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Glossolalia and cacophony in South Korea:

Cultural semiosis at the limits of language

ABSTRACT

In Christian traditions of “speaking in tongues,” *glossolalia* refers to an explicitly linguistic form of involvement with the deity, one carried out through denotationally unintelligible behavior. Its religious legitimacy depends on its being speech and not merely speech-like. South Korean Christians practice glossolalia widely across denominations, commonly in cacophonous settings of group prayer. Combined, glossolalia and cacophony impose limits on “normal” linguistic functions while reinforcing ideological commitments to language itself. Glossolalia should be conceptualized as cultural semiosis that is said to contain, and can therefore be justified by, an ideological core of language, but that is in fact produced at the ideological limits of language. This dynamic shapes how practitioners discern the nature of communication with their deity and with one another. [*speaking in tongues, noise, unintelligibility, intensity and intensification, Pentecostalism, Yoido Full Gospel Church, South Korea*]

기독교의 방언기도 전통에서 ‘방언(方言)’이란 특정 지역에서 쓰는 사투리를 의미하는 것이 아니라 명시적으로 이해할 수 없는 행동을 통해 신과 직접 관계를 맺는 언어 형식을 가리킨다. 방언기도의 종교적 정당성은 그것이 단순히 말과 유사한 행위가 아니라 진짜 말이라는 것에 달려 있다. 한국 기독교에서 방언기도는 여러 교단에 걸쳐 널리 행해지는데, 일반적으로는 서로의 말을 알아들을 수 없는 집단 기도 상황에서 일어난다. 서로의 말을 알아들을 수 없는 성질과 방언기도가 결합했을 때, 그것은 “일반적인” 언어적 기능을 제한하는 한편 언어 자체에 대한 이념적 헌신은 강화시킨다. 인류학적 분석을 위해 방언기도는 문화적 세미오시스로 개념화되어야 한다. 이 문화적 세미오시스는 언어의 이데올로기적 핵심을 담고 있고 그러므로 그에 의해 정당화된다고 간주되지만 실제로는 언어의 이데올로기적 한계에서 생산되는 것이다. 이러한 역학은 화자들이 신과 자신 사이의 의사소통, 그리고 서로 간의 의사소통의 성격을 파악하는 방식을 형성하는 데 중요한 영향을 끼친다. [방언기도, 소음, 불가해성, 강렬함과 강화, 오순절주의, 여의도 순복음교회, 한국]

On Wednesday mornings at the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, more than 10,000 congregants gather for a sermon and pray for healing. After the sermon, the pastor opens the prayer by asking the congregation to stand, to address the deity, and to summon the deity with a full-throated, archaic hyperdeferential vocative: “Chu yō!” (“O Lord!”). They call out three times, and then the thousands of people in the main sanctuary break into loud group prayer. The excerpt below is taken from a Wednesday-morning service that took place on July 17, 2013. Head Pastor Young-hoon Lee had given a sermon titled “When the Holy Spirit of Truth Comes.”¹ After invoking the deity, Lee prayed with the congregation, beginning with a quick repetition of “hallelujah.” He chanted this phrase on a B-flat, the tonic of the accompanying hymn, “Old Rugged Cross.” As the prayerful were enveloped by the cacophony that they themselves produced, their prayers transitioned into glossolalia, that is, speaking or praying “in tongues” (*pangŏn kido*).²

Uri ka onül tarün köttül ül ta ttōnago Chunim sōngnyōng ch’ungman haesō Yesunim hamkke hayō chuopsosō. Yesunim hamkke hayō chuopsosō.

Today we depart from everything, and as the spirit of the Lord fills [us], Jesus, [we ask that you] be with us. Jesus, be with us.

“Chu yō” k’ūge se pōn ūro kido hamnida.
[We] pray “Lord!” three times loudly.

Chu yō! Chu yō! Chu yō!
Lord! Lord! Lord!

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

[Glossolalia]

Glossolalia commonly takes place during cacophonous group prayer like this. In this context, glossolalia is the concrete production of individuals making speech-like utterances, while cacophony is the result of many individuals doing this, all at the same time, in the same place. These events follow a predictable pattern of both suppression and amplification. Repetitive utterances help the prayerful completely suppress denotation. The compounding effects of repetition also, but less obviously, suppress prosodic variation, narrowing the pitch contour toward fluid vocalizations that can be tuned in various ways—via pitch, rhythm, and tempo—to the ubiquitous musical accompaniment, whether it be a pulsating Korean gospel band (as above) or the austere, droning chords of a hymn played on the organ. The cacophony produced by groups of people praying together suppresses the audibility of individual speech sounds, opening up private communicative spaces for individuals to engage in focused, intimate, even secret communication with their deity. And their denotationally opaque vocalizations, buffered by noise, suppress role distinctions between speaker and addressee, “I” and “you,” the prayerful and the deity, creating a disorienting communicative space where it is unclear who is speaking.

Glossolalia and cacophony are fruitful disruptions of “normal” speech, because each separately enhances practitioners’ sense of their direct, personal communication and sensate connection with deity, and the combination of the two even more so (Lawless 1982; Maltz 1985; Titon 1988). Glossolalia and cacophony impose limits on speech that, together, undermine “normal” linguistic functions while intensifying the very act of communication itself. This allows practitioners to construe the limits (as imposed constraint) that glossolalic practice places on linguistic functionality as a generative, enhanced form of language that exceeds the limits (as extreme boundary) of linguistic functionality.

