WAS IT ECSTATIC ‘TONGUES’ OR NATURAL LANGUAGES IN ACTS AND 1 CORINTHIANS?

In this somewhat controversial subject there are a few factors that we should bear in mind at the beginning, because they give an early perspective on this subject:

- There is no reference to “speaking in tongues” in the synoptic Gospels (if one accepts Mark 16:9 ff. as an addition).
- There is no record in the gospels of either Jesus or his followers as ever “speaking in tongues.”
- There is no mention of “speaking in tongues” in John's Gospel, in spite of the fact that he records much about the spirit.

THE DIFFERENT POSITIONS TAKEN REGARDING TONGUES-SPEAKING

#1. GLOSSOLALIA. This view proposes that “tongues” were and are supernaturally given ecstatic (non-cognitive) speech for the purpose of authenticating the Gospel message. This involves unintelligible words and sounds sometimes performed whilst the practitioner is in a trance-like condition. 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:

- The language of angels.
- 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 of “speaking in ecstatic tongues” is:

1. The Montanists at the end of the second century.
2. The ‘French Prophets’ called the Camisards around 1688 to 1740 and the Jansenists in 1731.
3. The Irvingite’s of the 1830s in Scotland and England as a precursor to the modern-day movement.
4. The Pentecostal movement which 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?” The answer is clearly ‘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. This view proposes that “tongues” were 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. This view proposes that the event at Pentecost was 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. This view proposes that “tongues” 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. ‘Diglossia’ concerns a culture where there is a ‘lower’ common language and a ‘higher’ specialist language. ‘The Diaspora’ was the Jewish dispersion throughout the known world of the time.
WERE “THE LANGUAGES OF MEN AND ANGELS” ECSTATIC, THAT IS, 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 an unintelligible sound 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 14.

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. This view seems the more likely one as reference to “the languages…of angels.”

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 non-cognitive speech, but rather it refers to speaking in natural languages. The following reasons presented for this understanding bear either 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 common language of Greek.

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:

- **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).
- **Dialektos** which means ‘language’ when speaking of one’s own native language as in Acts 2:6, 8.
- **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 a better understanding of this subject. 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 or native 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 after translation has been 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? 8 How 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 at Pentecost gives this meaning as the definition of *glossa* for the events in Acts 10 and 19 as also being speech in natural languages i.e. this is the default meaning of *glossa*.

**NOTE:** The proposal that this involved supernatural hearing rather than supernatural speaking is dealt with in STUDY 14.

**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 natural languages are referred to in Acts 2, 10, and 19 as shown above, but,
- ecstatic (non-cognitive) tongues are meant in 1 Corinthians 12-14.
Charismatics teach that all individual Christians are baptized with “the Holy Spirit” and then all begin to speak in “tongues” which are real human languages as evidencing one’s being born again, and in line with the Acts 2 description of real languages. However, they then view 1 Corinthians 12-14 as being the ecstatic gift of tongues as a different and later personal gift, but not a gift for all (1 Corinthians 12:30).

**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 (Acts 2:1), 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, natural 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 refer to 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, yet did not do so. 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, but, in fact, did not do so.

**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:
**ECSTATIC ‘TONGUES’ OR NATURAL LANGUAGES**

- “...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 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. The purpose of this ability was primarily as a sign or attesting miracle (1 Cor. 14:22), and only secondarily as the communication of a message. Nevertheless any ecstatic utterances would not be convincing since anyone can babble and at the time those of the Greek pagan religion practiced ecstatic babbling.

2. 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 proper words and having grammatical structure and therefore are **not non-cognitive** (ecstatic) utterances.

3. 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 foreign native human languages.

4. That if those utterances were non-cognitive they could not have been interpreted, which Paul required of the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 14.

5. 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 1Corinthians 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.

6. 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. 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).

7. That according to Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon the Greek word diermeneuo 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, whereas the word “interpret,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means “translate orally the words of a person speaking in a different
language." However, one cannot translate ecstatic speech or gibberish.

8. That the miraculous ability to speak foreign native languages could not be an uncontrollable ecstatic utterance because Paul gave instructions on the control of this gift (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

9. 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 Chrysostom (around 400 A.D) taught that the Greek phrase glossais lalein referred to ‘unlearned human languages’ and 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.”

