

Bursary 01/06 (commenced 10/07)

**AUTOMATED TESTING FOR TELEPATHY AND
PRECOGNITION**

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GENERAL

I am once again grateful to the Bial Foundation, whose support has enabled me to carry out the following research over the past year and half.

In addition to carrying out research I have spoken at several international conferences and have given seminars at the following universities: Amsterdam, Bath, Cambridge, City University, London, Goldsmiths College London, Greenwich University London, The Graduate Institute Connecticut, Schumacher College/University of Plymouth, University College London. I have also addressed a number of business organisations, including Nokia and given workshops at Hollyhock Centre in British Columbia and the Esalen Institute in California.

As before, my website www.sheldrake.org plays an important role in my research and outreach and receives an average of 600,000 hits per month with about 17,000 unique visitors per month.

THE AUTOMATED TELEPHONE TELEPATHY TEST

It became technically possible only recently to implement an automated telephone telepathy test. This test was set up with the help of the commercial SMS telephone company Mobifi, based in London, together with a commercial telephone

voice message company X-On, also in London, and began working in December 2008.

For this test, subjects register online on my website giving their name, sex, age and mobile telephone number, and also the names and mobile telephone numbers of 3 friends or family members, their callers. They enter the callers' names in alphabetical order so they can remember who is number 1, 2 and 3.

Here is the portal:

<http://www.sheldrake.org/Onlineexp/portal/mobiletelepathy.html>

The test begins soon after registration is completed. The computer picks one of the three callers at random and sends her an SMS message asking her to call the subject at a landline number given on the SMS message. She is also given a four-digit pin code. When she calls the number she is asked to identify herself with the pin code. She is then put on hold listening to music, while the computer telephones the subject. His caller ID system says 'Telephone telepathy test' a voice message tells him that this is the telephone telepathy test and asks him to guess which of his three callers is on the line by pressing 1, 2 or 3. His guess is recorded, and immediately the line opens up so that he can talk to the caller, thus receiving instant feedback. They can talk for up to one minute, when the call cuts off. (I'm paying for the call and do not want people to have lengthy and expensive phone calls). After a random time delay, usually between 3 and 10 minutes, this procedure is repeated until 6 trials have been completed. At the end of the test, all participants receive an SMS message telling them the test is finished and thanking them for taking part, as well as giving the hit rate of the subject.

The hit rate expected by chance is 33.3%. So far, 1917 trials have been completed, with 827 hits, an average hit rate of 43.0%. This figure is very significantly above chance ($p < 1 \times 10^{-9}$).

There were approximately equal numbers of male and female subjects. The hit rate with males subjects was 42.5%, and with female 43.6%. These hit rates were not significantly differently.

One possible way in which subjects could gain information as to who was calling without telepathy would be by knowing the movements or activities of their callers. For

example if a particular caller was likely to be in a lecture or seminar during a particular period of time and there was a long delay before the subject received a call, he might be able to work out that the caller was the person who was inevitably delayed in responding. In fact looking at the results as a whole there were a minority of trials in which the delay in response was more than 20 minutes, and in these trials the hit rate was indeed somewhat higher, 50.7%, than in the trials where people responded more promptly. However in 89% of all the trials, the subjects responded in less than 20 minutes, with a hit rate of 42%. In 83% of the trials, the responses occurred in less than 12 minutes, and this short time delay could give no clue as to who was calling because of the random variation in timings between calls. In these trials, the hit was again 42%, very significantly above chance.

However, even if only one of the callers had delayed responses, it could increase the chances of success with all the other callers. To eliminate this possibility, I looked at the subset of tests in which all 6 trials involved responses by the callers in less than 12 minutes. The hit rate in these trials was 317 out of 816, or 38.8% ($p = 0.00006$). Thus although delays by callers could have raised the hit rate in some cases, this could certainly not explain the positive scores there entirely.

These experiments were mainly conducted by students whom I employed as research helpers. It was their job to ensure that the participants were in separate places when the tests occurred, to avoid leakage of information. But it was not possible to exclude the possibility of cheating in some cases, and for this purpose tests need to be done with subjects being filmed. I did some preliminary filmed experiments in an underground location in East London, in the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall, where subjects were tested on a landline telephone in an underground room where no mobile telephone signals could be received, and no computers were present. This showed that a very rigorous test procedure was possible using this automated method.

