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics are used in this study. Bar diagram and pie diagram also used to express the result.

Standard techniques used in cold reading

1. The Rainbow Ruse

The Rainbow Ruse is a statement which credits the client with both a personality trait and its opposite. Here is an example: "You can be a very considerate person, very quick to provide for others, but there are times, if you are honest, when you recognize a selfish streak in yourself." It covers all the possibilities from one extreme to the other, just as a rainbow encompasses all the colors.

2. Fine Flattery

Fine Flattery statements are designed to flatter the client in a subtle way likely to win agreement

3. The Jacques Statement

This element consists of a character statement based on the different phases of life which we all pass through. Jacques Statements are derived from common rites of passage, widely-recognized life patterns, and typical problems which we all encounter on the road to mature adulthood.

4. Barnum Statements

The name derives from P.T. Barnum, a legendary showman and circus-owner, who was said to have 'something to please everybody'. These are artfully generalized character statements which a majority of people, if asked, will consider to be a reasonably accurate description of themselves.

5. The Fuzzy Fact

A Fuzzy Fact is an apparently factual statement which is formulated so that (a) it is quite likely to be accepted (b) it leaves plenty of scope to be developed into something more specific.

6. The Cultural Trend

It is simply based on observing prevailing social and cultural trends, and extrapolating from them. A good knowledge of current trends can help the cold reader to make accurate statements about the subject's life now - her character, attitudes, pastimes and pre-occupations.

7. The Direct Question

In the case of the Direct Question, the cold reader simply asks for the information she/he wants. This may seem far too facile to play any part in cold reading process, but this is not necessarily the case.

8. The Diverted Question

The Diverted Question is a very subtle and effective technique. The cold reader takes a piece of information, one which has already arisen in the course of the reading, and finds ways to feed it back to the client in a modified form.

9. Likely Predictions

For these predictions, the cold reader makes a guess about the future which stands a reasonable chance of being correct.

10. Self-fulfilling Predictions

Another neat trick is for the psychic to make predictions which possess the virtue of being self-fulfilling. These generally pertain to, or are based on, aspects of the client's mood and personality.

11. Unverifiable Predictions

Another ruse employed by cold readers is to make predictions which the client can never verify either way. The client cannot possibly know if it ever comes true or not.

12. Use of pseudo-scientific words and explanation¹

A main technique widely used by cold reading is to use unknown words, or words related with fortune telling system, which makes more believability for his statements.

13. Redefining and correction

If one statement goes wrong, the cold reader can twist his statement and can redefine it in a different way. Then he may give emphasis to the second statement. In this way he can hide his mistake. It is one of the major techniques used by professional cold readers.

Classification of statements

General statements

If one statement contains general information which can be true about everyone or it uses any of the above mentioned techniques, it is consider as general statement. Numbers for General statements in this study are 1- 13.

14. Specific statements by observation

If the cold reader provide a specific information about the client based on his observation of responses, current situation, dressing style or body movement cues etc it consider as 'specific statements by observation.'

15. True specific statements which are difficult to explain with reason

Sometimes it is very hard to find out how the cold reader provides specific information. If it couldn't be explained by reason, it is considered as 'True specific statements'.

16. Completely wrong statements- Some reading or information provided by the cold reader may completely wrong which has no connection with the client.

17. Repeated statements with the same meaning

Some statements may be repeated in the same reading unnecessarily. Most of the time, when the reader have no more reading to say, he /she may repeat the previous things to fill the gap or to remind the client about a hit statement.

18. Advices

Normally cold readers give advices to the client. It helps them to turn cold reading process more meaningful and useful to the client.