Interestingly, in the writings between the time of Luke and that of Irenaeus there is very little said concerning speaking in tongues. Even the apocryphal Gospels do not refer to the phenomenon, although they do refer to animals speaking human language. Also in Justin Martyr’s famous Dialogue with Trypho tongues are not mentioned at all in spite of the fact that other gifts are mentioned. 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 the ecstatic-tongues belief was 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 if Charismatics wish to validate their practice of ecstatic utterances they ought to redefine the biblical “gift of tongues” as such, i.e. as an ecstatic utterance rather than as an actual human language. However because they cannot legitimately do so, it is obvious that current charismatic practice of speaking gibberish is not what was practiced in NT times.

**THE CLAIM THAT MODERN DAY TONGUES-SPEAKING IS IN REAL LANGUAGES IS FALSE**

There is no supporting evidence for this claim that the gibberish is a real language in spite of the Charismatic explanation that, just because no one can understand their tongues speaking it doesn’t mean they are not speaking in an actual language. The fact is that no one is ever edified by the gibberish that is spoken because no one at all understands it. This often leads Charismatics to resort to the claim that their interpretation is what is edifying. However, interpretations are rarely given, and when they are there is often a dramatic mismatch in length to the original gibberish “tongue.”

After detailing many comments which show that instances of the modern day speaking in tongues is not of real languages David Cloud in his book *The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement* wrote:

- Many linguists who have studied the “tongues” of Pentecostals and Charismatics have come to the same conclusion. William J. Samarin, professor of linguistics at the University of Toronto, summarized his research as follows:
“Over a period of 5 years I have taken part in meetings in Italy, Holland, Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. I have observed old-fashioned Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals: I have been in small meetings at private homes as well as in mammoth public meetings: I have seen such different cultural settings as are found among the Puerto Ricans of the Bronx, the snake handlers of the Appalachians ... Russian Molakans in Los Angeles. ... It is extremely doubtful that the alleged cases of xenoglossia [languages] among charismatics are real. Any time one attempts to verify them he finds that the stories have been greatly distorted or that the ‘witnesses’ turn out to be incompetent or unreliable from a linguistic point of view. ...GLOSSOLALIA IS INDEED LIKE LANGUAGE IN SOME WAYS, BUT THIS IS ONLY BECAUSE THE SPEAKER (UNCONSCIOUSLY) WANTS IT TO BE LIKE LANGUAGE. YET IN SPITE OF SUPERFICIAL SIMILARITIES, GLOSSOLALIA IS FUNDAMENTALY NOT LANGUAGE.” (Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, 1972, pp. xii, 112, 113, 227). (Emphasis is the authors).

SUMMARY

So when all of these factors are taken into account, it can be seen that the glossa which Paul advocated referred to natural human native languages exactly as in Acts 2, 10, and 19. With better modern translation and contextual considerations taken into account it is evident that, in terms of the nature of ‘speech’ used, there is no difference between all the relevant passages in Acts and those in 1 Corinthians 12-14. None involve ecstatic (non-cognitive) tongues - all involve natural languages. For those who wish to believe and teach otherwise the burden of proof lies with them. Indeed the Greek word glossa used in the Scriptures means languages. It does not mean incomprehensible babble. As David Cloud says in his book The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements, “The fact is that biblical tongues were real earthly languages, and this is a foundational truth. Any doctrine of tongues that reduces this practice to mere gibberish of any sort that is not real language is unscriptural.”

The next study, STUDY 15, will examine what is involved in this speech phenomenon in the book of Acts.

APPENDIX

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

MARK 16:15-18

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 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. The fact that Jesus said that anyone who “believes” will go “into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” and “speak with new tongues/languages” strongly suggests that the “tongues/languages” in question were the languages spoken in other parts of the world.

The original Greek word glossa means actual languages, and not made-up languages, heavenly languages, or mystical languages. Apart from its prime purpose of giving a testimony to unbelieving Jews that God had fully brought Gentiles into the body of His people, this gift of speaking these languages would serve as a way of dealing with the language barrier when spreading the Good News, because when Christ said these words, and in the earliest days of Christianity, no part of the New Testament had been written.
Additionally, 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 miniscules 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 where Jesus says:

❖ “Look, I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; nothing will ever harm you.”

This then raises the question of Jesus’ saying in Mark 16:17: “These signs will accompany those who believe: ....they will speak in new languages”

RESPONSE: These signs were fulfilled in the first century by the apostles as “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor.12:12; Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12). Furthermore, this gift was primarily a sign to the Jews that God was extending the Gospel message to the Gentiles and so was a temporary sign that ceased once it had fulfilled its purpose. For anyone today to be doing the “signs of an apostle” they would also have to raise the dead and instantly heal people, neither of which miracles actually occur.

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