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THE TONGUE OF ANGELS?

Glossolalia in the Mormon Church

Scott C. Dunn

... behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

(2 Nephi 31:13)

One of the distinctive claims of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that it is a church of restoration—the restoration of primitive Christianity to modern times. This restoration is said to include the return of the spiritual gifts enjoyed by the New Testament Christians. Indeed, the herald of this restoration, Joseph Smith, identified the gifts of the Holy Ghost as one of the distinguishing features of the Mormon religion. Among these gifts was one Smith identified as being "the smallest gift perhaps of the whole and yet... one that is the most sought after": the gift of tongues.

But what does the expression "gift of tongues" mean to Mormons? Mormon diaries, histories, sermons, and folklore apply the term "gift of tongues" to approximately three kinds of phenomena:

1. **Divinely-assisted Acquisition/Performance**, defined as supernaturally enhanced performance in a foreign language which one is studying or using. This usage is today commonly applied to the Church translation and missionary programs.

2. **Supernatural Comprehension**, or the ability to understand the message of a language one has not learned. A commonly cited example of this form of the gift is President David O McKay's account of his address to the Maoris of New Zealand during which many seemed to understand his sermon without the aid of an interpreter.
(3) Xenoglossia (from the Greek, meaning foreign tongue), which is the speaking of a genuine foreign language—living, dead, or heavenly—by a person who has not learned the language in any normal way. Most Mormon accounts of xenoglossia come from the Church's early period and probably the best remembered are those dealing with the Adamic tongue.

But Mormonism is neither the first nor the last religion in modern times to claim the gift of tongues. Thousands of people now living claim the ability, by means of the Holy Spirit, to speak as it were, with "the tongues of angels." Though the tongues movement is commonly associated with Pentecostal religions, people claiming the gift of tongues can also be found among Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, and even Catholics. The nature of their "tongues" has been the subject of considerable research, and the practice of speaking in tongues has even acquired a technical name: glossolalia. While disagreement exists on why humans produce glossolalia, linguists and other students of this interesting practice agree that glossolalia is a "human utterance devoid of semantic meaning or syntax." While its "phonological structure . . . makes it sound languagelike in intonation, melody, and phoneme composition," and while producers of glossolalia typically believe their speech to be genuine language, glossolalia nevertheless bears "no systematic resemblance to any natural language, living or dead."

Like glossolalists (those who make use of glossolalia), Mormons have tended to believe that the unknown tongues uttered spontaneously in church meetings in their early history were actual languages. But a close examination reveals that most if not all accounts of Mormon xenoglossia, do probably, in fact, describe glossolalia. I have four reasons for making this assertion: First,
there is very little reliable evidence to confirm the existence of true xenoglossia among Mormons. Second, the same psychological and social conditions that typically lead to the production of glossolalia in other religions are also found in early Mormonism. Third, what little linguistic data can be recovered concerning Mormon tongues shows strong resemblance not to natural language, but to documented examples of glossolalia. Finally, while it is apparent that LDS Church leaders personally believed that the tongues used by Church members were genuine, there is no indication that they ever received any revelation or made any official claims to that effect.

In attempting to show that Mormon tongues are in reality glossolalia, this study will deal with only the third form of the Mormon "gift," or xenoglossia—the speaking of a genuine foreign language by one who has never studied that language. This paper does not deal, therefore, with divinely assisted performance or supernatural comprehension.

ACCOUNTS OF ALLEGED XENOGLOSSIA

Linguist William Samarin, devoted student of the tongues movement, has pointed out that "a case of xenoglossia could be proven real only if, on the one hand, it were demonstrated that the speaker could not possibly have learned the language in any normal way and, on the other hand, that the language spoken was incontestably a real one." Virtually none of the LDS accounts of xenoglossia can adequately meet both of these criteria.

Most accounts which attempt to verify a tongue's genuineness come from individuals who neither experienced the gift nor knew the language involved. Typical of these is John Corrill's account of his conversion to Mormonism, which reports that he heard the Mormons speak in tongues unknown to him.
"Persons in the room . . . declared, from the knowledge they had of the Indian languages, that the tongues spoken were regular Indian dialects, which I was also informed, on inquiry, the persons who spoke had never learned." Unfortunately, Corrill fails to identify what qualifications his witnesses possessed to give such testimony, except to say that "from what knowledge they had" the tongues seemed genuine. This hardly constitutes expert opinion.