RESULT

Results are given in tables

Table 1 – Number of techniques used in total contents

<i>Techniques</i>	<i>Content 1</i>	<i>Content 2</i>	<i>Content 3</i>	<i>Content 4</i>	<i>Content 5</i>	<i>Content 6</i>	<i>Content 7</i>	<i>Content 8</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rainbow ruse	2	6	1	1	0	2	0	3	15
Fine flattery	2	7	1	4	6	0	0	1	21
Jacques statement	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	5
Barnum statements	3	3	2	5	0	2	1	1	17
Fuzzy fact	4	4	2	4	3	3	1	1	22
Cultural trend	2	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	8
Direct question	4	5	5	2	5	2	0	0	23
Diverted question	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Likely predictions	1	5	4	0	2	0	0	0	12
Self fulfilling	2	4	3	0	1	1	0	0	11
Unverifiable predictions	0	3	1	3	1	0	0	0	8
pseudo-scientific	5	2	0	2	2	1	0	0	12
Redefining, correction	2	4	1	0	0	0	2	0	9

Figure 1 – Bar diagram shows techniques used in total contents

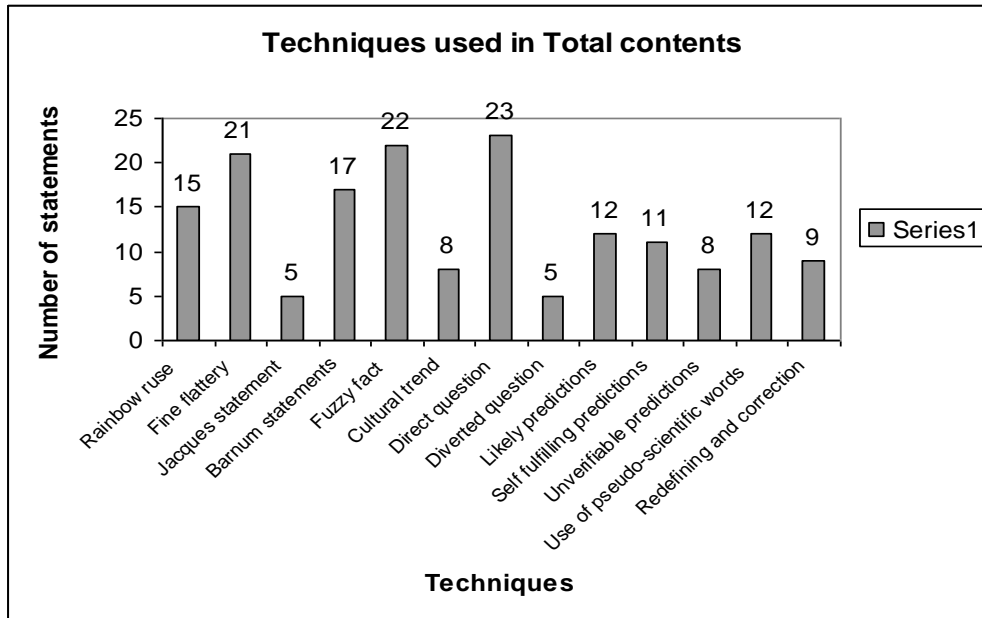


Figure 2 – Pie diagram shows percentage of each technique used in total contents

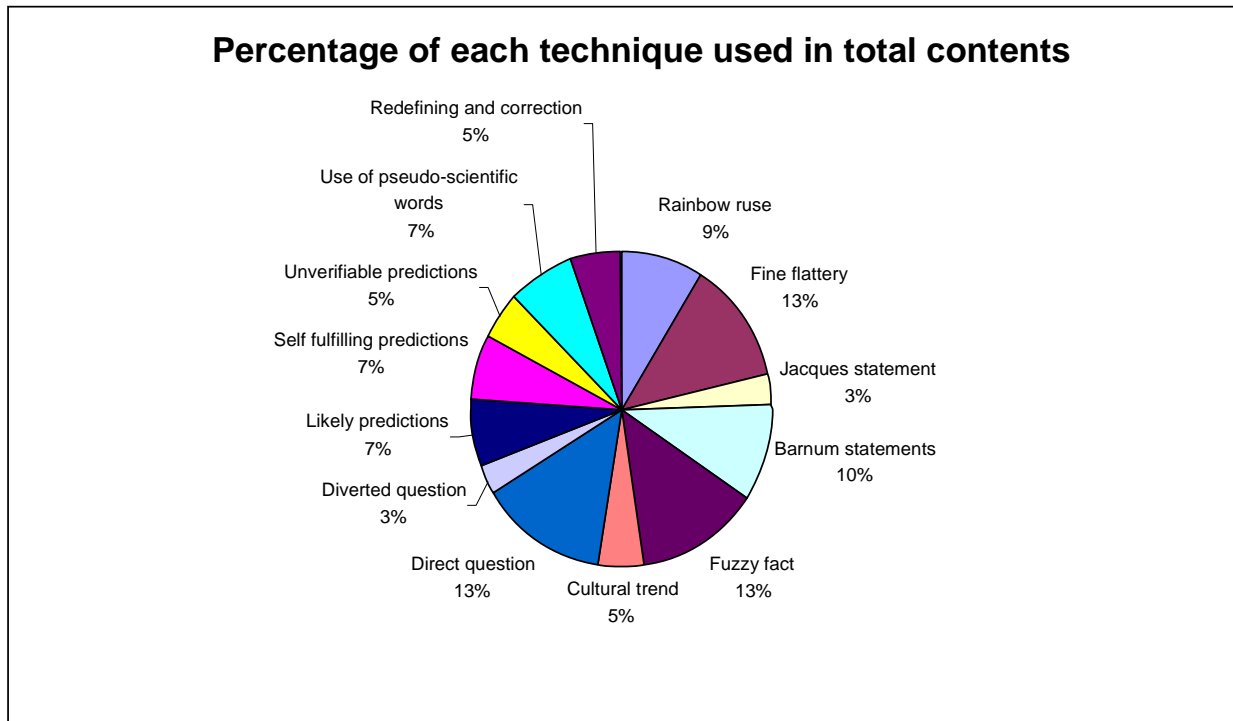
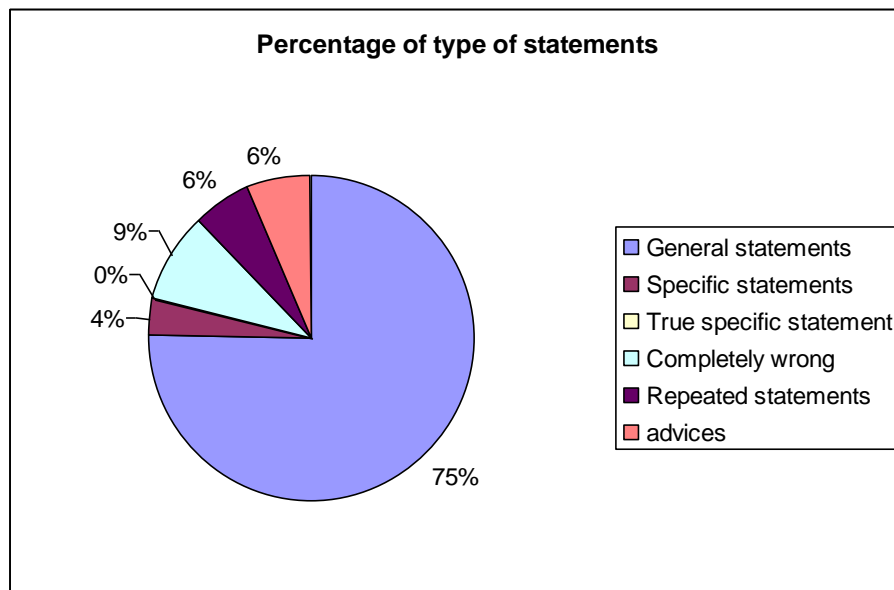


Table 2 – Number of different type of statements used in total contents

Type of Statement	Conten t 1	Conten t 2	Conten t 3	Conten t 4	Conten t 5	Conten t 6	Conten t 7	Conten t 8	Tota l
General	32	48	23	23	21	11	4	6	168
Specific Explainable	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
True specific	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Completely wrong	1	9	3	3	1	0	3	0	20
Repeated	0	0	1	4	0	6	2	0	13
Advice	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	0	14

Figure 3 – Pie diagram shows percentage of type of statements in total contents

Findings from total contents

1. The most used technique in total contents is direct question.
2. The number and percentage of general statements used in total contents are 168 and 75 respectively.
3. The number and percentage of Specific statements by observation in total contents are 8 and 4 respectively.
4. The number of True specific statements which are difficult to explain with reason in total contents is zero. The percentage is also zero.
5. The number and percentage of completely wrong statements in total contents are 20 and 9 respectively.
6. The number and percentage of repeated statements with same meaning in total contents are 13 and 6 respectively.
7. The number and percentage of advices in total contents are 14 and 6 respectively.