In Christian traditions of speaking in tongues, *glossolalia* refers to an explicitly linguistic form of involvement with the deity, one that is carried out through denotationally unintelligible, speech-like behavior. Although the “world-breaking” and “world-making” properties of glossolalia are stereotypically associated with Pentecostals (Robbins 2004), it is practiced widely across denominations and congregations in South Korea. I was surprised to find that most Presbyterians I asked, let alone Pentecostals, had spoken in tongues or had prayed with others who did. Many of them had initially encountered glossolalia as a foreign, unsettling practice even as they yearned for it, and they continued to treat it with caution even as they practiced it. And while they did not always agree about the specific nature, purpose, or degree of supernatural involvement in glossolalia, they generally did agree that true glossolalia is the manifestation of language, be it spiritual, archaic, transcendent, or simply foreign.³

The religious legitimacy of glossolalia depends on glossolalic utterances’ really being speech and not merely speech-like. This distinction led William Samarin (1972), in his landmark study, to conclude that glossolalia

always turns out to be the same thing: strings of syllables, made up of sounds taken from among those that the speaker knows, put together more or less haphazardly but which nevertheless emerge as word-like and sentence-like units because of realistic, language-like rhythm and melody. (228)

Samarin’s conclusion that glossolalia is made of “common human stuff” (229) draws an analytic line between two ways of segmenting this “stuff” into sounds: a grammar-driven segmentability of speech understood as linearly unfolding linguistic signs, and a more brute-reality segmentability of speech in terms of syllables. This line continues to shape anthropological approaches to glossolalia.

The grammar-driven approach to segmentation begins with phonemes, the “opposite, relative, negative” categories of speech sounds (Jakobson 1978) that, as individual units, contribute to denotation by differentiating more complex linguistic units. According to grammatical “rules,” phonemes can combine to produce morphemes, the minimal units of what linguists and philosophers call sense. These may be further combined to produce more complex syntactic units and, ultimately, denotational text. Denotation is most commonly associated with lexemes, those semantically saturated linguistic units often conflated with “words for things” in folk ideologies of language. Lexemes can be isolated through grammatical analysis by separating among syntactic units what appear to have a kind of stand-alone semantic “content” from those that do not. For example, *speaks* and *speaking* are both formed from a verb stem, the lexeme *speak*; *-s* and *-ing* have grammatical but not lexical “sense.” Phonemes (as the purely “negative” units) and lexemes (as the semantically “full” units) are functionally linked through a grammar.⁴ Within this structuralist linguistic paradigm, the phonological plane of speech is defined not merely by its rules of linear combination, nor merely by the distinctive features through which it is organized, but also by the way it is integrated systematically into more complex planes of linguistic function. Glossolalia therefore cannot be said to have even phonology, let alone grammar or semantics (Chilton 1979).

In the more phenomenological approach to segmentation, the brute reality of speech consists of a string of syllables assembled by phonetic articulations. One of the hallmarks of glossolalia is that it is perfectly syllabic. Because the syllables draw phonetically from phonological systems with which the speaker is familiar, and because they seem to follow some minimal rules of combination, the utterances would seem to be interpretable in

phoneme-to-morpheme terms. In this view, the sounds should combine to produce denotationally coherent utterances. Glossolalic utterances are not, however, interpretable in these terms: the syllables can never actually be construed as morphemes, so the utterance never rises to the level of linguistic “sense.” Instead, phonetic residue is reconstituted to masquerade as a phonological system. Only through mystical acts of “interpretation” can glossolalic utterances be said to contain or produce denotation.

This analytic split between the phonological segmentability of speech and the syllabic segmentability of pseudo-speech has led anthropologists to chart different methodological routes into glossolalia. The ethnographic record of denotationally unintelligible speech has focused on contextualization to explain how it can produce, effectuate, or “do” something that is taken to be real, rather than merely passively corresponding to something real outside of itself (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; McIntosh 2009; Tambiah 1985; Wirtz 2007). Anthropological treatments of religious speech genres have demonstrated how religious assertions find “support in the concrete forms of speech practices as much by what they presuppose as by what they depict” (Keane 1997, 58; see also Silverstein 1981)—from the moral demands of semiotic overdeterminacy (Bauman 1983, 43–62) to the performative productivity of semiotic underdeterminacy (Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). Aware of charismatics’ inclination to locate spiritual presence in semantic absence (Tomlinson 2012), many anthropologists of Christianity have focused on the “problem of presence” itself (Engelke 2007), treating glossolalia, for example, as a correlate of trance or dissociation (Goodman 1972), as the foregrounding of bodily activity (Bialecki 2011; Csordas 1990), or as part of a learned repertoire of techniques for producing psychologically sensate experiences of the unseen (Luhmann 2012). These perspectives emphasize the “intensity” of religious practice, whether methodologically collective (Durkheim 1995; cf. Evans-Pritchard 1965, 68), methodologically individual (James 1902), or anthropologically aware that “societies tend to differ according to whether they find the last court of appeal in matters religious in the social act or in the private emotional experience” (Sapir 1928, 74–75). And yet, one problem lingers. As William Samarin observed but did not explain, “Glossolalia is indeed like language in some ways, but this is only because the speaker (unconsciously) wants it to be like language” (1972, 227). There remains a fundamental, unanswered question: Why do they want it to be language?

Since the 1970s, anthropologists have increasingly conceptualized denotation, and the formal linguistic structures that make it possible, within a broader theorization of culture as semiosis (sign processes). This understanding views pragmatics, the domain of indexicality, as logically and empirically prior to (and encompassing) denotation, or the symbolic function of language (see Parmentier 1994 for

an explanation of these technical Peircean categories). Semantics and pragmatics do not form an opposition; rather, semantics is a narrow domain of pragmatics. Whereas culture may be understood as a “construct for the meaning system of *socialized* behavior,” language, more narrowly, is a “systematic construct to explain the meaningfulness of *speech* behavior” (Silverstein 1976, 53; see also Silverstein 2013). Although language is unique within culture for its true symbolic mode, the bulk of speech involves the iconic and indexical modes, making speech formally similar to and practically continuous with the more expansive domain of cultural semiosis.

Glossolalists insist that speaking in tongues is a specifically linguistic medium, albeit mystical and mysterious, despite the absence of a true symbolic mode or even the structured linguistic processes that would make such a mode possible. And so the most pressing question remains how and why glossolalia’s ideological status as language (Nakassis 2016; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994) is central to its appeal, even as it lacks in practice the very semiotic mode that would differentiate it from the rest of cultural semiosis.