Similar difficulties occur in an account given by Dan Jones and published in the *Millennial Star* in England. Jones reports that "one of the Hindoos . . . from Bengal" attended a Mormon service in which the gift of tongues was manifest and afterwards related "that he had heard . . . eight different languages of the east, which he understood more or less of," including those of Malabar and Malay. Again, it is highly questionable whether one should accept the opinion of a witness who only knew "more or less of" the languages he thought he heard.

Charles S. Smith, on the other hand, relates an instance of xenoglossia involving a listener whose native language was presumably the same as the tongue in question. According to his account, a Welsh sister named Letty Dudley possessed the gift but was in doubt as to the genuineness of the tongue she spoke. When some sailors, including a "native of the Caribbean Islands" who knew no English, accepted an invitation to eat in her home, Smith encouraged the woman to test her gift. She sat down and began speaking to the man from the Caribbean, who while first quite astonished, made a reply. They continued making verbal exchanges for some fifteen minutes, after which the sailors left. The story concludes with a vague expression of Mrs. Dudley's renewed faith.

But while Mrs. Dudley seems to have been satisfied by these events, the
critical reader is not so fortunate. The mere fact of verbal exchanges occurring between two people hardly proves that such verbalizations are genuine language, especially when neither individual gives any explicit testimony to that effect. The critical reader is thus left to wonder: was there any concrete indication that the sailor understood Mrs. Dudley? Did Mrs. Dudley understand the sailor? If so, why is this not mentioned in the story? The failure to give any explicit indication of genuine communication or information exchange disqualifies this account as evidence for xenoglossia.

Less ambiguous is Edward Stevenson's recounting of an incident from the early days of the Church in which native speakers of French allegedly identify a Mormon tongue as being their own. The testimony of the Frenchmen was apparently relayed to Stevenson by a little boy who spoke to the men while standing outside the window at the time of the utterance. The Frenchmen, it seems, were attracted that direction when they heard the gospel being preached in their own language. There are obvious reasons for questioning the accuracy of this account, including the fact that it is a reminiscence of many years and the youthfulness of Stevenson's source. Furthermore, the reliability of all the accounts related thus far is weakened by the fact that in each, the one who relates the story is neither the speaker nor the interpreter of the tongue in question and therefore cannot provide firsthand information concerning what degree of comprehension or communication (if any) was attained.

Though a few firsthand accounts of Mormon xenoglossia (i.e., ones that offer some kind of indication that the tongue spoken is a real language) do exist, none are given from the point of view of the listener/interpreter.
Table 6

Vowels and Diphthongs of Mormon Tongue Texts #’s 1, 2, 7. These counts exclude obvious English words (e.g., Mount Zion, America, Lehi, etc.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 1:</th>
<th>a - 7</th>
<th>o - 7</th>
<th>e - 17</th>
<th>ai - 1</th>
<th>ah - 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text 2:</td>
<td>a - 21</td>
<td>o - 16</td>
<td>e - 15</td>
<td>ay - 1</td>
<td>aw - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text 7:</td>
<td>a - 10</td>
<td>e - 2</td>
<td>u - 3</td>
<td>ow - 1</td>
<td>oo - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25.28
previously. Let us therefore look at the consonants.

Table 7 lists the consonants of the first two Mormon texts, comparing them to an equal number of consonants drawn in sequence from a child’s nursery rhyme book, where one would expect to find more redundancy (and therefore possibly less variety) than in ordinary English. But even with this redundancy, the nursery rhymes show noticeably greater variety in phone selection than the two tongues. The first text uses nine different consonants compared to fifteen different consonant sounds in the nursery rhyme sample. In the second Mormon text, in which the sample is larger, the difference is even more dramatic, with twelve different consonants in use in the tongue, as compared to twenty in the nursery rhyme sequence. The reduction in number of sounds is still more obvious in Texts 3 through 6, although of course the samples are too small to judge whether such lack of variety would persist had the transcription continued. The limited number of sounds in use in the Mormon tongues, then, parallels that of known glossolalia.

