

Signatures in mediumnic automatic writing - a pilot exploration of the resemblance with the deceased's handwriting

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Abstract

In some texts from automatic writing (psychography), the produced signature sometimes resembles the one the deceased produced in life. This pilot research aims to explore the resemblance between signatures in automatic writing and the deceased's handwriting. The researcher followed two séances of a reputed Spiritist medium with many years of experience with psychography. The procedures were all filmed, and the medium during the trance wrote with speed clearly above the conventional one. Proxies willing to participate in the study allowed the produced signature to be photographed right there. Further, the proxy sent the researcher an image file illustrating a document with a representative signature of the deceased. For the four pairs obtained, the signatures produced by psychography were surprisingly similar to those that the deceased produced in life. However, the scarcity of material and its insufficient quality prevent more robust conclusions. There seems to be no mundane explanation based on fraud that would stand up to closer scrutiny. Future research should describe this phenomenon in more detail and possibly venture to explain it.

Keywords: mediumship; psychography; afterlife; Spiritism; handwriting; Brazil

Introduction

Today, some automatic writing (psychography) mediums are active in Brazil, writing comforting letters to bereaved people. Some have a very fine reputation in the Spiritist arena and have recently been empirically evaluated under scientific methodology [GOMIDE et al., 2022]. Allegedly, the letters are written by the spirits of the deceased, who use the medium's body to produce the texts. In their work, the produced signature sometimes resembles the one the deceased produced in life. This impression is the unpublished perception of the proxies (the deceased' relatives and recipients of these letters). At first, a conventional materialistic reasoning would argue that the medium voluntarily changes his handwriting appearance with each new communication. It would be natural to imagine a medium abusing the good faith of the consultants, perhaps motivated by fame or money. In fact, cases of forged mediumship were already reported in the Brazilian press media.

Cases of fraud often refer to the illicit acquisition of information entered into the texts. The medium could obtain information from mundane sources: cold reading (getting data from clues in behaviors of the proxy, such as body language), hot reading (getting data from previous searches on the deceased), or broad generalizations (guessing data that have a greater chance of success). However, the above-mentioned signature similarity has nothing to do with information, but with a specific writing motor skill. Signature production is regulated by multiple parallel cortical-subcortical pathways; any attempt to overwrite the automatic writing program produces vicious patterns [CALIGIURI & MOHAMMED, 2012]. During forged writing, graphism tends to be visibly drawn and patched up, with many pen lifts, blunt beginnings/ends, irregularities, and much tremor and pressure [DESAI & KALYAN, 2013].

Another obvious reason against the fraud argumentation is the problematic access to the deceased's signature. Considering the medium had this standard to study, he would strive to put it down quickly and fluidly on paper before an attentive audience. Even expert calligraphers need time and calm to perform, with a skill limited to a few variations [DEWHURST et al., 2008]. Disguised handwriting is often discovered because no one can entirely suppress a subconscious motor habit [UPADHYAY & CHANDRAVANSI, 2021]. For all these reasons, the materialistic argumentation of fraud is very unlikely, and the phenomenon of signature similarity remains challenging to explain.

Some previous attempts to validate psychographed signatures using graphotechnical analysis were published in non-scientific books and non-peer-reviewed journals. Although successful, they are often retrospective analyses of writings of the exceptional medium Chico Xavier (1910 – 2002), written in Portuguese [PERANDREA, 1991] [DANTAS et al., 2018]. Besides these few exceptions, there is no study on this subject that is prospective and published in English. This pilot research aims to explore the resemblance between signatures in automatic writing and the deceased's handwriting.

Material and Methods

The studied medium

N.C.S. (male, currently 46 years old) was born in a rural area of the State of S. Paulo (Brazil). He received a Catholic education, but his mediumship has emerged since adolescence. At 14, he got to know Spiritism, and an ostensive psychography ability surged in 2000. In 2005 he founded the *Gabriel Marins Spiritist House* to base these activities on and serve the public. The chosen town was Neves Paulista, in the same state's countryside, a small village with 9,000 inhabitants. Since then, he has received thousands of comforting letters directed to the bereaved, besides many books allegedly dictated by the spirits. On average, he performs one session once or twice a week.

Producing the Psychographed Texts

The medium practiced his usual psychography session at his habitual place, preceded by his usual calming preparation rituals. Thus, external (environmental) and internal (emotional) factors that could affect handwriting [HARRALSON & MILLER, 2018] were controlled. A researcher was present at two consecutive sésances, on 22 and 23 October 2022 (Saturday and Sunday), observing and registering the medium's work. The activity was filmed to record the time spent producing each text; later, the word count enabled calculating the writing speed (words per minute). Since there is no explicit parameter on the expected writing speed for healthy adults, this study adopted the standard of 12 to 18 words per minute [TYSON, 2021].

