

DOES SPEAKING IN 'TONGUES' REFER TO ECSTATIC OR NATURAL LANGUAGE?

THE DIFFERENT POSITIONS TAKEN REGARDING TONGUES-SPEAKING

#1. GLOSSOLALIA. Supernaturally given ecstatic (non-cognitive) speech for the purpose of authenticating the Gospel message. It is generally described as the deeply emotional outpouring of seemingly inarticulate sounds. As a phenomenon it is claimed to continue until the return of Christ. The claim is made that believers are speaking either:

- An angelic language or
- A 'spiritual utterance' or
- A special 'prayer' or 'love' language.

These are claimed to be superior to natural speech and to allow the speaker to utter or pray perfect speech or prayers which Satan and the demons cannot understand or interfere with. A brief history of the development of this understanding is:

- The Montanists at the end of the second century.
- The 'French Prophets' between around 1688 to 1740.
- The Irvingite's of the 1830s in Scotland and England as a precursor to the modern-day movement.
- The Pentecostal/charismatic movement began around 1900 in California. This modern-day movement is generally viewed as developing in three phases:
 - The Pentecostal Movement confined to the Pentecostal churches.
 - The Charismatic Movement within churches other than the Pentecostal churches.
 - The Signs and Wonders Movement of Peter Wagner and John Wimber which involves so-called 'power evangelism.' These people have also been called 'New Charismatics.' There was a revival in 1994 called the 'Toronto Blessing', and a more recent revival called the 'Pensacola Revival'.

NOTE: The Pentecostal insistence that speaking in tongues is evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is discounted by the statement by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30, when he asks rhetorically: "Do all speak in languages? Do all interpret?" with the answer being 'No' because of the earlier context so that God has not gifted all believers with certain languages. Yet the spirit is available to all as stated in verse 13: "For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body."

#2. XENOGLOSSIA. The supernatural ability to speak a foreign language which the speaker did not learn. This ability **ceased to occur** (1 Cor. 13:8-13) after the death of the prime Apostles or with the completion of the Bible canon. It was for the purpose of authenticating the Apostles and to demonstrate that God was now using the Christian rather than the Jewish congregation. There are two cessationist approaches:

- The 'Reformed' approach. This views the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language primarily as **a means of authentication**. B. B. Warfield is a main promoter of this view.
- The 'Dispensational' approach. This views the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language as indicating the **introduction of a new dispensation**.

#3. *ERMENEIA*. **The supernatural converting of alien speech so that one hears it in one's own language.**

There are two different views of the kind of language that is heard:

- At Pentecost the disciples spoke in ecstatic (non-cognitive) language which the crowd supernaturally heard in each of their own languages, or
- At Pentecost the speech was (cognitive) i.e. the disciples spoke in their own language (Greek or Aramaic) which the crowd supernaturally heard in each of their own languages.

#4. *NON-MIRACULOUS NATURAL LANGUAGES*. **These were naturally understood both by the speakers and by the hearers.** So it involved neither supernaturally produced speech nor supernatural hearing to convert the language spoken.

This is a modern-day reappraisal of all the biblical data and *the 6 key passages are understood as:*

- The bold “prophesying” at Pentecost in common languages by the disciples in the temple area and in contravention of the ‘diglossia’ convention (see note 1) so that non-Hebrew speaking pilgrims could understand the message preached (*Acts 2:1-33*).
- Foreign language-speaking recent converts at the home of Cornelius who expressed themselves in their own languages because they were overjoyed at hearing the message of the Gospel (*Acts 10:44-47*).
- The prophesying by the recently re-baptized twelve disciples’ in Ephesus in either ‘diaspora’ (see note 2) languages or their own native languages (*Acts 19:1-10*).
- The ability to speak foreign languages as one of the highlighted diverse gifts that God gives individuals (*1 Cor. 12:1-11, 27-31*).
- The superiority of love over many very desirable attributes (spoken of hyperbolically), including the ability to speak foreign languages (*1 Cor. 13:1-3, 8-13*).
- At Christian meetings the foreign language speaking minorities who prophesied, prayed and sang in their foreign languages and were to have these interpreted so that the majority would be edified (*1 Cor. 14*).

This view asks the question: ‘What are tongues?’ Diligent analysis and logic give the answer that they were natural human languages and were understood by the speakers. The languages therefore do not cease because of having fulfilled a purpose.