2. Loss of Infrequent Sounds. In examining glossolalia, Samarin has noted that "in producing a pseudo-language a speaker maximizes what is already common in his primary language," with a corresponding "diminution of what is less common." Interestingly, the same phenomenon can be seen in the Mormon texts. Table 8 lists the frequencies of consonants in English compared with two samples of glossolalia and three Mormon tongues. In spite of the problematically small size of the LDS samples (as opposed to the glossolalia samples which contain 3,000 sounds each), the LDS texts are noticeably more similar in their frequency of consonant usage to the glossolalia samples than they are to normal adult English. While alveolars make up more than half of all the consonants in every case, the glossolalia and LDS tongues show a proportionately greater
Table 7
Comparison of Consonants from Mormon Tongue Texts 1 and 2 with English Nursery Rhymes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant Sound</th>
<th>Rhyme #1</th>
<th>Mormon Text #1</th>
<th>Rhyme #2</th>
<th>Mormon Text #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total   | 42       | 42             | 94       | 94             |
Number of Different Sounds Used | 14       | 9              | 20       | 12             |

25.30
use of these than the English. Similarly, those sounds which are used least in
the glossolalia texts, interdental and labials, also tend to be the least used
in the Mormon texts. The proportions do not correspond perfectly, of course,
but the Mormon tongues do compare more closely with the glossolalia samples than
do either the glossolalia or Mormon samples compare with the English. In short,
Mormon tongues exhibit the same tendency as glossolalia in using the most
common consonants in the speaker’s first language while slighting the less-used
ones.

3. Echoism. Another phonological feature of glossalalia is echoism, or the
tendency to follow a stereotyped pattern of vowels or consonants. That such
also occurs in Mormon tongues is shown in Table 9, which presents graphically
some of the consonant patterns found in Text #2. The letters have been spaced
out for maximal fit, and hyphens are used to indicate consecutive letters
(consonant clusters). As can be seen in the table, breath-groups (if one
can trust the punctuation) have a tendency to begin with the sequence /s ntr/
followed by /v n t/, with the odd-numbered lines on the table also continuing
with the pattern /p l s t/.

It may be interesting here to note a phenomenon which occurs with the pattern
/m n t/ which occurs three times (see Text #2, Table 1). The first two times
the speaker utters these patterns, he realizes them as unintelligible forms. But
the third time the pattern comes up, he manifests it as an English word, mount.
Of course, this may be coincidental, the sound of the word mount being dictated
by what the speaker wanted to say (which is the usual relationship of sound to
meaning). Nevertheless, in light of the fact that this pattern had occurred twice
previously in this relatively small but highly repetitive text, it is equally if
not more likely that the reverse is true: what the speaker said (mount) was
ddictated at least in part by its sound.
### Table 8

**Frequencies of Consonants in Three Mormon Texts as compared with English and Two Glossolalic Texts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Glossa #1</th>
<th>Glossa #2</th>
<th>Mormon Text #1</th>
<th>Mormon Text #2</th>
<th>Mormon Text #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilabial</strong></td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labio- and Interdental</strong></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alveolar</strong></td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alveolarpalatal</strong></td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Velar</strong></td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9

**Echoic Patterns in Mormon Tongue Text #2**

- S N-T-R V N T   _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ P R L S T S T M N T . . .
- S N   _ _ V N T-R _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ . . .
- S N-T-R V N T _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ T _ R T-T _ _ _ _ _ _ . . .
Echoism is also quite apparent in Texts 3, 4, and 5 which display alliteration and assonance typical of glossolalic utterances. Of course, this is not to say that echoism does not also occur in natural language; on the contrary, echoism figures highly in poetic discourse. But to suggest that Mormon tongues are given in a poetic style is to make a claim for tongues that few Mormons would make for most inspired utterances in the Church. Whereas echoism is present in virtually all known descriptions of Mormon tongues, such poetics are the exception rather than the rule in the "interpretations" of these tongues and in Mormon revelations generally. In other words, LDS tongues show far more similarity to glossolalia than they do to other forms of inspired language in Mormonism.