The ideological conundrum of glossolalia for practitioners is the dynamic that should analytically and methodologically define glossolalia for anthropologists: glossolalia should be conceptualized for anthropological analysis as cultural semiosis that is said to contain, and can therefore be justified by, an ideological core of language, but that in fact is produced at the ideological limits of language. An “ideological core” refers to the absolute necessary element that orients a cultural category (in this case, language), is prototypical or emblematic of the category, and is the conceptual focal point in terms of which other elements are assimilated to the category. The “ideological limit” refers to the threshold for assimilation to the category (perceived as either an imposed constraint or an extreme boundary). For example, within the ideological limits of language, some sounds are treated as phonemes, syllables as morphemes, strings of syllables as words, and so on, because these elements can be functionally related to an ideological core (denotation). Beyond the ideological limits of language, these sounds seem to lose their linguistic value. For example, a person at a birthday party blows out candles on a cake, producing a sound (^hw) that resembles the onset of the English word *who* (Sapir 1925, 37–40). Is it speech? Christians face the same problem when evaluating speaking in tongues in the context of prayer. They must decide if a string of syllables is really speech or merely speech-like. Traditions of glossolalia likely will differ on both the ideological limits and the ideological core of language, and this relation will shape how practitioners discern the nature of contact and communication with the deity and with one another.

For Korean Christian practitioners of glossolalia, two related propositions follow from the assertion that

glossolalia is the spoken actualization of a specific, real language. First, unintelligible speech in an unknown language—however transcendent and ineffable—can be rendered intelligible through the gift of interpretation, revealing propositional truth formulated as denotational text. Although denotation is absent in practice, it is there in potential. The emphasis on denotation appropriates the more familiar model of biblical truth that is immutably given in scripture and set into circulation by sharing the “Word” across speech events (Harkness 2010, 143–48).

Second, the unintelligibility of glossolalic utterance is a complex sign of contact between the prayerful and their deity. Korean glossolalists, like Pentecostal theologians (e.g., Macchia 1992, 1993), disagree about whether to take this sign of the deity’s presence in the evidential sense of hard proof or in a more sacramental sense of the dynamic media of spiritual encounter. The emphasis on contact highlights the communicative grounds of a “live and direct” (Engelke 2007) encounter with the spirit that reappears consistently in Christians’ accounts of glossolalic experience. The view of glossolalia as contact, in which the deity directly plants the Word in the mouths of the prayerful and the spirit moves like fire throughout a congregation (Harkness 2010, 148–54), is recognizable to South Koreans from shamanic spirit possession (e.g., Bruno 2002; Kendall 2009; S. N. Kim 2005; Kim Harvey 1987). This is why both Christian and non-Christian Koreans have sometimes viewed some Christian practices as contaminated by the residue of shamanic superstition (as well as, for vocal practice specifically, repetitive Buddhist chanting). And it was often in reaction to the scent of syncretism (if not outright fraud and fakery) that Korean Christians contested and negotiated the ideological limits of language, as they decided whether speech-like behavior—their own or someone else’s—was or was not “real” glossolalia.⁵

This fundamentally phatic dimension of glossolalia also fits within a broader Korean understanding of speech as a pragmatic medium of social contact. Koreans reflect explicitly on how the interactional dimensions of Korean speech situate speakers in a complex matrix of social relations through its elaborate formal system of honorifics and speech styles. They do not make the error of treating speech as “mere words,” of “naively suppose[ing] that speech is nothing but the piling up of lexations” (Whorf 1956, 83). This awareness presents particular challenges for Christian assertions of universal, egalitarian access to God (Harkness 2015), as even the Korean gloss for the Word or speech of God is already marked by its honorific form: *malssūm* rather than the unmarked *mal*.

From “wordless groans” to opaque vocalizations interpretable through spiritual gifts, glossolalia’s value as language—whether ancient, foreign, the “language of heaven,” or the “tongues of angels”—rests on an ideological commitment to the promise of denotation and

to denotation as a product of social contact. The more undeniable the feelings of contact, the more convincingly the presumed potential for denotation can be converted into the pragmatics of virtual language.⁶ Treating glossolalia narrowly as linguistic utterance focuses attention on this ideological core, namely the promise of denotation and the special sociospiritual contact that denotation is thought to anchor. Treating glossolalia as semiotic practice broadens the focus to consider a wide range and a vast scale of operations beyond syllables that allow culture generally to manifest—or masquerade—as language. It is through this dynamic that cultural semiosis at the limits of language allows Korean Christians to posit glossolalia as language and to collaboratively transform the intensity of unintelligibility into the clarity of prophecy.

Intense religion

Although only about 20 percent of South Korea’s population (about 50 million) claims to be Protestant Christian, the country boasts some of the largest congregations in the world, well over 20,000 missionaries worldwide, and daily predawn worship services attended by thousands at a time. Although Catholics and politically progressive Protestants have been active in South Korea, Protestant Christianity there is overwhelmingly evangelical, characterized as “intensely practical and devotional” (T. Lee 2010, 115) and defined by “a particularly intense, experiential faith” in the context of gatherings that produce “intense collective interaction” (Chong 2008, 96–97). Such were the views of William Newton Blair, a Presbyterian missionary from Kansas, who called Koreans “a people by nature intensely religious” (1910, 12) upon his arrival there in 1901. A century later anthropologist Kwang-Ok Kim wrote of South Korea’s “intense religious explosion” (1993, 5) in the decades following the Korean War. In the contemporary United States, the children of South Korean immigrants describe their parents and their churches as “intense” and speak “explicitly of intensity as a feature of Korean American immigrant life” (Abelmann 2009, 49–57).

