

D. Applying tests to contemporary claims of speaking in languages (“tongues speaking”)

1. Glossolalia: misidentification

a. Eclipse of the adult inhibition against babbling

(1) Basic proposition: Much of what goes under the term *tongue speaking* (*glossolalia*) is a matter of overcoming the adult inhibition against babbling, the inhibition against making meaningless sounds. Factors that help break this inhibition are mistakenly identified as the energizing work of the Holy Spirit. The phenomenon itself is then misidentified with New Testament language speaking.

(2) Observations bearing on this proposed thesis

(a) Structure of modern glossolalia

- [1] Alliteration, repetition, rhyme, vowel prominence
- [2] Reflective of linguistic patterns in the speaker’s native language or range of linguistic exposure
- [a] Phonetic inventory
- [b] Pitch patterns/voice modulation
- [c] Rhythm/stress patterns

Sometimes glossolalic characteristics can even be matched to the leader under whom the experience was gained.

[3] The identical nature of examples from within Christian, quasi-Christian, non-Christian religions, and non-religious scientific experimentation under laboratory conditions

(b) Causes of the glossolalic experience

[1] Presence of influences that reverse inhibition

[a] Emotion

Some expressions of glossolalia are preceded by “driving,” which raises the emotional pitch by clapping, loud singing, encouragement, and the like. Emotional prominence may correspond with its more frequent appearance among women and young people. Agonizing for a long time may bring about the “gift.” Something has to “give” under prolonged pressure.

- [b] Pronouncement as religiously good
- [c] Prospect of acceptance into the group
- [d] Viewed as a supernatural gift, hence, the giving up

of controlled utterance

[e] The prospect of having something “more” that a person becomes convinced Christianity offers

[f] The desire—stronger in some than in others—to have certainty about acceptance with God. We wonder to what extent Jesus’ objection to sign-seeking applies here (John 4:48?; 6:30; 1 Corinthians 1:22). Many of these signs were requested by people with less than ideal motives: Matthew 12:38-39; 16:1-4 = Mark 8:11-12 (cp. Luke 11:16-30); John 2:18.

[2] Dissociation of sound from meaning

[a] Viewed as a supernatural gift in which speakers do not understand what they are saying.

[b] Continuous repetition of a word tends to separate its sound from its meaning. This very mechanic that is sometimes used to induce glossolalia: repeat a few sounds over and over to “loosen up the tongue,” “prime the working of the Spirit,” or “free the person from inhibition.” If this experience were a gift from God, learning techniques would be unnecessary and irrelevant.

[3] The universal sense of inadequacy and need for acceptance

The sense of inadequacy directly compares to the tendency to being caught up in glossolalic experience. It does not follow, though, that people involved in the experience are neurotic, psychotic, psychologically weak, highly emotional, social outcasts, socially inhibited. A sense of inadequacy plagues us all to some degree, and forms only one correlation with involvement in charismatic pursuits.

[4] The revival of a common experience through which everyone has passed

In their subconscious, all people have their childhood experiences, when they lacked association between a meaning and a sound. The glossolalic experience seems adequately explained as a return to this stage. Everyone has the capacity to engage in glossolalia, which fits with its not being limited to Christians. Releasing inhibition is harder for some than others.

[5] Propensity of some personalities to depend on an authority figure (drive for certainty)

Some time ago John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, p. 43, fnt. 4, related that the McKenzie Mental Health Scale as applied to the Thematic Apperception Test showed a significantly greater dependency of tongue speakers on authority figures.

[6] Fakery

Occasionally individuals who cease the practice admit that while acceptably practicing glossolalia, they found themselves thinking they were using

this or that sound too often and had better change it. If glossolalia is a divine gift of an actual language, the speaker does not control which sounds are in the utterance.

(c) Effects of the glossolalic experience

[1] Tendency toward personality transformation, which may seem comparable to “fruit of the Spirit”

[a] A sense of acceptance

1) By God

We all want certainty about what we believe and who we are. It is quite human to want a sign from God that he accepts us. When we believe tongue speaking is such a sign, we can feel relieved of our uncertainty and confident of our status with God.

2) By other people

People are social creatures who want to feel like a part of the group—to “belong.” When they experience glossolalia, they no longer feel like they are on the outside. Of course, the problem is that not having the experience leads to a sense of rejection from God and separation anxiety.

[b] A sense of release from inhibition

Overcoming the adult inhibition against babbling shares a feeling that other releases have, thus giving a sense of triumph and freedom.

[c] Boldness to witness

When people regard their experience as a sign, it provides a basis for certainty of salvation, that God exists, and so on; and it emboldens them to witness to other people about the God of that experience in terms of that experience.

[d] Improved life quality

[2] Division of the body between the “seekers” and the “havers”

b. Altered states of consciousness

- (1) Hysteria, characterized by hypersensitivity and susceptibility to suggestion
- (2) Ecstasy, characterized by concentration on some idea with the result of suspending sensation
- (3) Catalepsy (though without the usual rigidity), marked by ability afterward to remember visionary and auditory hallucinations experienced while in the trance
- (4) Aphasia, involving the loss of sound-meaning relationship (sometimes caused by disease, injury, or drugs)
- (5) (Self-)hypnosis
- (6) Trance

- (7) Freud's theory of unconscious
- (8) Jung's concept of collective unconscious

c. Reasons for the popularity of glossolalia

- (1) Glossolalia lies within the capacity of every person.
- (2) Glossolalia has been interpreted in a way that identifies it with the common need for acceptance, certainty, and release.
- (3) Glossolalia has been interpreted as divine in origin and as a sign of acceptance to the individual.

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