4. Open Syllables. A number of linguists have observed that glossolalia shows a preference for open syllables, i.e., those that do not end with a consonant. This is somewhat difficult to measure in the longer Mormon texts, inasmuch as the written transcriptions make it hard to determine in a long word where one syllable ends and another begins. Too, it is possible that in ending some of the words with the letter e, the transcribers were following a convention of English spelling which places a "silent 'e'" at the end of words with "long" vowels. Nevertheless, an examination of the short (and therefore less problematic) words reveals a number of open syllables, especially in Text #2. And of course, nearly all of the syllables in Texts 3 through 6 exhibit open syllables (see Table 1).

5. Consonant Clusters. Samarin also observes that syllables tend to "have either no consonant clusters or clusters of very limited types." The only clusters found in the first Mormon text are in those words which are apparently borrowed from English, e.g. goste. The only other text to exhibit any consonant
clusters at all is the first Hawthornthwaite text. The most complex cluster in this sample is one that recurs three or four times, namely the /ntr/ combination in sontra, sontrote, sontro. Significantly, this same (or similar) combination is found in a number of glossolalic "words" in various parts of the world. For example, the forms kindra fendre and rentre fente are part of a glossolalic chant found in a mystical sect in old Russia. The same consonant cluster turns up in American Pentecostal glossolalia in such phrases as shändré file sundrukuma' shandré. Indeed, linguists Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh find "this international inclination toward combinations of n with d or t," as nothing less than "astonishing. The appearance of this very same consonant cluster in a text with very few kinds of consonant clusters cannot, I believe, be adequately explained as mere coincidence. The evidence strongly suggests that glossolalia and the samples of Mormon tongues we have here are a common phenomenon.

Reliability of the Linguistic Data

But how accurate is the linguistic data on which much of this evidence is based? One of the authors of the accounts studied here freely admits that his transcription is given "as near as the narrator can recollect," demonstrating that his sample of tongues is a reminiscence and not a transcription made at the time of the event. No doubt this is true of many if not all of the transcriptions. Furthermore, it is well known that it is extremely difficult to remember a series of sounds when no meaning is connected to those sounds. How then can the transcriptions possibly be considered reliable phonological representations of Mormon tongues?

Fortunately, there exists another description of LDS tongues that may serve as a "control" for the other texts. This account comes from the Logan
T~ple historical record which is compiled each year from the notes of the
temple recorder. Since this firsthand account of an event in the Logan Temple
was made by the temple recorder, it was no doubt logged within hours of its
occurrence, and possibly within only minutes. Nolan P. Olsen, the recorder,
tells how a woman, Sister Watson,

was bearing her testimony about her temple work and genealogical activities.

. . . All at once her face lighted up, she looked heavenward, held out both
hands, and began speaking in a language we could not understand. We had some
knowledge of Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, German, Dutch, French,
Spanish, Italian, Latin, Maori, Hawaiian, and some words of other languages.
There was not one familiar word in her talk that we could recognize. It was
very noticeable that the words were full of the letter "L", and the language
more closely resembled Hawaiian than any other we could identify.

The use of the pronoun we in this account suggests that the recorder discussed
the event with others present. It is significant that he describes the utterance
as "more closely resembl[ing] Hawaiian than any other [language] we could identify,"

a statement not made in ignorance, since those present "had some knowledge of
. . . Hawaiian." Like glossolalia, Hawaiian exhibits a smaller sound inventory
than English, open syllables, and no consonant clusters whatever. The description
also suggests that the tongue had an abnormally high "degree of alliteration and
repetition of sounds, since "it was very noticeable that the words were full of
the letter 'L'."

That repetition of syllables also occurred is suggested by the "interpretation,"
the last line of which admonishes the congregation to do their genealogy "now
before it is too late . . . before it is too late . . . before it is too late."92

Presumably the person giving the interpretation was attempting to follow some
repeated pattern noticeable in the tongue.

In spite of the fact that the temple recorder did not furnish a phonetic
transcription, he has provided an account of an LDS tongue whose phonological
characteristics correspond in every detail with the other Mormon texts as well as
known descriptions of glossolalia. So favorably, in fact, does the Logan Temple account compare with all other known accounts of LDS tongues that one is led to conclude that while the representation of individual phonetic units in the transcriptions may be in error, the essential characteristics of reduction and repetition in each case have been faithfully preserved. The linguistic evidence, then, stands as a firm witness that Mormon xenoglossia is in reality glossolalia.