A manifestation of this religious “intensity,” glossolalia was popularized during rapid urbanization and church growth in the 1960s and 1970s. Yonggi Cho and his future mother-in-law, Jashil Choi, founded the Full Gospel ministry in 1958 in a Seoul shantytown, using a tent discarded by the US military. The Assemblies of God church materialized in its contemporary form in 1973 as the gigantic Yoido Full Gospel Church, which at its height claimed more than 800,000 members. In the 1960s, Cho “introduced glossolalia as the typical outward sign” that a person has received the Holy Spirit (Bay 2006, 241), part of an unorthodox theology that many older Protestant groups established before the Korean War saw as a syncretic mixture of Christianity and indigenous shamanism. But the growing numbers of

pastors at the Yoido Full Gospel Church and elsewhere came to view glossolalia more generally as one of many “spiritual gifts.” By the 1980s glossolalia had become widespread among denominations (Bay 2006, 245–46).

At the Yoido Full Gospel Church, glossolalia regularly takes place on Wednesday mornings and Friday evenings. Other churches might accept or even encourage glossolalia, but only in fairly restricted ritual spaces (e.g., prayer retreats). While many Christians of the latter sort speak in tongues, they do not normally do so during standard worship services for fear of “scaring off” others or embarrassing themselves. Even those who claimed to be frightened or bothered by the large congregations where glossolalia was the norm often said they did practice it in smaller, more intimate groups. There is also diversity in South Korean Christians’ explanation of, aesthetic judgment about, and theories of personal and divine agency in the production of glossolalia as they ask: Who is really speaking to, or through, whom?

Christians in South Korea by and large learn to speak in tongues through group prayer (*t’ongsōng kido*), even if they first produce glossolalia, or continue to practice it, alone. Fervent group prayer is a basic and fundamental component of the “evangelical ethos” (T. Lee 2010) of the Korean Protestant tradition. Forms of group prayer share a common feature: synchronous but unsynchronized vocalizations carried out in groups that create a cacophony of sound; this cacophony hinders the interpretability of any single voice but one’s own (Chong 2008; Yoon 2005; for a comparable non-Korean account, see Handman 2014, 178–84). Simply put, since everyone is speaking at once but saying different things, no one can understand what anyone else is saying. Incorporating an ideology of sincerity (Keane 2007) and the Protestant holy priesthood of all believers into institutions founded on charismatic authority, *t’ongsōng kido* can be found in nearly every corner of Korean Protestant Christianity, in South Korea and throughout the diaspora.

A foundational and legendary moment for this sort of prayer practice was the Pyongyang Great Revival in 1907, when hundreds of recent converts broke out into cries of repentance, and revival activity spread throughout the peninsula. As Blair wrote in his memoir, *The Korean Pentecost*,

So many began praying that [the missionary Graham] Lee said, “If you want to pray like that, all pray,” and the whole audience began to pray out loud, all together. The effect was indescribable. Not confusion, but a vast harmony of sound and spirit, a mingling together of souls moved by an irresistible impulse of prayer. The prayer sounded to me like the falling of many waters, an ocean of prayer beating against God’s throne. (1910, 45)

As if anticipating *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Blair marveled at how “every man forgot every other. Each was face to face with God. I can hear yet that fearful sound of hundreds of men pleading with God for life, for mercy. The cry went out over the city till the heathen were in consternation” (1910, 47). Graham Lee recounted the “indescribable effect” of “hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer,” where confession mixed with weeping, wailing, even falling to the floor and screaming, which the pastors managed to quiet only by singing hymns (G. Lee 1907; see also Chang 2014, 13–63). Unlike the 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles that sparked the Pentecostal movement in the United States, however, the written record of the 1907 “Pentecost” in Pyongyang does not mention speaking in tongues (Oak 2012, 287–88). It is largely with the growth and urbanization of postwar Pentecostalism in the 1960s, and especially with the Full Gospel Church, that glossolalia emerges in the 1980s and 1990s as a widespread component of Korean Christian worship across denominations.

The productivity of limits

During cacophonous glossolalia, practitioners collaborate to place limits on four areas of “normal” speech: denotation, prosody, participant roles, and social indexicality. The ritual teleology of these imposed limits, however, generates an experience of virtual language that exceeds the limits of “normal” speech.

Limits to denotation: “If we open our mouth wide before God, God fills it up even today”

It takes training and socialization to speak fluently while suppressing denotation. On Sunday, July 13, 2008, at the fourth service of the day, Pastor Cho stood before his congregation in the main sanctuary of the church and announced that God had sent him and the congregation a glossolalic message. He recited the glossolalic message and then interpreted (*t’ongyōk*) it into Korean for the audience. The audience shouted “Amen!” rhythmically and enthusiastically as Cho recited the lines of his interpretation, and they applauded when he finished. While the phonetic material of Cho’s glossolalic utterance was taken entirely from the sounds of Korean, it was, predictably, a drastically reduced swatch of the available phonetic repertoire. Yet in interpreting the glossolalic utterance, Cho generated denotational text that, syllable for syllable, far exceeded the glossolalic source from which it was drawn:

Introduction

Hananim kkesō uri ege pangōn ūi meseji rŭl chusigo kyesineyo.

God is giving us a message of glossolalia.

Glossolalia

*T'ip'iya lasyak'ap'at'e lasiyada loyaroba k'annak'i
lik'ik'ik'o nak'achi lashik'ap'at'ari nimik'iniya
ap'at'ak'ak'aya shik'ik'ik'o p'aya.*⁷