Discussion

Content analysis is the best method to study about the facts in fortune telling. There are some psychological factors related with memory and forgetting helps the fortune teller for his process. The investigator can't rely on his auditory memory alone for the study of fortune telling. After a fortune telling session, people generally reported that more than 70 percentages was hits and 30 percentage misses. The subjects reported the same when 50/50 hit and miss situation also. In cold reading, the cold readers won't give enough time to the subject to evaluate the statement. He will make continuous statements

In fortune telling the hits will be observed more and the subject even won't get the time to think about misses. Even if people have sought and interpreted evidence in a neutral manner, they may still remember it selectively to reinforce their expectations. This effect is called "selective recall", "confirmatory memory" or "access-biased memory".

Explanation of total contents

Table 2 shows the most used statement in total contents is direct question. There are 23 direct questions are in total contents. Direct question is in fact a bad technique in fortune telling.

Generally subjects or the clients report that fortune teller never asked a question, fortune teller told everything about them. But when consider these fortune readings, it is found that every fortune teller asked some questions and they used the answers brilliantly later in the reading process. Answers of the questions, the way of answering, time taken for answering, and the body language cues used with answers also consider by fortune tellers. Subjects never know these much information gathered from a single answer. Most asked direct questions are name and age. Both of these things can give some more extra information. Another frequent used technique in total reading is fuzzy fact statements. Fuzzy fact statements are also not a good technique. Generally it won't work with skeptic people. There were 22 fuzzy fact statements observed in total contents.

Another commonly used technique is fine flattery. There were 21 fine flatteries used in total contents. Fine flattery also will not work with skeptic people. Fine flattery is also easy to detect by a clear observer. But if used fine flattery in between specific statements, it can make tremendous impact on the client. There were 17 Barnum statements used in total contents. Barnum statements will work with most of the clients including skeptics. Bertram R. Forer proved these facts in his classic experiment about fortune telling. But if the client gets a chance to critically evaluate the statements, like this content analysis, Barnum statements won't work. In an actual reading, client won't get that much time to think about it, or the good fortune teller won't give enough time to think about it.

Table 1 shows there were 15 rainbow ruse statements used in total contents. The rainbow ruse is a statement which credits the client with both a personality trait and its opposite. It covers all the possibilities from one extreme to the others just as a rainbow encompasses all the colors. The unknown indirect responses of the client to the rainbow ruse statement will give additional information to the fortune teller. Rainbow ruse may be the best techniques normally used in fortune telling. 6 fortune tellers out of 8 used this technique in their reading.

The use of pseudo scientific words also can be seen in total contents 12 times. The proper use of pseudo scientific words can enhance the effect of reading and also can use as a cover for the mistakes. But the over use or improper use will dilute the effect of a good reading. Clients never know the meaning of these statements, so it will never questioned in reading process.

In total contents, there were 31 predictions are made by different fortune tellers. It is observed that likely predictions are the most used one. 12 likely predictions are there. If any of these predictions become true, the client will remember that one. But if it is wrong, naturally client will forget about it. Likely predictions are the predictions which have more chance to become true for most of the people, or that particular client. It is also important that there are 11 self fulfilling predictions in total contents. If self fulfilling predictions made about client's improvement, that will motivate the client and will help. But if it is made in an opposite direction (negative), that will discourage the client and will destroy hope. That may be bypassing the life of the client. It is ethically wrong to make a negative self-fulfilling prediction about someone. But some fortune tellers make these for their personal gain. The fortune tellers believe that client will be tensed about the negative predictions and the fortune teller will get a chance to solve the nonexistent problem. 3 out of 11 self-fulfilling predictions are negative in total contents. Even one negative self-fulfilling prediction is may become so dangerous in client's life. There are 8 unverifiable predictions also can be seen in total contents. Unverifiable prediction is a bad technique in fortune telling. Skeptics easily can understand this one.