NOTE 1. ‘Diglossia’ concerns a culture where there is a ‘lower’ common language and a ‘higher’ specialist language.

NOTE 2. ‘Diaspora’. The Jewish dispersion throughout the known world of the time.

WERE “THE LANGUAGES OF MEN AND ANGELS” ECSTATIC
i.e. NON-COGNITIVE?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

“If I speak the **languages of men and of angels**, but do not have love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have [the gift of] prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

It is often stated by believers in glossolalia that Paul is here describing the phenomena of non-human ecstatic speech when he speaks of “the languages...of angels.” However, there are reasons why this explanation fails.

REASONS WHY “THE LANGUAGES OF ANGELS” COULD NOT HAVE BEEN NON-COGNITIVE

- No human could interpret, i.e. orally translate, an angelic language if it was not a human language.
- Paul refers to “kinds of languages” in 1 Corinthians 12:10. In the multi-language setting of the city of Corinth this is hardly a reference to multiple languages unique to angels.
- 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that, compared to love, languages will cease when the complete arrives. How could this mean that angelic languages will cease at that time?
- In Paul’s illustration in 14:6-12 of unintelligible as opposed to a clear, distinct sound he asserts that all verbal sounds are inherently intelligible, and if we do not understand the verbal sounds of another human being, they become ‘gibberish speakers’ to us so that when such languages are left untranslated the speakers and hearers become foreigners to each other.

POSSIBLE MEANINGS

1. Paul’s reference to: “the languages...of angels” may refer to the Hebrew Language because it was angels who spoke to Moses to give him the Law in Hebrew, which then became the holy language for Israel as described in STUDY 13.
2. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, makes his list of statements with a degree of hyperbole i.e. exaggeration so that he may demonstrate the superiority of love over the things that people generally prize. Evidently he did not “understand all mysteries” and have “all knowledge.” Hence the NIV notes state that: “Paul uses hyperbole” in these verses. So once again there is no indication in this passage or its context that the reference is to ecstatic language.

Additionally, it is interesting that in verse 1 Paul speaks hypothetically of becoming as useless as “a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal” if he did not have love. This reference seems to concern: “The worship of **Cybele-Attis**...The rites of this cult were extreme in nature. Priests...were stirred by clashing cymbals, loud drums, and screeching flutes,...” as pointed out by H. Wayne House.

GENERAL REASONS WHY THE SPEAKING IN ‘TONGUES’ REFERS TO
SPEAKING IN NATURAL LANGUAGES

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that #1 *GLOSSOLALIA* is an incorrect view of the biblical data, so that the ‘speaking in tongues’ as recorded in the Scriptures never involved any kind of **ecstatic speech**, but rather it refers to speaking in natural languages. The following reasons presented for this understanding either bear directly or indirectly on the subject.

GOD’S COMMUNICATION WITH HUMANS HAS ALWAYS BEEN BY MEANS OF NATURAL LANGUAGE

- ❖ “God having **spoken** in former times in fragmentary and varied fashion to our forefathers **by the prophets**, has in these last days **spoken to us by a Son** whom he appointed to be heir of everything...” (*Heb. 1:1, 2 ISV*).

God consistently communicated through His agents with people in natural human language. This is evident in each of the following instances:

1. When confronting Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.
2. When the angel came to Abraham and Sarah and had a long conversation with Abraham.

3. When the angels who went to rescue Lot and family out of Sodom conversed with Lot.
4. When God spoke to Moses to give him the Law at Mount Sinai.
5. When God spoke to all the assembled people of Israel at Mount Sinai.
6. When angels spoke directly to Mary and Joseph at the time of Jesus' conception and birth.
7. When angels spoke directly to the shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth.
8. When Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus, he spoke in the Hebrew dialect (Acts 26:14).
9. When Jesus gave John the 'Revelation' it was evidently in John's own native language.

THE MODERN-DAY MEANING OF THE GREEK WORDS IS "LANGUAGES" RATHER THAN 'TONGUES'

The three Greek words generally translated as 'tongue' or 'language' in most Bibles are:

1. *Glossa* which means 'language' when speaking of someone else's language or language in general. (It also refers to the physical organ of the tongue).
2. *Dialektos* which means 'language' when speaking of one's own native language as in Acts 2:6, 8.
3. *Phonos* which means 'verbal sounds'.