Interpretation

1. *Nae sarang hanün adülttal a, nō nün nae ka ödi ittago
saenggak hanünya?*
My beloved sons and daughters, where do you think I am?
2. *Nae ka kumalli changch'on mölli hanül e ittago saenggak
hanünya?*
Do you think I am in the vast, distant heavens?
3. *Ttangküüt esö ittago saenggak hanünya?*
Do you think [I am] at the end of the earth?
4. *Ttang ül p'aya, na rül ch'ajül su ittago saenggak hanünya?*
Dig in the earth, do you think you can find me?
5. *Anira! Sipchaga rül t'onghayö nae ka nöhüi sok e tūröwa
itko*
No! Through the cross I come into you, and
6. *Nöhüi sum kwa hamkke itko nöhüi saengmyöng sok e
hamkke ittoda.*⁸
Ah, [I am] with your breath and also with you inside your
life.
7. *Nae ka nō rül puttürö chugo nō rül towa chugi rül
wönhana.*
I want to hold you and help you, but
8. *Nöhüi ka na rül morünündoda. Na rül alla. Na rül
kkaedarüra!*
Oh, you don't know me! Know me! Realize me!
9. *Na rül üiji hara. Nae ka nöhüi üi kido rül tütko*
Trust in me! I hear your prayers, and
10. *Nöhüi son ül puchaba chugo nöhüi rül ikkürö churira.*
I will hold your hands and lead you.
11. *Kip'ilk'o nae ka sara kyesin nüngnyök ül nō ege nat'anage
churira.*⁹
Surely I will disclose to you the living power.
12. *Yönggwang ül poyö churira. Ttüt taero toege mandürö
churira.*
I will show you glory. I will make it happen according to
my will.
13. *Hananim üi yönggwang üi ttüt i imhayösö nöhüi sok e
nat'anage toege hal köt ida.*
The meaning of God's glory will be present, it will
appear inside you.
14. *Turyöwö malgo nollaji malmyö tamdae hago kanghara.*
Do not be afraid, do not be alarmed, be bold and strong.

Conclusion

*Iwa kach'i Chunim kkesö malssüm hasimnida.
Halleluya. Hananim kamsa hamnida.*
The Lord speaks in this way. Hallelujah. Thank you,
God.

Cho claims that speaking in tongues like this allows him to pray at least three hours a day. He also instructs his congregants to pray for hours at a time as a form of spiritual endurance training. According to him, the spirit can come at any time, but after an hour or so of prayer a person runs out of things to say. This, he suggests, is the perfect time to speak in tongues. In these moments, as they tire of repeating themselves because they have run out of things to say, these Christians do not necessarily consider their unintelligible utterances to be the speech of the spirit. Rather, they treat these sounds as a practical orientation to the speech of spirit, engaging in glossolalic practice with the goal of producing inspired glossolalic utterances. This repetitive narrowing of the degrees of phonetic freedom can be frustrating, or it can be an arousing, pleasurable, intermediate, intensificatory stage on the way to producing the mysterious speech of the spirit. As Cho tells his congregants, "If we open our mouth wide before God, God fills it up even today." One can use glossolalic forms to "open" the spiritual mouth, just as one might practice pronouncing new words in a language one does not speak—the syllables contain the potential for denotation.

Limits to prosody: "The Holy Spirit will come directly to lead your lips and larynx"

The ideal of holy speech passing fluently through the mouths of the faithful was clear when Christians described the "flow" (*hürüm*) of prayer. Prayer that flowed like water was a sonorant stream of vocalization, with legato syllables connected by a single breath. Such prayer takes on a quasi-musical character, harnessing the capacity of prosody not only to focus and intensify denotation but also to redirect attention from denotation to intonation, to override denotation, and, ultimately, to become a crucial mode of orientation in the total absence of denotation.

The sonorant flow of glossolalia came to the fore when practitioners described glossolalia in terms of singing and treated vocalization itself as a semiotically coherent intermediary point on the way to glossolalia. They told me of singing in tongues and chanting in tongues. One old friend, a Presbyterian, professional singer, and regular practitioner of glossolalia, even told me of dreams in which she sang operatic arias entirely in tongues for vast audiences. Pastor Cho himself explained it this way on February 15, 2009, in a sermon on the benefits (*yuik*) of praying in tongues: even though we do not have all the lyrics memorized, we can join in singing the hymns without the hymnal. "If we sing hymns in tongues," he said, "the Holy Spirit will come directly to lead your lips and larynx [*mokch'öng*]."

This appeal to singing makes sense of the way limits to prosodic variation intensify the production of markedly holy speech. For example, a part-time organist and choir conductor in her late 20s, who is the daughter of a

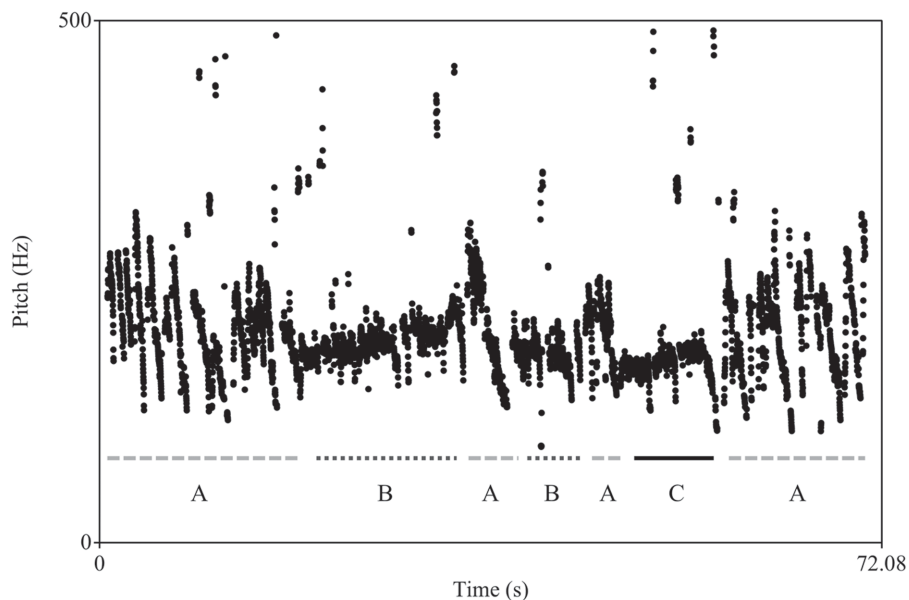


Figure 1. A pitch analysis of a sermon delivered October 29, 2006, by Pastor Yonggi Cho at the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul. The analysis visualizes the concentration of pitch and acceleration of tempo as Cho transitions from hermeneutical explanation (A) to intensification through repetition and parallelism (B) to the recitation of scripture (C). By observing how scripture comes to “flow” from Cho’s mouth as he preaches, congregants learn how glossolalia can “flow” from their own mouths as they pray.