AUTHORITATIVE MORMON VIEWS

But if there is little or no empirical reason for believing in xenoglossia, is there at least a religious reason for doing so? In other words, are there any authoritative statements from LDS scriptures or leaders which would indicate a doctrinal commitment to xenoglossia? Again, the answer is no. While the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price all make mention of the gift of tongues, none of them give any explicit examples that would indicate that xenoglossia is a genuine form of the gift.

In the Book of Mormon, for example, Nephi promises that those who take upon them the name of Christ by baptism shall afterwards "receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel." While Nephi notes that this baptism of fire grants the ability to "speak with a new tongue, even the tongue of angels," he does not specify that this language come without study, or even that it be a natural or meaningful one, a condition true of almost every reference to the gift of tongues found in the standard works.93 Furthermore, Nephi's use of the expression "tongue of angels" implies that this new tongue is not a natural language at all; indeed, the emphasis of these verses on experiencing the tongue of angels after a "baptism of fire and of
the Holy Ghost" reflects Pentacostal teachings far more closely than it does modern Mormonism. The one modern revelation that comes the closest to making reference to a documentary occurrence of the gift of tongues is the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, included in the Doctrine and Covenants as section 109. In it, Joseph asks that "the gift of tongues be poured out upon thy people, even cloven tongues as of fire, and the interpretation thereof." The History of the Church records that following this prayer "many began to speak in tongues and prophesy," but fails to describe the nature of these tongues. Nevertheless, in view of what is known concerning the tongues that occurred elsewhere in that period of Mormonism, it may be reasonable to assume that the answer to this prayer was not an outpouring of xenoglossia, but glossolalia.

The work of scripture that provides the most detailed discussion of the gift is the same one cited by other tongue-speaking religions: the New Testament. According to the Book of Acts, the apostles were gathered in Jerusalem when the Holy Ghost fell upon them and they "began to speak with other tongues." A crowd gathered, including "men out of every nation under heaven . . . and were confounded because . . . every man heard them speak in his own language." While these events appeared marvelous to some witnesses, others concluded that the apostles were inebriated. The meaning of this event has been hotly debated for years by various Christian groups, some of whom view it as evidence for xenoglossia, while others see in it an example of glossolalia. Interestingly, President Joseph F. Smith gave an interpretation to these verses that differs from both viewpoints. Speaking of the multitude who heard the apostles, President Smith asserted that

God gave them the gift of understanding and they understood, every man in his own tongue. The apostles spoke in their own Hebrew tongue; they
did not talk a multitude of languages, but the ears and understanding of the multitude were opened and they heard the voice of the apostles and understood what they said.100

This view interprets the events in the Book of Acts as a manifestation of "supernatural comprehension," a form of the gift defined in this paper's introduction. If one accepts that the President of the Church "has the right... to give authoritative interpretations of scriptures," then one cannot cite the Book of Acts as evidence for xenoglossia.101

One is equally hard pressed to find any formal approbation of xenoglossia by Presidents of the Church. The only instance I know of in which a President of the Church identified a manifestation of tongues as a specific language is the well-known account of Brigham Young's experience with the gift during an informal meeting in 1832. After the manifestation, the others "flocked around [Joseph Smith] and asked his opinion concerning the gift of tongues" which Young had experienced. Smith "told them it was the pure Adamic language. Some said to him they expected he would condemn the gift Brother Brigham had, but he said, 'No, it is of God...'." 102 It is significant that this is noted in Brigham Young's history not as an official declaration or an inspired statement, but as an opinion. Whatever prompted Smith to make this statement, it is evident that he did not intend it as an official enunciation of Church doctrine.