Prior to the 20th century the English word 'tongue/s' simply meant 'language.' However, today the word 'tongue/s' is used almost exclusively by religious-minded people in reference to ecstatic tongues-speaking. Yet, because the now out-of-date term "tongue/s" is used in most translations of the Bible one can easily assume that the term does refer to something ecstatic or non-cognitive. So, although the word 'tongue/s' would have been acceptable during Victorian times and earlier, people living during and after the 20th century would not, for example, ask someone "how many tongues do you speak?" but rather "how many languages do you speak?" So by abandoning the word 'tongue/s' because it has undergone a significant change of meaning through time and so now obscures the original biblical meaning, and then using the current meaning of *glossa*, namely "language/s" we will be helped toward better understanding. It is, in fact, this semantic problem which is largely at the root of the differences among believers in understanding the Bible text.

INCONSISTENT TRANSLATION OF THE GREEK WORDS FOR 'LANGUAGES'

The KJV and NASB translate *glossa* consistently as the out-of-date term "tongues" and *dialektos* also as "tongues", but only once as "languages."

Apart from the use of *glossa* as a reference to the physical tongue or to "*the tongues as of fire*" (Acts 2:3) the references are to 'language'. Yet most other versions are inconsistent in their rendering of the words *glossa* and *dialektos*. As shown above they should be rendered consistently as 'language' and as 'own languages' respectively. The following are examples of inconsistency:

- The ESV translates *glossa* as "tongues" in Acts 2, 10, 19 and 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 and as "languages" only in Revelation; and *dialektos* six times as "language."
- The NIV translates *glossa* as "tongues" in Acts 10, 19 and 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 and as "languages" in Acts 2 and seven times in Revelation; and *dialektos* three times as "language" and three times, when associated with the word 'Hebrew' as 'Aramaic'.
- The NLT translates *glossa* as "tongues" in Acts 10, 19 and 1 Corinthians 14 and as "languages" in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and Revelation; and *dialektos* three times as "language" and four times, when associated with the word 'Hebrew', as 'Aramaic'.

According to Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon the definitions of *glossa* are:

1. a body of words and systems that makes up a distinctive language.
2. an utterance outside the normal patterns of intelligible speech — ecstatic speech.

Furthermore, most lexicons give a similar second meaning for *glossa* as concerning ecstatic speech. Is this correct or are there factors which indicate otherwise? Generally it is the usage of a word in its

various contexts that gives clarity of definition; and in view of the continued usage of the very dated term ‘tongues’ one must ask: have the producers of the lexicons and the translators of these passages in most Bibles been influenced by charismatic hijacking of the language. It is only once translation is brought **up-to-date and consistent** that we can get a clear picture of the biblical teaching on this subject.

WHY THE SPEAKING IN ‘TONGUES’ IN THE ACTS EVENTS REFERS TO SPEAKING IN NATURAL LANGUAGES

ACTS 2:1-11 (HCSB)

“When the day of **Pentecost** had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole **house** where they were staying. ³ And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in *different (Gk heterais = other) languages (Gk glossa)*, as the **Spirit gave them ability for speech**.

⁵ There were **Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation** under heaven. ⁶ When this sound occurred, the multitude came together and was confused because each one heard them **speaking in his own language (Gk dialektos)**. ⁷ And they were astounded and amazed, saying, ‘Look, aren’t all these who are speaking **Galileans?** ⁸How is it that we hear, each of us, in our **own native language (dialektos)?** ⁹ *Parthians, Medes, Elamites; those who live in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,* ¹⁰ *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,* ¹¹ *Cretans and Arabs*—we hear them speaking in our own languages (*glossa*) the magnificent acts of God.’

Clearly, the disciples “began to speak in *different natural languages*, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech.” This was because each one of the pilgrims to Jerusalem “heard them speaking in his **own language**” and said, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our **own native language?**” The description in this event gives the definition of *glossa* for the events in Acts 10 and 19 as also being speech in natural languages.

WHY IT WAS NOT SUPERNATURAL HEARING (ERMENEIA)

Some Christians think that the events in Acts did not concern any speech miracle but a hearing miracle to produce the languages in the ears of the pilgrims. There are two different views:

- That the disciples gave out **ecstatic utterances**, which the holy spirit converted into the native languages in the hearing of the listening pilgrims.
- That the disciples were speaking **the common languages** of Aramaic and Greek, which the holy spirit then converted into the native languages in the hearing of the listening pilgrims.