pastor of a Yoido Full Gospel satellite church, explained to me how she had learned to pray in tongues following Cho’s direction. In a small coffee shop in Seoul, she explained that she had received the gift of tongues in her third year of high school. She received glossolalia suddenly while Cho was leading a Friday-night prayer session. More than 10,000 people were speaking in tongues together. They prayed all night. And then she explained a method for learning to speak in tongues. As captured in Pastor Lee’s invocation of the deity quoted at the beginning of this article, a way to release the tongue is to say “hallelujah” continuously. She demonstrated this method for me by repeating “hallelujah” three times quickly, after which she said, “At some point glossolalia suddenly breaks out [*t’ōjida*].” As a transition into glossolalia, this Christian’s utterance of “hallelujah” not only formally limited denotation to repetitive syllables but also demarcated itself tonally from her other speech. As she repeated “hallelujah,” she raised and fixed her pitch and increased her tempo to produce a concentrated, fluid form of vocalization that departed dramatically from her “normal” speech, orienting instead toward glossolalia in a chanted, almost sung, quasi-musical way.

This kind of phased transition was common among Christians who described their experiences speaking in tongues, especially when they emphasized the repeated recitation of scripture as a technique of intensification. When congregants observed scripture “flowing” from Cho’s mouth as he preached, they received a model for their prayers. Normally, Cho begins his sermons by speaking emphatically but still in a relatively normal or unmarked

sermonic style, framing his comments around relevant Bible verses. He emphasizes a certain point that the selected scripture is supposed to clarify and affirm as a means of hermeneutical explanation. His prosody approximates “normal” if somewhat excited public speech. He then transitions into another style characterized by extended repetition—a familiar feature of ritual speech. At this point, his speech assumes a clear rhythmic structure and a fixed pitch or repeated intonation contour. The poetics of parallelism and redundancy function as an intensifier, emphasizing his hermeneutical explanation and also rhythmically indexing the coming of a more intense overall experience. Intensification serves as a transition from hermeneutical explanation to the recitation of the Bible verse around which the sermon is organized. When he finally does recite the Bible verse, he changes the pitch (raising or lowering it), increases the speed of his speech, and produces syllables rapidly and rhythmically so that the verse is practically chanted. The transition to recitation is a transition from denotation that he himself has authored to textual chunks (verses) that he is merely animating (Goffman 1979).

The passages below are taken from just this sort of episode, a sermon given by Cho on October 29, 2006, called “The Outer Person and the Inner Person” (*Kōtsaram kwa soksaram*). The passages are reduced excerpts from the three phases of oration discussed above. A pitch analysis of these passages (see Figure 1) visualizes the increasing concentration and stabilization of pitch and utterance segments toward a rapidly produced chant-like form, from

explanation (A) to intensification (B) to recitation (C).

A. Explanation (excerpt): *Soksaram i saerowō chigo him ūl ōtko nūngnyōk ūl ōdōsō kōtsaram ūro salji malgo ije uri nūn soksaram ūro saraya toegessūmnida. Soksaram i ōttōk'e saerowō chimnikka? Malssūm ūro saerowō chinūn kōt innida. Malssūm ūl t'onghaesō yōngchōk in nae ka nugunji rūl palgyōn hage toenūn kōt innida. Soksaram i ōttōhan saram inya?*

The inner person is renewed and receives strength and power. We should not live as the outer person, but now we should live as the inner person. How can the inner person be renewed? He can be renewed through the Word. Through the Word, I can discover who I am spiritually. What kind of person is the inner person?

B. Intensification (excerpt): *Ūiroun saram, kōrukhan saram, ch'iryō padūn saram, ch'ukpok padūn saram, yōngsaeng pongnak ūl ōdūn saram, yōnghon i chaldoego pōmsa e chaldoemyō kanggōn hage toen saram i soksaram ida. Soksaram ūn t'aekhasin choksok iyo, wang kat'ūn chesajang iyo, kōrukhan nara yo, kŭ ūi soyu toen paeksōng i toeōtta.*

The inner person is a righteous person, a holy person, a healed person, a blessed person, a person who has received the blessing of eternal life, a person who prospers in all things and is healthy, just as his soul prospers. The inner person is [of God's] chosen people, a king-like priest, a holy nation, the inner person becomes one of God's own subjects.

C. Recitation (Romans 12:2): *Nōhūi nūn i sedae rūl ponbatchi malgo ojik maūm ūl saeropke ham ūro pyōnhwa rūl pada Hananim ūi sōn hasigo kippō hasigo onjōnhasin ttūt i muōt inji punbyōl hadorok hara.*

Do not conform to this era, but be transformed by renewing your heart-mind, that you may discern what is the good and pleasing and perfect will of God.

As Cho moves closer to the recitation, the stylistic delivery marks the shift from self-animated, self-authored hermeneutics (as “direct speech”) to self-animated, other-authored scripture (as “quoted speech”). But the effect of narrowing the pitch contour and increasing the speed to make this transition is to present himself as if he were simply “opening his mouth” and letting it be filled up by the Word of God. In this arrangement, the Bible verse serves as the authoritative Word (Bakhtin 1986, 163), which, like a ventriloquist, speaks through Cho to the audience as if it were not merely memorized but actually embodied within, or passing through, him. Like scripture flowing from Cho's mouth while preaching, glossolalia in prayer should emerge as a sonorant flow, allowing Christians to speak secrets “in” or “with” the spirit.