While on other occasions, the Prophet did teach that tongues "were given for the purpose of preaching among those whose language is not understood," there is no indication that he believed the gift would replace foreign language study.103 On the contrary, he and other members of the Mormon hierarchy went forward with the study of Hebrew and other languages in a traditional manner.104 This apparent need for the gift of tongues to accompany—not replace—foreign language study
was emphasized by John Taylor in his mission report in 1852:

It is good for the Elders to become acquainted with the languages, for they may have to go abroad, and should be able to talk to the people and not look like fools. I care not how much intelligence you have got, if you cannot exhibit it you look like an ignoramus. . . . You may say, I thought the Lord would give us the gift of tongues. He won't if we are too indolent to study them. I never ask the Lord to do a thing I could do for myself. We should be acquainted with all things, should obtain intelligence both by faith and by study. . . . The Elders need to study these things, that when they go to the nations, they may not wish to return home before they have accomplished a good work.

This does not mean that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others did not personally believe in xenoglossia. Indeed, there is some indication that they did. But while they may have held these opinions personally, there is no known evidence to suggest that they or any other President of the Church advanced xenoglossia as an officially approved explanation for the gift of tongues.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to demonstrate, not that the gift of tongues is not a reality, but that it has been misunderstood. The virtual absence of verifiable instances of xenoglossia, together with the linguistic and socio-linguistic data, strongly suggest that if xenoglossia does exist, it is extremely rare.

At the same time, it was not the purpose of this study to belittle the practice of glossolalia. On the contrary, the information presented here indicates that, for a period of time at least, Mormons found this phenomenon a very satisfying expression of their religious feelings, one that seemed to unite them with one another and link them to a form of Christianity they felt was their responsibility and their blessing to restore. The occurrence of glossolalia in other religions, far from lessening Mormonism, illuminates the bond shared by
all who seek to commune with Christ and demonstrates the truth taught in the scriptures and emphasized by Joseph Smith that no matter who believes, these signs will surely follow. 107

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NOTES


3 See, for example, John E. Carr, "Q and A: 'Do People Still Speak in Tongues Today?,'" The New Era, March 1975, pp. 48-49.

4 Clare Middlemiss, comp., Cherished Experiences (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1955), pp. 73-74.


7 Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 5.


9 Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 2.

10 Ibid., p. 112. Admittedly, the dividing line between "divinely-assisted performance" and xenoglossia can, at times be indistinct, especially with regard to the question of the length of time a person must be exposed to a foreign language before his or her mysterious grasp of it becomes a case of divinely-assisted performance and not xenoglossia. Fortunately, borderline cases are quite rare, with individuals claiming to have had virtually no exposure to the language on the one hand, or regular daily exposure for three months or more on the other. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to classify the former as xenoglossia and the latter as "divinely-assisted performance."

11 John Corrill, A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (Commonly Called Mormons): Including an Account of their Doctrines and Discipline (St. Louis: Published by author, 1839), p. 9.

12 Dan Jones, "Letter to President Orson Spencer," The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star 9 (1 August 1847): 238.
Even less substantial is an episode related by Matthias F. Cowley, who assumes a certain tongue to be genuine on the basis of the speaker's "voice, gestures, and intonation." See M. F. Cowley, "Gifts of the Gospel," The Improvement Era 2 (April 1899): 448.


"Diary of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner," typescript in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, p. 6. Hereafter cited as BYU Special Collections. The title notwithstanding, this work is apparently a reminiscence produced after the turn of the century. In a letter written to Emmeline B. Wells in the summer of 1905, Rollins answers a number of Wells' questions relating to early Church history, saying "My Journal got burned up, so cannot remember dates." Rollins goes on to describe events in Missouri from memory, which would not have been necessary, if the aforementioned typescript had been produced from an actual diary. See M. E. Lightner to Emmeline B. Wells, Summer 1905, photocopy in BYU Special Collections, p. 4.


Stanley B. Kimball, Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 39. Stanley Kimball's acceptance of this event as genuine xenoglossia (see p. 117) seems to typify the naive and uncritical way in which many Mormons view these accounts. Nevertheless, Heber's speaking in tongues to German immigrants no more means he was speaking the German language than Brigham Young's speaking in tongues to an ox means Young was speaking "ox language." See "History of Joseph Smith," The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star 25 (21 March 1863): 183.

Scraps of Biography, Faith-Promoting Series, no. 10 (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), pp. 17-19.

Grover's defiant manner is indicated by the fact that she was "vexed," and that she was determined that "they should not take me alive." Ibid.