This would be similar to the fictional universal translator machine which was written about in several science fiction stories, so that whatever words are spoken they are immediately translated into the language of the hearer. However, such a hearing miracle could not be the case for the following reasons:

- Verse 4 shows that the disciples “began to **speak in different languages** as the Spirit gave them **ability for speech**.”
- Although it is true that in Acts 2:8 the assembled crowd call out, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our **own native language**...?” they also say: “we hear them **speaking in our own languages**” (vs. 10).

- A miraculous ability would not be given to those who were not yet believers as were these pilgrims, but rather such ability would only be given to believers, and in particular to those who had just received the holy spirit (tongues of fire) and so excluding the listening pilgrims.

So both of the above proposals are invalid and the event at Pentecost did not involve any kind of supernatural **hearing** on the part of these pilgrims; but rather it was “native languages/other languages” as spoken by the disciples.

REASONS WHY THE SPEAKING IN ‘TONGUES’ IN THE CORINTHIAN SITUATION REFERS TO SPEAKING IN NATURAL LANGUAGES

Because of the earlier mentioned inconsistent renderings of the word *glossa* some people are led to understand the Scriptures as teaching:

- that it concerned natural languages in Acts 2, 10, and 19 as shown above, but,
- ecstatic (non-cognitive) tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

REASONS OFFERED FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACTS AND 1 CORINTHIANS

Quoted below, from Volume 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, are a couple of the more significant reasons offered for a difference in the nature of the speaking at Pentecost and the speaking in the Corinthian congregation. This commentary also shows **why these reasons are incorrect**.

3. At Pentecost the unbelievers were filled with awe and marvelled (Act2:7-8), but at Corinth the unbelievers thought the Christians were mad (1Cor.14:23). Reply: in Acts 2 the unbelievers were also bewildered (v.6); they were amazed and perplexed (v.12), and some even thought that the believers were intoxicated and they made fun of them (v.13).

4. At Pentecost there was harmony (Acts2:1), at Corinth confusion (1Cor.14:23). Reply: this contrast must not be pressed to imply a difference **in the nature of** the tongues spoken; it only reveals the generally disorderly conduct of the Corinthian congregation seen in their party spirit (1:10-17) and in their reprehensible conduct at the Lord’s supper (11:17-34).

CONSISTENT MODERN TRANSLATION HELPS

However, if the translation of *glossa* is consistently rendered as “language/s” then both the accounts in Acts and those in 1Corinthians would be easily seen as referring to the same thing, namely, existing human languages. Several modern versions of the Scriptures are consistent in the use of the word *glossa* as ‘language,’ namely, the GOD’S WORD Translation, the New Century Version, the Contemporary English Version, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB); this last one being the most literal of these versions.

PAUL’S AND LUKE’S USAGE OF “GLOSSA”

A natural reading of all the relevant passages in Acts and 1 Corinthians would lead one to understand that all speak of the same kind of ‘language.’

Additionally, the fact that Luke wrote Acts (A.D. 62) seven or more years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (A.D. 55), and that they were travelling companions for some years makes it evident that they would understand the usage of the word *glossa* in the same way, so that Luke would already have been fully cognizant of the kind of languages being spoken at Corinth. If there had been a difference, then Luke likely would have stated it when he came to write Acts. The facts are that Luke used the same term that Paul used i.e. *glossa*, and so indicating that it had the same meaning i.e. natural languages.

Conversely, it is almost certain that Paul would have known of the details of the Pentecost event where natural foreign languages were used. So if there had been a difference in Corinth he likely would have stated it in his letter.

THE TERM "GLOSSA" IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The use of the Greek term *glossa* in the Book of Revelation is not usually taken into account in analysing the subject of 'tongues-speaking'. In his book *Charismatic Chaos* commentator John MacArthur assumes that: "the later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again" (p. 233). However, this is because he is referencing only the language situations described in Acts and 1 Corinthians and so he discounts the use of the term *glossa* in the book of Revelation in the seven following passages:

- ❖ "...from every tribe and language (*glossa*) and people and nation" (5:9); "...from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages (*glossa*)," (7:9); "prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages (*glossa*)..." (10:11); "...some from the peoples and tribes and languages (*glossa*) and nations will gaze at their bodies" (11:9); "...authority was given it over every tribe and people and language (*glossa*) and nation" (13:7); "he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth - to every nation and tribe and language (*glossa*) and people" (14:6); "The waters you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages (*glossa*)." (17:15). (ESV).