Limits to participant roles: Speaking in tongues “so the devil cannot understand”

Korean Christians often described speaking in tongues as having a secret conversation with God. The conversation itself is not a secret. Its secret properties are based on the denotational unintelligibility of the conversation—the inability of (most) others to decode the denotational substance of speech, even while they might understand in a general sense what the genre of conversation is “about” (e.g., worship, confession, repentance, etc.). As Cho explained on September 26, 2004, glossolalia is a “secret language with God”; it is “speech that is just between us and God.” He continued by claiming that if we use ordinary speech, “the devil comes to know and can interfere in advance. However, if we speak in tongues to tell God all of our private inner feelings so the devil cannot understand our soul or our heart,” then “the devil is helpless and unable to obstruct us.”

If God is the super-addressee, Satan is the super-overhearer. For these Christians, glossolalia prevents Satan, the devil, evil spirits, as well as human others (*nam*) from hearing (and presumably acting on) the juicy details of one's life revealed through verbalized confession and repentance. They sometimes compared praying in tongues to slang, where slang is characterized as a secret register used by young people to speak privately with one another (Agha 2015). Korean Christians were adamant that Satan and others would use their secrets against them. Their caution about “others” is significant, since they emphasize group prayer as a centerpiece of the Korean Protestant experience. In settings of group prayer, the threat of eavesdropping can be counteracted by both glossolalia and the noise of the group itself, modeling the anonymity of the urban crowd. The noise facilitates privacy through a kind of civil inattention that is afforded by a cacophony in which no individual's utterances can be interpreted. Ratified interactional participant roles can be restricted solely to dyadic channels between individuals among the prayerful and their deity—a special, spiritual, one-on-one meeting within a multitude.

The pastor's daughter quoted above felt constantly under scrutiny, even surveillance, at church. She explained that when she had “uncomfortable things” to reveal in prayer, she preferred to say them in large groups or completely alone, for example, at home in her room or in an individual prayer cell at a mountain retreat. She explained that she was not very proficient at speaking in tongues and, aware of the potential for “learner error” in this acquired language, she feared that she might accidentally reveal a secret during prayers. She suspected that others would listen to her prayers because, she admitted, she herself would do the same. For her, a small prayer group was like a small town where everyone constantly overhears—eavesdrops on—everyone else.

The aggregate of sentiments expressed publicly but with the security of individual privacy—enveloped by cacophony and masked by glossolalia—seems to produce a perfect Christian secret society mediated by universal, simultaneous access to both public and private confession, made possible by sharing unintelligible secrets with God. The severe threat of rumors in churches, some claimed, was exactly why the gift of interpretation was given only to those who could keep a secret—to those who spread the Gospel rather than gossip. Producing cacophony through glossolalic group prayer instantiates not only the excesses of spiritual contact but also the special personal relationship that individual Christians are supposed to have with their deity: a relationship of overwhelming intimacy, privacy, and secrecy, in which everything can be revealed through confession and repentance without saying anything at all.

Limits to social indexicality: Blending in while “bursting with grace”

Freed from denotation, focused by narrowed prosody, and made private by cacophony, the dyadic interactions between the deity and prayerful individuals are nonetheless subject to a limit of their own: the social indexicality that formally pervades the Korean language. This indexicality takes the form of honorifics and speech styles—a baroque, elaborate signaling of uneven participant roles according to generalized forms of social differentiation (for a comparative view of this dimension of language, see Agha 2007, 301–39). The obligatory and archaic deference and demeanor indexicals normally reserved for addressing the deity give way to a feeling of phaticity that, by dissolving the dyad, combines submission with empowerment, intimacy with awe. Practitioners often described this permeable state of spiritual sociality in bodily terms that were familiar, sensuous, vivid, and affectively charged. They moreover described the deity’s presence both outside (“enveloped by grace,” “bathing in grace”) and inside (a heart “spilling over with grace,” “bursting with grace”) the individual person.

On these themes, an evangelist (*chōndosa*) in his mid-30s tried to teach me how to speak in tongues. The evangelist was raised a Presbyterian but decided, against the wishes of his parents, to attend Hansei University, the theological seminary attached to the Yoido Full Gospel Church. Although he participated in daily events of group prayer and glossolalia, he said he also spoke in tongues for hours every night in the privacy of his room. In a noisy restaurant, after we had finished our cheeseburgers, he explained that glossolalia was common, easy, and available to all. His technique was to focus his heart-mind (*maūm*) on the deity specifically and completely. He insisted that one should never try; rather, a person should simply ask. And then he demonstrated for me. After addressing the deity and entreating the deity to lead his prayers, he transitioned into

rapid-fire tongues (he mentioned that people who pray slowly have a harder time speaking in tongues). As he did so, he alternated among three different conversations with three distinct styles: a relatively unmarked polite mode addressed to me; a formulaic, overtly honorific mode addressed to his deity; and glossolalic utterances devoid of person deixis or honorifics. With each style, his pitch became increasingly fixed, from variable prosody to formulaic prosodic contours to a fixed and markedly lower pitch.

The evangelist insisted that the phonetic and prosodic sound patterns of glossolalia could be very simple at first. And while many people did begin speaking in tongues in a very simple way—sometimes described as infantile babble, baby talk, or “la la la” glossolalia—it was possible for glossolalia to develop into an ornate semiotic register. There was occasionally conflict among Christians over which of them excelled at glossolalia. Some Christians described being cautious about their own glossolalia because it would make their friends envious and cause discord within their church groups. Many congregations strongly pressured members to participate, enthusiastically, in gatherings of group prayer. Sometimes glossolalia was a prerequisite for such participation. And prayer style also regulated participation: there was much discussion among Christians about other Christians whose prayers—glossolalic and otherwise—were distracting. Others’ prayers were considered disruptive if they were too loud or otherwise stood out from the sound of the group. Those who first learned to speak in tongues sometimes prayed too loudly and had to be corrected by their more experienced peers. Christians accused other Christians whose prayers were consistently disruptive of engaging in a kind of worldly boasting, of effectively bragging about their faith and their special relationship with God. Disruptive prayers even generated judgments of satanic, demonic, or ghostly influence, resembling a witchcraft accusation. “Not all prayer is clean,” insisted one seasoned glossolalist, who emphasized the importance of spiritual discernment while speaking in tongues. These kinds of statements suggest that boastful prayer violates the ritual limits to participant roles and social indexicality more broadly, because it is through these two kinds of semiosis that social differentiation—differentiation among the prayerful as a function of their individual relations with God—can be made explicit.