Redefining and correction can be used for clarity in reading and also can use as a screen for the mistakes. It is a good technique when it is combining with 'fishing technique'. It allows the fortune teller to make some bold statements about the client. But no fortune teller used this technique with specific statements. They always used it to hide their mistakes. In total contents, fortune tellers used correction 9 times.

There are 8 Cultural trend statements can be seen in total contents. Cultural trend is simply based on observing prevailing social and cultural trends and exploiting from them. A good knowledge of cultural trends can help the fortune teller to make accurate statements about the subject's life now- character, attitudes, past times and pre-occupations. Jacques statements are very much similar to cultural trends. Jacques statements are character statement based on different phases of life which humans pass through. Jacques Statements are derived from common rites of passage, widely-recognized life patterns, and typical problems which we all encounter on the road to mature adulthood. There are only 5 Jacques statements in total contents.

There are 5 diverted questions in total contents. The Diverted Question is a very subtle and effective technique. The cold reader takes a piece of information, one which has already arisen in the course of the reading, and finds ways to feed it back to the client in a modified form. Client will not remember diverted questions in between or after fortune telling process. There were 23 direct questions in total contents, but just 5 diverted questions. All the contents hold more direct questions than diverted questions. This shows these fortune readings are technically weak about question techniques.

Table 2 shows the number of different type of statements. If one statement contains general information which can be true about everyone or it uses any of the techniques numbered 1-13 here, it is consider as general statement. In a fortune telling process, general statements are considered as trickery or verbal manipulation. There are nothing more than linguistic deception. If the fortune teller provide a specific information about the client based on his observation of responses, current situation, dressing style or body movement cues etc it consider as ‘specific statements by observation.’ Sometimes it is very hard to find out how the cold reader provides specific information. If it couldn’t be explained by reason, it is considered as ‘True specific statements’. If true specific statements are more than general statements in one reading, we can consider that for further scientific studies. When considering the total contents in this analysis, it is observed that there are 168 general statements and only 8 explainable specific statements. There are no ‘true specific statements’ observed in total contents. This is the most important result of this study. If there are no ‘true specific statement’ in total contents, that means there are no mysterious fortune telling skill used in total contents. But if a person hears these readings live, he/she may feel that more than 70 percentages is true about themselves and the fortune teller talk specifically about them.

Explanation of specific statements

Content one and two only holds specific statements in it. Each statement explained below.

1. “You are not a farmer or a businessman” (content one). This is a true statement. The dressing style, presence of a shoulder bag, age and body structure clearly explains the investigator is not a farmer or a businessman.

2. “There is no happiness in your face” (content one). This statement seldom explains it is observed from face. But the investigator was happy at that time.
3. “Now you are thinking something” (content one). Observation of face, especially eyes. Investigator was thinking about the investigation process.
4. “One of your thought is about a permanent job” (content one). It is a common problem of a young man in India.
5. “You are a devotee of Lord Siva” (content two). He made this statement because investigator met him in front of Attukal Temple, Trivandrum. It was a wrong statement. Investigator holds an agnostic view point about God and related beliefs and a non follower of religion.
6. “You will get support from this person” (Rajamoorthy, investigator’s friend) (content two). This is a right statement till now. Rajamoorthy is a good supporter for more than 7 years. Fortune teller observed the interaction between Rajamoorthy and investigator.
7. “The home you are living now is not for you” (content two) Fortune teller asked about investigator’s siblings before. So he knows that house is for the youngest person according to the social structure in Kerala. So he made this statement.
8. “You will get support from a person whose name starts with Ra” (content two) fortune teller observed that investigator’s friend’s name is Rajamoorthy. He used that information later. Analysis of total content shows there were 20 completely wrong statements. If fortune telling is based on reality, it shouldn’t happen. Also it is found that 13 statements repeated in the same reading unnecessarily. Most of the time, when the reader have no more things to say, he /she repeated the previous things to fill the gap or to remind the client about a hit statement. Normally fortune tellers give advices to the client. It helps them to turn cold reading process more meaningful and useful to the client. There were 14 advices seen in total contents. Some are meaningful but some other advices used for filling the gap.

CONCLUSION

Fortune tellers used psychological techniques to describe about client’s personality and life events. There is nothing mysterious in personality reading, everything can explain using content analysis method.

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