American College of Vedic Astrology™



President's Message

WIGGLE WORDS: Use of Ambiguous Expressions in Vedic Astrology

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There are few absolutes in life and many things are subject to interpretation, even concrete "facts." In fact, we can say that facts ARE facts, but then, they are subject to interpretation. Astrologers, in their processes of interpreting and expressing predictions, need to be careful about speaking in ambiguous terms in order to "wiggle out" of speculative statements, when the time comes. Many astrologers want to make sound forecasts but they also want to protect their reputations, and thus leave some room for error. While they openly celebrate their prognostic success, they still might introduce intentionally vague or ambiguous expressions. These cleverly crafted statements, some even done innocently, obscure that the astrologer said something incorrect. Ambiguity allows forecasters to avoid full responsibility for their erroneous claims.



Highly speculative terms and ambiguous and imprecise expressions are used in writing and speaking, both in and out of the field of astrology. These are also called "weasel words." Weasel words are a way that astrologers (and other forecasters) can tell others that something may be plausible, but there is not enough certainty to stand behind the prediction fully.

A 2009 study of Wikipedia found that most weasel words could be divided into three categories

Numerically vague expressions (e.g. "some people", "experts", "many")

Use of the passive voice to avoid specifying an authority (e.g. "it is said")

Adverbs that weaken (e.g. "often", "probably")

Here are some more examples of ambiguous statements that appear to say something:

"I can't tell you how much I enjoyed our Vedic astrology session. “

“I can't recommend this astrologer too highly.”

"Thanks for the astrology session. I’ve never seen a reading done like that before. “

“No other astrologer has given me the same results as you have.”

“This planetary period will help overcome troubles.” (Also includes “helps stop”, “helps prevent”, “helps fight,” etc.)

Some further examples of wiggle words or ambiguous expressions taken from the archives of Wikipedia are:

"one suspects," "I feel," "my impression," "it is clear," "cannot be without significance," "dare we ask," "without doubt," "it is my guess," "it is quite evident," "I am left with the conviction," “can it be true?” “almost certainly,”and a list of others that you can extract from a simple scan of the astrological literature.

Of course there are many responsible astrologers who make an honest effort to speak from evidence and to speak conscientiously. This short article was meant to alert us all to the responsibilities astrologers have for speaking the truth clearly and simply. You can see that words actually indicate specific things and carry meaning for those in the audience you're talking to.

Let us be clear that one of the main functions of a responsible astrologer, as the giver of information, is to communicate and convey meaning. It should be the goal that the people at the receiving end of knowledge understandas clearly as possible what you're saying in your statements and predictions. According to Malcolm Murray and Nebojsa Kujundzic, in their book, “Critical Reflection: A Textbook for Critical Thinking (2005) “To give an argument is not necessarily to give a good argument."