It should be noted that glossolalia is not learned in the same sense that language is learned, since in glossolalia there is little or no attempt to use "words" one has heard nor imitate patterns one has been exposed to. Nevertheless, glossolalia may be considered learning in a more general sense. See Virginia H. Hine, "Pentecostal Glossolalia: Toward a Functional Interpretation, The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 8 (Fall 1969): 221; Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 72.

24Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 55-58.

25Samuel Hawthornthwaite, Mr. Hawthornthwaite's Adventures Among the Mormons as an Elder During Eight Years (Manchester, England: Published by author, 1857), p. 91.

26Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 142.


28Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 68-72.

29Gerlach and Hine, People, Power, Change, p. 127. For a discussion of objections to this characterization, see Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 22-26.

30"Far West Record: The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ's Church of Latter Day Saints; Belonging to the High Council of Said Church, or their Successors in office, of Caldwell County Missouri," typescript of a manuscript; photocopy in possession of author, pp. 49-60. Hereafter cited as "Far West Record." It should be noted, however, that the transgression described in these minutes was more one of teaching contrary to the council's advice and performing unauthorized ordinations than it was speaking in tongues. Other examples of Church leaders' prohibiting or restricting the gift of tongues can be found in Edward W. Tullidge, The Women of Mormondom (New York: Tullidge & Crandall, 1877), p. 100; Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-1886), 10:324. Hereafter cited as JD.

31JD 4:170.

32Gems for the Young Folks, Faith-Promoting Series, no. 4 (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881), pp. 59-61.

33Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 68-70.

34"Far West Record," p. 50.


36JD 4:170.
37 "Try the Spirits," *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 April 1842): 747.


39 Wilford Woodruff Journal, 6 April 1837, Library-Archives of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as Church Archives.


42 Ibid., pp. 52-54.

43 *HC* 2:428.


47 Kildahl, *Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, p. 3.


49 Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, pp. 134-36. The account given here originates with a Mr. Higby, who was an elder of the LDS Church for approximately eight months. Higby also records that one "old gentleman, after considerable urging, spoke and made some sounds, which were pronounced to be a correct tongue. Several others spoke in a similar manner, and among them was myself. I spoke as I listed, not knowing what I said, yet it was declared to be a tongue. The sound of the words used by some, in speaking in tongues, was a medium between talking and singing--and all, as I am now convinced, a mere gibberish, spoken at random and without thought." Ibid., p. 134.

50 Homespun [Susa Young Gates], *Lydia Knight's History, Noble Women's Lives* Series, no. 1 (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), pp. 22-23.


53 *Doctrine and Covenants* 46:27.


55 *HC* 3:392.

56 "Diary of Mary Elizabeth Pollins Lightner, p. 9; Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, p. 134.
Lieut. J. W. Gunnison, The Mormons, or, Latter-day Saints in the Valley of The Great Salt Lake (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), p. 74; Hawthornthwaite, Adventures, pp. 92-93; Juanita Brooks, ed., Journal of the Southern Indian Mission: Diary of Thomas D. Brown, Western Text Society, no. 4 (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1972), p. 116. Later on, however, Church leaders avoided the problems that arose through the interpretation of tongues by adopting the teaching that while the ability to speak in tongues was a gift from God, the messages themselves were the products of the human mind and heart. Joseph Smith, for example, told the Relief Society in Nauvoo: "You may speak in tongues for your own comfort, but I lay this down for a rule that if any thing is taught by the gift of tongues, it is not to be received for doctrine." Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph, Religious Studies Monograph Series, no. 6 (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), pp. 118-19. See also Eldon Watson, comp., Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1801-1844 (Salt Lake City: Published by author, 1968), pp. 60-61; JD 3:364.

Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 161-62.

Howe, Mormonism Unveiled, pp. 133-136.

Hawthornthwaite, Adventures, pp. 89-91.


While Samarin points out that "no experiments have yet been conducted to determine how much text is required for identification," it is probable that he would consider the first two texts of Table 1 long enough for a reliable analysis. See William J. Samarin, "Glossolalia as Regressive Speech," Language and Speech 16 (January-March 1973): 79.

That is, those tongues which Mormons would presumably label xenoglossia. It should be pointed out that this study does not discuss the handful of "words" found in Mormon writings which purport to be examples of the "Adamic language" (e.g., Ahman, Son Ahman, Anglo-man, Adam-Ondi-Ahman) inasmuch as these words do not seem to have been given through the gift of tongues but instead occur in contexts that are, except for these items, entirely English. See JD 2:342.