I invited Britain's leading media sceptic, Professor Chris French, of Goldsmith's College London University, to try replicating this experiment with subjects being filmed throughout the test. We have agreed a method, he obtained a grant to pay for this work and recruited assistants to carry out

this test, but his team has so far not performed any experiments. Hopefully they will do so within the next few months.

This automated procedure makes telephone telepathy tests accessible to anyone within the UK, and the tests work seven days a week and 24 hours a day. This system has aroused considerable interest among developers of mobile phone applications, and I gave a seminar during the course of this year to managers and developers in the Nokia Telephone Company and have also been in discussion with iPhone App developers, and developers at Google, working on the Android telephone system.

Meanwhile, Alex Tsakiris, who runs a website in the United States, called Skeptiko, has engaged two teams of developers who are developing an automated telephone telepathy test system for use in the United States and they hope to launch their system soon. This will enable my experiments to be replicated and tests to be carried out in a much larger scale.

THE AUTOMATED TELEPHONE PRECOGNITION TEST

This automated test is designed to find out if people can have precognitions about who is going to call that cannot be explained telepathically. The design is similar to the automated telephone telepathy test. The subjects register online giving their own details and names and phone numbers of three callers.

<http://www.sheldrake.org/Onlineexp/portal/mobileintuitiontest.html>

The test, like the telephone telepathy test, involves a combination of telephone messages and SMS messages. The difference is that in this precognition test, the subject receives a call from the system asking him to guess which of the 3 callers will soon be making a call. He does so by pressing 1, 2 or 3. Only *after* the guess has been recorded does the system pick the caller at random and send her a text message asking her to call through the computer system. In this test, it is impossible for subjects to cheat because all guesses are made before anybody knows who the caller will be.

So far, there have been 545 trials, out of which 184 were hits (33.8%). This is significantly above the chance level of 33.3% ($p = 0.03$) but is obviously a small effect. This implies

that precognition plays a very small role in the telephone telepathy test, where the effect is much larger.

THE AUTOMATED JOINT ATTENTION TEST

Joint attention is the phenomenon where two or more people are paying attention to the same thing at the same time. This year, with the help of Dr, Ashwin Beharee, of University College London, I developed an automated joint attention test which is carried out on the internet by two people. They register online and then log on together to the website where the test is located.

<http://www.sheldrake.org/experiments/jammuspic/>

In a series of trials, each person is shown a photographic image and at the same time hears a soundtrack. In each trial there are two images and associated soundtracks, and they either hear the same one, A and A, or B and B, or one hears and sees A and the other hears and sees B. After 30 seconds each person has to guess if their partner is having the same experience or not. This is not a normal telepathy test, because both people are transmitters and receivers and it is fully symmetrical.

So far, 3,640 trials have been carried out, of which 1,828 were hits. The hit rate of 50.2% is not significantly different from chance, 50%. This shows that under these conditions people are not able to tell when others are having the same experience.

A PRECOGNITION TEST WITH SOUNDS

Together with Dr, Beharee, I have been developing a new precognition test that works with sound samples.

<http://www.sheldrake.org/experiments/precog/>

The subject registers and logs on for the test. In a series of 12 trials, she is asked which of four samples she is about to hear. The four sound samples each last 30 seconds. They are extracts from a lecture by me, samples from a Bach keyboard concerto, the song of nightingale, and samples of French café music.

This test was launched at the end of April 2010, and so far the results are very promising. With more than 400 trials the hit rate is 29.9%, very significantly above the chance level of 25% ($p=0.003$). This test is cheat-proof and this is a very exciting result. If similar hit rates continue, this procedure would be well worth adapting for use as a mobile telephone app, and could attract very widespread participation.

PUBLICATIONS

Investigating scopaesthesia: attentional transitions, controls, and error rates in repeated tests. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 22, 517-527 (2008)

A rapid online telepathy test. *Psychological Reports* **104**, 957-970 (2009)
(with Ashwin Beharee).

Sensing the sending of SMS messages: an automated test. *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* **5**, 272-276 (2009).
(with Leonidas Avraamides, and Matous Novák).