

2. Xenoglossia

Glossolalia covers a range of speaking phenomena, including ecstatic utterance and “angelic tongues.” Cases occasionally come up in which someone speaks an actual language—xenoglossia. The following possibilities may be kept in mind when evaluating these cases.

a. Mistaken identification

(1) Someone who knows a few words of a language might suppose, upon hearing these sounds in a tongues situation, that the whole utterance is in that language. These sounds may have happened into the expression or were snatches of that language previously heard by the speaker.

(2) Even though people may not know German, French, or Hebrew, they have an impression of how the language “sounds.” Even tongue speakers could drift into a pattern of expression that plays on these characteristics with the result that an unlearned hearer might identify the speaking as French or Hebrew. The speakers do not object because they share the general feel for the language’s sound system. It is said, for example, that Danny Thomas was good at saying French expressions even though he supposedly did not know French. One incident recorded in the literature has to do with a woman who identified someone’s tongue-speaking experience as Hebrew. When asked whether she knew Hebrew, she answered, “No.” One wonders how many claims made for xenoglossia originate from cases like these.

b. Spiritism (?)

Whether rightly called spiritism, xenoglossia in some cases may have the same explanation as cases reported in séances, where communications reportedly occur in languages unknown to the medium and the sitter (cp. E. Garth Moore. *Try the Spirits: Christianity and Psychological Research*, p. 29).

c. Demonic possession

Instances have been reported of real languages that were cursing and swearing in a language unknown to the speaker.

d. Cryptomnesia

The case of a working woman comes to mind in which she would go into a trance and give forth passages in Greek and Latin. Researchers discovered that at one time she had been housekeeper for an Episcopalian priest who would orally recite around the house long passages from the classics. In trance she could verbalize these experiences that lay in her subconscious.

e. Telepathy/clairaudience

Several instances are related in which someone speaking in tongues is approached by a native speaker who comments that the utterance was a beautiful expression in that person’s native tongue. The case calls for suspended judgment because other people

are not likely in a position to make realistic judgment on the matter and keep in mind the other tests that apply.

Psychical research is a relatively new science, and by its very nature is difficult to pursue with certainty and objectivity. Nevertheless, paranormal phenomena may be the reality that often gets misidentified with the working of the Spirit. A growing literature in this area has accompanied an increased interest in psychic research and the rise of the modern Pentecostal movement. The *Journal* and the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* provide resource information in this area. A helpful key for entering into this field is the older work by E. Garth Moore, *Try the Spirits: Christianity and Psychical Research*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1977.

f. Divine manifestation

On definitional grounds, glossolalic utterances would not appropriately be assigned to the Spirit of God since they do not measure up to the biblical description of tongue speaking as actual languages. Xenoglossia, however, may be something divinely produced if it does not involve authentication of those who do not meet the doctrinal, moral, and practical standards. Such a position depends on the pre-understanding that scripture does not preclude miraculous manifestation beyond the apostolic age. The issue regarding duration of the charismata is taken up elsewhere in these notes.

3. Materials on aspects of glossolalia

a. Linguistics

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b. Historical

R. Leonard Carroll. "Glossolalia: Apostles to the Reformation." *Glossolalia Phenomenon*. Ed. by Wade H. Horton, Cleveland, TN, 1966.

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c. Psychological

L. Chertok. "Psychosomatic Medicine in the West and in Eastern European Countries." *Psychosomatic Medicine*. XXXI:6 (1969). pp. 510-21.

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John P. Kildahl. *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*. NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972.

James N. Lapley; John H. Simpson. "Speaking in Tongues: Token of Group and Divine Approval." *Pastoral Psychology*. (May, September, 1964).

d. Sociological

Felicitas D. Goodman. *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia*. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1972.

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William J. Samarin. "Glossolalia as Learned Behavior." *Canadian Journal of Theology*. XV (1969), pp. 60-64.

"Language in Resocialization." *Practical Anthropology*. XVII (1970), pp. 269-79.