Signatures Gathering

Before the séance, the researcher collectively explained this research's objectives and procedures to the audience. After the séance, the proxies willing to participate in the study allowed the produced signature to be photographed right there, generating the image (A). Further, the proxy should send the researcher an image file illustrating a document with a representative signature of the deceased, providing the image (B). All participant proxies were asked to agree with and sign a free and informed consent form. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Spiritist Medical Association of S. Paulo (Brazil).

Results

The séance situation

The audience had an average of 200 participants, although many pairs or trios were related to the same deceased. Before the séance, the medium took a quick interview with each proxy for less than 5 minutes on average. Then, the medium entered a trance and started writing before the audience for an average of 2,5 hours. The non-stop writing is frantic, so the skin of the medium's fingers needs to be protected by medical tape. Later, the average writing speed was calculated using the video recording in 28 words per minute.

Although dozens of letters were produced in that days, only a few proxies committed to send later the images of the deceased's signature. The researchers arbitrarily excluded "inadequate" questioned material; for example: if the signature produced by the medium was the full name and the signature on the document was an illegible scrawl. Then, the researcher selected four cases with usable material. Table 1 presents, for each case, the deceased's name initial letters, gender, kinship with the proxy, the month and year of death, and the age at the death. Figure 1 shows the samples related to the four cases, including the psychographed signature (A) and the provided document (B).

Table 1. For each case, the deceased's name initial letters, gender, kinship with the proxy, the month and year of death, and the age at the death.

CASE	NAME	GENDER	PROXY	DECEASED	AGE
1	TAA	male	mother	February 2010	28
2	VGN	male	mother	August 2021	35
3	RCO	male	mother	February 2019	18
4	MAF	male	father	April 2015	22

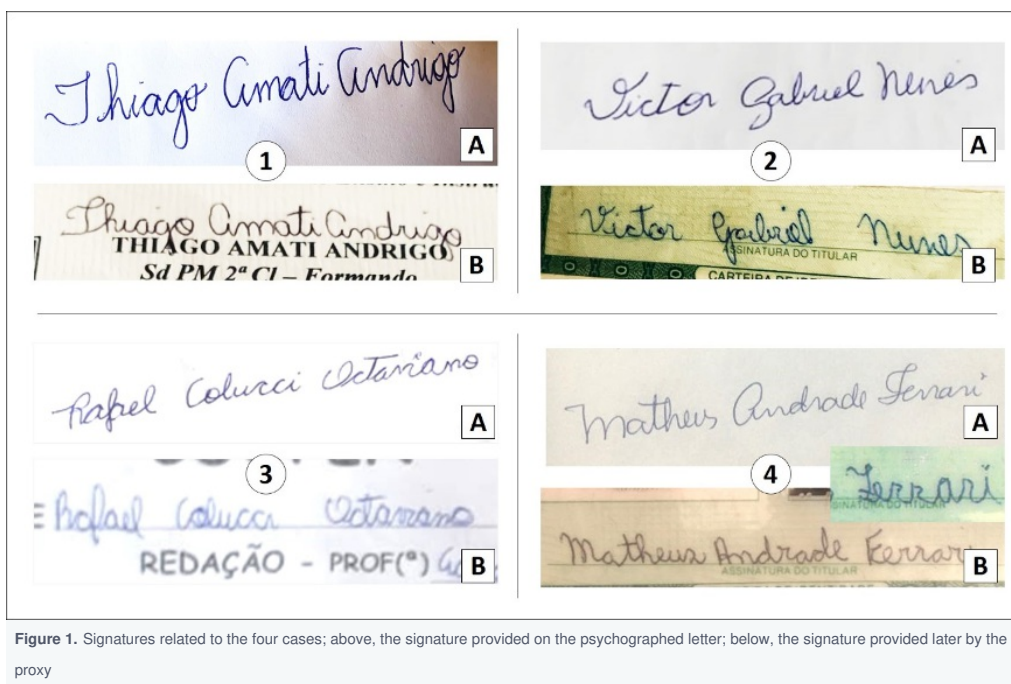


Figure 1. Signatures related to the four cases; above, the signature provided on the psychographed letter; below, the signature provided later by the proxy

Under a visual, subjective analysis of each case, the signature generated through psychography (A) is quite similar to the signature the deceased produced in life (B). An amateur evaluation would only consider one handwriting parameter, called graphic habit. This is the personal touch, the embellished, flowery calligraphy with fancy curls, loops, or other particular features. The only discrepancy case is the 4, with differences in capital "A" and "F" in middle and last names. Yet, the proxy also provided a second signature for comparison, showing a capital "F" more similar to that produced in psychography.