Some scholars are so taken with their definition of *glossa* for other parts of the NT as 'ecstatic' that they simply forget about the usage of *glossa* in the book of Revelation as obviously referring to natural languages, and so miss a relevant factor to understanding the situations in Acts and 1 Corinthians.

FURTHER REASONS WHICH INDICATE THAT IT WAS IN NATURAL LANGUAGES IN CORINTH

Additional to the above reasons for natural languages having been used in Corinth the following factors should also be considered:

1. That the 'language-speaking' that Paul advocated in 1 Corinthians 12-14 involved the lyrics of songs (1 Cor. 14:15), expressions of prayer, praise, "giving thanks," and "ten thousand **words** in a tongue" - all involving *words* and having grammatical structure and therefore are **not non-cognitive** (ecstatic) utterances.
2. That 1 Corinthians 14:21 provides the key to Isaiah 28:7-13 which in turn gives the definition of *glossa* in 1 Corinthians as normal human languages.
3. That if those utterances were non-cognitive they could not have been interpreted, which Paul required of the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 14.
4. That the "interpretation of tongues" is not the same as the "evaluation" of prophecy as some have assumed; that is, it is not that of giving meaning to prophetic non-human language. This is because 1 Corinthians 14:10 shows that such "distinguishing between spirits" relates to "prophecy" as a different subject to that of 'tongues/languages' which are to be interpreted.
5. That our understanding of this issue is enhanced when we examine the meaning of the verb "to interpret" (Gk *hermeneuo*) and its related forms as used in their other occurrences in the NT. For example: In Luke 24:27 the verb refers to the interpretation of the Scriptures in human language about the Messiah. Also in Acts 9:36 the verb refers to the translation of one human language into another, namely, Aramaic into Greek. The root of this verb is consistently used in the NT of interpreting one human language into another (see John. 1:38, 42; 9:7; Heb. 7:2).
6. That according to Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon the Greek word *dihermeneuo* and its related forms, as used in 1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:5, 13, 27, and 28, can mean either "**to translate from one language to another**" or "to clarify something so as to make it understandable." So the context will determine which meaning is correct. In the case of the above texts the context

is that of natural human languages as demonstrated above. Also in English the word “translate” is commonly used to refer to what is written, and the word “interpret,” according to the Oxford English dictionary, means “translate **orally** the words of a person speaking in a different language.”

7. That early Christians understood that the First letter to the Corinthians concerns natural languages: Irenaeus (185 A.D), Clement of Alexandria (190 A.D), Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nazianze, Gregory of Nyassa, Basil, Jerome, Chrysostome, and most others understood the ‘languages’ spoken in Corinth as linguistic and not ecstatic. Only Tertullian misunderstood the languages as being ecstatic.

In reference to 1 Corinthians 12 Chrysostom (around 400 A.D) explained that: “One person knew what he spake himself, but was unable to interpret to another. While the other had acquired both these [gifts], or the other of the two.” And in commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:10-12 he stated, there were: “So many tongues...So many ‘voices’ of Scythians, Thracians, Romans, Moors, Indians, Egyptians, [and] innumerable other nations.” All of these needed to be interpreted. So Dr. Charles Hodge concludes that:

- What was spoken with tongues, was intelligible to those who understood foreign languages...What was uttered, were articulate sounds...they were edifying, and therefore intelligible to him who uttered them....They admitted of being interpreted, which supposes them to be intelligible...Though intelligible in themselves and to the speaker, they were unintelligible to others...not acquainted with the language used.

Some who hold the ecstatic tongues belief teach that only by having such ability is one proven to be a true believer. However, notwithstanding the fact that ecstatic-tongues is not the biblical practice, 1Corinthians 12:30 shows this view to be untrue when Paul asks rhetorically: “Do all speak in languages? Do all interpret?” with the clear answer of “no”!

So when all of these factors are taken into account, it can be seen that the *glossa which Paul advocated* referred to **natural human languages** exactly as in Acts 2, 10, and 19.