Hawthornthwaite, Adventures, p. 89.

Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 127.


The transcription here is in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). The characters on Table 7 are also IPA.


"Mysteries of God, As revealed to Enoch, on the Mount Mehujah, and sung in tongues by Elder D. W. Patton, of the 'Church of Latter Day Saints,' (who fell a Martyr to the cause of Christ, in the Missouri persecution,) and interpreted by S. Rigdon," broadside, [n.p. n.d.], photocopy in BYU Special Collections.

Interestingly, this is the same rationalization put forth by many modern glossolalists. See Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, pp. 162-63; Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 78 note 2.

These counts are approximate, since they depend on how one divides up the lines. The only other possible explanation for the drastic differences in the two works is that they represent interpretations of entirely different songs. But if one accepts this explanation, one faces the sticky question of "inspired plagiarism," i.e., the problem of explaining the many similarities.

Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, p. 89.

Sarah E. Neibaur O'Driscoll, "Alexander Neibaur" (Kamas, Utah: manuscript in Archives and Manuscripts Department, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, n.d.), p. 1. I have asked various language scholars to identify the language represented by this transcription and have been assured that it is not Old English, German, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Old Norse, nor any Scandanavian language. One scholar commented that the transcription appeared to represent "just somebody playing games."


Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 79.

Samarin, "Regressive Speech, pp. 79, 81. I have subdivided some of Samarin's larger categories and rearranged the criteria to suit my organization.

Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 84.

Echoism can even be seen in the very brief account of tongues given by Thomas Brown who was witness to "a mellifluous unknown tongue, much resembling the Greek in its terminations—"on" &c. apoliston—episton—&c." See Prooks, Diary of Thomas Brown, p. 116.

Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 81.

Goodman, Speaking in Tongues, p. 121; Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 79.

Samarin, "Regressive Speech," p. 81.


Ibid.; ellipses in original.


Pentacostals commonly refer to the gift of tongues as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit." See Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, p. 2.

While Book of Mormon references to the gift are too vague to demonstrate a clear doctrinal commitment to xenoglossia, Robert Clark believes that Alma 19:29-30 demonstrates a Book of Mormon occurrence not of xenoglossia, but of glossolalia. Robert S. Clark, "Let the Gift of Tongues be Poured Out Upon Thy People," unpublished paper in private possession, p. 14.

Section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, like its parallel discourses in 1 Corinthians 12 and Moroni 10, lists among the gifts of the Spirit the ability to speak in tongues and give interpretations but does not define the nature of the gift any more than the Book of Mormon references.

Doctrine and Covenants, 109:36.

HC 2:428.


Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels, pp. 14-16.


J. Reuben Clark, "When Are the Writings or Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?" Dialogue 12 (Summer 1979): 72.

LDS Founder Joseph Smith also commented on the gift of tongues mentioned in the
Echoism can even be seen in the very brief account of tongues given by Thomas Brown who was witness to "a mellifluous unknown tongue, much resembling the Greek in its terminations—"on" &c. apoliston—episton—&c." See Prooks, Diary of Thomas Brown, p. 116.


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The only other scriptural discussion of the gift is that found in 1 Corinthians 14. Like other scriptures discussed here, this chapter says nothing that would indicate a doctrinal position on xenoglossia. If anything, Paul's discussion of the unintelligibility of the gift tends to indicate that the phenomenon he is describing is glossolalia.

102 Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, pp. 4-5, emphasis added.


104 *HC* 2:318-19; O'Driscol, "Alexander Neibaur," p. 1. Perhaps the Brethren in Kirtland felt that since the speakers rarely understood what they were saying with their new tongues and since the appearance of the gift was somewhat sporadic, language study was still required for consistent comprehension and communicative competence in a foreign language.

105 JD 1:27.

106 Brigham Young, for example, once stated in a discourse that the Saints could "speak in new tongues, and interpret as well as the learned of the age." Nevertheless, this information is incidental to the focus of his message and is apparently a boast to the non-members present rather than a statement of official Church doctrine. See JD 10:324.