The questioned signatures have features that might appear as signs of forgery at first glance. Examples include excessive pressure of the pen over the paper and ascending orientation considering the horizontal. Nevertheless, they are due to the mediumnic process of writing with closed eyes, with the fist running frantically. In addition, the questioned signatures contain characteristics indicative of the same writer, such as the capital "A" in different samples. However, only a larger sample would exclude the possibility of coincidence.

Discussion

Evolution of the present study

Psychography has been submitted to prospective controlled trials to check the validity of the information conveyed, many with positive results [SARRAF et al., 2020]. Notwithstanding, the present paper explores a completely new avenue linked to this phenomenon. The set of signature samples explored here forms a series of cases that is, to our knowledge, the first published of its kind.

Authors acknowledge the difficulty distinguishing between remarkable manifestations and mundane coincidences. However, contrary to what some scholars might claim, the matter treated here is in fact within the scientific domain. The scientific method starts by making an observation (of some fact or event) while questioning its odd nature. A testable reasoned assumption (the hypothesis) is created, followed by the empirical experiment. The present text is committed to the first step, the observation of a phenomenon.

The researchers' original intention was to conduct a study in a blind controlled model, including professional graphotechnical analysis. An expert would receive two signatures in addition to the original document: the medium would produce one, and a calligrapher would forge the other. We envisioned vast material from diverse seances, but unfortunately, we did not get financial support.

The present research served informally as a proof of concept, registering the visual resemblance of different signatures. The scientific literature recognizes that the signature is a biometric parameter of personal identification. A positive result from a prospective controlled trial would majorly impact theories of mind, even though explaining the phenomenon would remain challenging.

On the results

Some signatures produced in psychography were visually very similar to those that the deceased produced in life. The materialist reasoning of fraud is almost unrealistic, mainly for three reasons. First, the medium would have no access to documents signed in life by the supposed communicant spirit. Second, even if the medium had some standards for copy, he does not know whose relatives will be in the audience in a specific séance. Third, even disregarding the conditions before, the ability to quickly forge a number of signatures would be virtually superhuman.

Before the séance, the medium takes a quick interview with each proxy, which could be seen as a fraud loophole. He insists on this ritual, which according to him is fundamental for creating a spiritual connection. However, the generic conversation is insufficient to acquire relevant information about the deceased, as has already been observed in a previous study with the same medium [GOMIDE et al., 2022]. Furthermore, this contact could not give clues to the motor ability to produce a signature. Above all, the medium could not have gained access to samples of the deceased's handwriting. Such material is not readily available, even considering our highly interconnected world today; supposed "henchmen" working for the medium could not Google it.

Although there is no explicit parameter on the expected writing speed for healthy adults, the medium showed writing fluency above the standard adopted. Thirty years ago, experienced writers in the English idiom were expected to produce about 30 words per minute [HARDCASTLE & MATTHEWS, 1991]. Over the decades, people progressively write less by hand as electronic devices require typing. It is almost certain that the classic "25 words per minute" standard may no longer be realistic [WARREN, 2017]. Today, the expected written speed may be approximately 12 to 18 words per minute [TYSON, 2021]. In any way, the fluency of the medium's handwriting during the séance further decreases the chance of disguised calligraphy.

This paper is not committed to risking an explanation for the findings reported here. Still, to give voice to the studied part, an explanation derived from Spiritism is registered below. This doctrine would argue that each communicant spirit produces a different calligraphy when driving the medium's fist. A signature is a motor act that originates in the mind, which supposedly survives the body's death to compose the spirit. That is how superior cognitive abilities would remain, among them something as particular as the signature. Such an assumption would strengthen the idea of the persistence of the self after death and the actuality of mediumnic interaction. Nevertheless, by lacking scientific bases, this thought could not even be a hypothesis, remaining as a premise.

Present limitations and future proposals

This study has multiple limitations, most related to the pilot nature of the proposal and lack of financial support. The casuistry is very short, restricted by the few proxies committed to sharing images of signatures produced by their loved ones in life. The researcher was able to be present at only two séances on consecutive days, and many attendees were the same in both activities. The image quality was bad due to the speed needed to capture such sensitive material in a delicate moment for the familiar.

Future studies should engage in collecting a larger casuistry by following more séances. A portable scanner would take snapshots of signatures with more quality than smartphone cameras. Similar equipment adequacy by the side of proxies would also produce better images from the deceased signatures. Lastly, a significant differential would be a professional graphotechnical analysis to authenticate the signatures ultimately.

Conclusion

In the studied material, the signatures produced by psychography were surprisingly similar to those that the deceased produced in life. However, the scarcity of material and its insufficient quality prevent more robust conclusions. There seems to be no mundane explanation based on fraud that would stand up to closer scrutiny. Future research should describe this phenomenon in more detail and possibly venture to explain it.

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