ECSTATIC TONGUE-SPEAKING WAS COMMON AMONG THE ANCIENT PAGANS OF CORINTH

H. Wayne House, in his theological paper entitled *Tongues and the Mystery Religions of Corinth*, describes how ecstatic tongues-speaking was a common practice of those in the pagan communities of Corinth. This background was of the cultic worship of **Cybele-Attis** where, at the sound of clashing cymbals, loud drums, and screeching flutes, the priests were stirred to dance in a frenzy of excitement and to gash their bodies. Also part of the background was the worship of **Dionysus**, the god of wine, and which involved similar intense rapture as they became identified with the god himself. However, more relevant as the prime source of the practice of tongues-speaking was:

The third major cult...of Apollo. Several temples in Corinth were for the **worship of Apollo**, and the famous shrine at Delphi was primarily that of Apollo. The slave girl that Paul encountered in Philippi on the way to Corinth had a spirit of Python, or one inspired by Apollo. **The ecstatic tongues-speaking** of the oracle and the subsequent interpretation by the priest at Delphi are widely known. The cult of Apollo was widespread in Achaia, but especially around the temple of Delphi across from Corinth.

So it seems that in 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul may have been presenting a hypothetical situation based on the previous pagan background of the Corinthians (vs. 2) and not that anyone in the congregation was actually saying that ‘Jesus is cursed.’ Furthermore, “speaking in the Spirit of God” is assumed by tongues-speakers to refer to ecstatic speaking, whereas the context shows that it is the various “utterances” from God (vs. 8) and their gift of “prophecy” (vs. 10) all of which are fully intelligible with nothing non-cognitive about them.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE MODERN-DAY TONGUES-SPEAKING PHENOMENON

FACTORS ABOUT THE MODERN-DAY TONGUES-SPEAKING PHENOMENON

In contrast to the biblical recorded instances of the use of natural language, modern-day ecstatic speaking in tongues:

- Is not of existing foreign languages with a **grammatical** structure.
- Has a definite **input in terms of the sound system of the native language** of the speaker, whereby there is an incorporation of sounds that contrast with those of the native language and those broadly of the native sound system.
- Has a very **limited ‘vocabulary’** (if any) compared to any known language.
- **Cannot truly be interpreted** (translated) because they are ecstatic non-cognitive phenomena.
- Often involves **ecstatic behaviour** which can lead to sensory overload and loss of mental control.
- Is often, either first heard by or actually **taught** to the tongues-speaker i.e. it is a **learned behaviour** rather than, as claimed, to be initiated by God’s spirit. The tongues-speakers tend to make themselves make sounds that they did not previously use and this becomes a babble.
- Mostly remains **private** and so fails to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 13).
- Is not an exclusively “Christian” practice because it occurs as **part of voodoo** in Haiti, in the Zar cult in Egypt, in some aspects of Hinduism, and in other societies.

NON-COGNITIVE PRAYING IN TONGUES IS A MISAPPLICATION OF SCRIPTURES

The reason for praying in ecstatic tongues (1Cor. 14:14) is supposedly to bypass the fleshly mind which interferes with one’s prayers. The Scripture appealed to for this says:

- ❖ “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (*Rom. 8:7*).

However, as will be seen in STUDY 14 the 1Corinthians 14:14 reference is to prayer in a foreign normal language in the 1st century setting of the multi-language city of Corinth. Furthermore, the Romans 8:7 statement is not in the context of praying or speaking in languages/tongues, but rather it is in the context of a Christian’s living his life according to God’s spirit.

Also, modern-day tongues speakers generally think that the prayers that are prayed in a tongue will always be answered:

- ❖ “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (*1 John 5:14-15*).

Again there is no context here that excludes prayer in general i.e. nothing that limits answered prayer to only those prayers that are prayed in a tongue. Instead, we know that:

- ❖ “...the Spirit too comes to our aid in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings (or: **‘which cannot be uttered’**)” (*Rom. 8:26 NAB*). Yet, tongues are utterances.

So it is not up to the person to try to enable the spirit to pray for them. Such ‘praying in tongues’ is

really the meaningless babble of the nations that Jesus condemned (Matt. 6:7) and is little different than the chanting of Buddhist mantras. Therefore, the modern phenomenon is not what is spoken about in the Scriptures.

IT IS VERY SIMILAR TO THE ANCIENT PAGAN TONGUES-SPEAKING

As shown above this practice was common in ancient times and is also evident today among those involved in the occult e.g. voodooism and other spiritistic activities in parts of South America, the Middle-east, and the Far-east.

