

ABSTRACT

**Glossolalia in the Spiritual Baptist Faith: A Linguistic Study**

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Glossolalia is the linguistic term for the act of "speaking in tongues" which occurs in many religions. It is understood in its religious context to be a spiritual gift or attribute and has been investigated in some Christian and non-Christian settings. It is a human speech activity and has also been previously researched for its communicative value and function.

In this thesis, glossolalia is investigated in the specific context of the Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad and Tobago, to determine to what extent it can stand tests of linguistic analysis and/or be described as language. An explication of its context and method of occurrence is presented as well as phonetic data and data collection procedures. Those procedures include the recording and transcription of glossolalic utterances and the interviewing of members of the Faith who have produced or responded to glossolalia.

The analysis of the data is based on the definition of language as contextually meaningful, systematic and rule-governed with recognizable patterns of occurrence and identifiable segments. The evaluation is made within the parameters of language use and function and in the notable absence of definitive syntactic and specific correlational semantic evidence.

The findings reveal a conformity with the "unified phenomenon" which linguists call human language in nature and function. These findings are significant because they present a new theory, add new knowledge to the body of scholarship on glossolalia, claim academic recognition for an esoteric phenomenon and contribute authentic data on the occurrence of the phenomenon in the specific context of the Spiritual Baptist Faith. They also provide the preliminaries for further investigation into an untapped area of Caribbean reality.

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