IT COULD INVOLVE BLASPHEMY

Although those who engage in the ecstatic tongues-speaking phenomenon believe they are speaking meaningful words to God, yet, they actually don't know what they are saying to Him. They evidently do not understand the meaning of any of the sounds that they speak. However, to speak to God but not have any control over the content of what is said can be very dangerous — it could be absolute blasphemy. Jesus warned that:

- ❖ "...on the day of judgment people will give an account for **every thoughtless word** they utter. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

(Matt. 12:36-37 ISV).

Ecstatic tongues-speakers counter this statement by pointing out that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3:

- ❖ "Therefore I am informing you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

However, Professor Gordon Fee explains in his commentary on First Corinthians that:

this is exactly the kind of thing that those who are "inspired" by demonic spirits may have said in the pagan settings that Paul is alluding to in v.2...it would be precisely the kind of **contrast between their pagan past and Christian present** that would help them to see the difference between "spirits" and *the* Spirit, between "inspired utterance" as such and that which is truly of the Spirit of God,

The New International Commentary on the New Testament. pp. 578, 9.

BUT I KNOW IT IS FROM GOD BECAUSE I HAVE EXPERIENCED IT!!

There is no doubt that some Christians have such experiences. Yet even people who get involved in the occult have these sorts of experiences which clearly are not from the true God. However, these are all based simply on subjective feelings. So how can one know if these experiences are from God or from some other source? Certainly one needs the standard of the Scriptures. This standard is external to the 'experiences' and so provides an objective standard from which one can evaluate the experiences.

POSSIBLE DEMON INFLUENCE

Some have had the experience of a listener saying that when they heard the tongues-speaker they understood his message. A possible explanation is that this has been the influence of a demon because demons clearly know every language and the situation is similar to when, in the Bible record, a demon spoke the language of a possessed person. Furthermore, when some go into a frenzy one has to wonder whether this is most likely a case of demon oppression because the event is the very opposite of the displaying of the fruits of God's spirit (Gal. 5:22-24). Even if there are no frenzied outbursts, no falling down and rolling on the floor, or all speaking at once, all avoided because of following the biblical injunction to do everything "decently and in order" (1Cor. 14:40) this still does not mean that one is experiencing something from God.

SUMMARY

With the translation issues cleared up and contextual considerations taken into account it is evident that, in terms of the nature of ‘speech’ used, there is no difference between the passages in Acts 2, 10, and 19; and those in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as regards the nature of the languages spoken. None involve ecstatic (non-cognitive) tongues. All involve natural languages. Those who wish to believe and teach otherwise must present clear and convincing evidence i.e. the burden of proof lies with those who teach that there are two different natures of language used in the Scriptures. So the next study, STUDY 13, is an attempt to answer the question:

Did the Acts 2, 10 and 19 events involve a miracle so that the natural languages were previously unknown to the speakers and so involving supernatural ability?

APPENDIX

DID JESUS REALLY PROPHECY THAT THE DISCIPLES WOULD
SPEAK IN ECSTATIC LANGUAGES AS SOMETHING NEW?

MARK 16:16-18

- “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in **new languages** (Gk *glossa*); they will pick up snakes with their hands, and whatever poison they drink will not harm them; they will place their hands on the sick and they will be well.”

There is nothing here to indicate that any such “**new languages**” were anything other than natural human languages. ‘New’ here simply refers to their freshness rather than to them as having never existed before. However, it is evident that the context is that of supernatural activities as “signs.” Although this is a strong indicator that the “languages” were to be supernaturally produced it is not actual proof of such.

POSSIBLY NOT AN AUTHENTIC PASSAGE

It is well known that the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 is questioned by most authorities i.e. it is a highly suspect text and should not be relied upon. With reference to Mark 16:9-20 *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that:

...it is clear that the longer ending was written in the 2nd cent. But it is equally clear that Mark did not write it (clearly shown by J. K. Elliott, who demonstrated non-Markan linguistic elements in 16:1-20). Several minuscules marked it with an asterisk to show that it was suspect. Moreover, both the vocabulary and the style of the verses differ noticeably from the rest of the Gospel. p.256

Furthermore, if taken literally, the fact that this passage advocates the dangerous and unchristian exhibitionist practices of picking up “**snakes** with their hands, and whatever **poison they drink** will not harm them” is a further reason to question the authenticity of this passage. However, if taken as metaphorical language it would parallel Luke 10:19.

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