Although people insisted that they should not listen to one another during prayer, they admitted that they sometimes did. Sometimes people listened with curiosity to the glossolalic sounds of their neighbors. Often, however, listening was the unwanted effect of another’s intrusive behavior. In these contexts of collaborative sound-making, in which it can be difficult if not “impossible to draw a line between the linguistically poetical and the musical” (Friedrich 1997, 189; see also Feld 1994; Graham 1993; Samuels 2004), a relationship emerges between glossolalic practices in

worship contexts and honorific practices in the broader social context of being a Christian in Korean society. Although the cacophony produced from glossolalic practices bypassed ordinary verbal interaction laden with honorific usage, it still faced the problem of social indexicality in the form of group participation, an activity that required neither transcendence, nor dissociative trance, nor embodied ecstasy, but rather, as in everyday speech, careful encryption, self-monitoring, and deference to others.

The communicative production of reality

As members of the Yoido Full Gospel Church contact their deity through glossolalia en masse, they enact a basic principle of their faith: “If we stand firmly on the Word of God, think the Word, believe the Word, speak the Word, go forth according to the Word, in the end we will be able to experience that which is true and real,” as Pastor Cho put it in a sermon called “Illusion and Reality” (*Hōsang kwa silsang*), delivered March 28, 1999. The “Word” (*malssūm*) in this passage is a conceptual union of the denotational conception of language as a vehicle for propositional truth and a broader pragmatic conception of language as a medium of social interaction that makes denotation possible (Harkness 2010, 151).

As the sanctuary erupts with the sound of mass glossolalia, long-shot images of the congregation and close-up images of individual congregants are projected on large screens to the right and left of the towering back-lit cross behind the pulpit. Within the cacophonous acoustic space, the promise of denotation is fulfilled and the reality of contact made manifest in the voices and hands of roaming intercessors. These intercessors move about the congregation, standing on pews above the prayerful, placing their hands on the person’s head or back to pray over them. As the congregants’ bodies begin to sway and shake from prayer, they rise and wave their outstretched arms. Some congregants strain toward the intercessors, leaning over adjacent pews, striving with their arms and torsos to make physical contact with these roaming conduits of the Holy Spirit.

The excerpt below captures the moment when a roaming intercessor approached me at a service on July 17, 2013. Amid the cacophony and frenetic bodily movement, some voices droned on the same B-flat tonic that began the prayer session on “Hallelujah,” sometimes harmonizing with the pitch, departing from it, and returning to it again. As the intercessor approached, his voice came through increasingly clearly, in part because of the direction of his speech (all the congregants were directed toward the cross, while the roaming intercessors were mostly face-to-face with the prayerful) and in part because of the denotationally transparent Korean that he was speaking against the cacophony of others’ glossolalia. He stood on the pew in

front of me, placed his hands on my head, and uttered the initial phrases of his formulaic intercessory prayers, also on a B-flat. He departed from this pitch only in the final cadences of each sentence, when he produced a prosodic thrust that was calibrated to match the quick shoves of his hands and the final verb and sentence endings that finished each phrase (Korean syntax is subject-object-verb). These sentence endings alternated between the hyperdeferential combination of the honorific infix *-si* and the archaic honorific imperative *opsosō*, and the plain combination of the future verb suffix *-l* and the archaic imperative *chiōda*. This alternation explicitly signaled a change in addressee, in which contrasting forms of illocutionary force manifest as the difference between supplication and command. Furthermore, the imperative pattern [verb]–*l chiōda*, while usually directed at second-person addressee (e.g., “Behold!” [*Pol chiōda!*], “Praise God!” [*Hananim ūl ch’anyang hal chiōda!*]), was expanded to include a third-person referent. This fashion of speaking effectively proclaimed prophecy and performatively brought that prophecy to reality by “going forth according to the Word” (as in “It shall be done!”).

Below, I have underlined the passages that were uttered on the B-flat tonic of the hymn. Furthermore, I have differentiated the phrases that were addressed to the deity as a form of supplication in respectful, honorific speech (to the left), and the phrases that used the spiritual power afforded by this supplication to performatively command and influence or give prophecy about states of affairs on earth produced without such honorifics (to the right; on this methodological and analytic approach to “ethnopoetics,” see Moore 2013).

[Glossolalia]

Kido hamnida.

[We] pray.

Yesu sōngnyōng ūl simō chusigo
Jesus, plant the Holy Spirit, and

ŭnhye ūi yōng isigo
[you] are the spirit of grace, and

pok chusigo
give the blessing, and

kan’gu hayō chusiopsosō
we earnestly desire, and you give.

Kūrōch’iman sarang hage towa chusigo
But help us to love, and

Abōji yōksa hayō chusiopsosō
Father, please work in us.

Choe saham i (?) möjianül chiöda!¹⁰

The forgiveness of sins shall (?) before long!

Chu ünhye ka imhal chiöda!

The grace of the Lord shall come!

Kijök i irönal chiöda!

Miracles shall rise up!

Nünghi towa chusigo

Ably help us, and

Ünhye rül töhayö chusiopsosö!

Make your grace increase!

Chu man para podorok towa chusigo

Help us look only at [you], Lord, and

Chu rül üiji hamkke kijök i irönal chul mitsümnida!

We believe that if we together rely on the Lord, miracles will rise up!

Chu üi nünngnyök i imhal chiöda!

The power of the Lord shall come!

[Glossolalia]

[Glossolalia]

[Singing]

[Spoken to the congregation]

Kak kasüm e son ül önjüsipsio.

Place your hand on your heart.

Midüm üro, munje ka palsaeng haettamyön kasüm e son öngo kido hasipsio.

If you ever have had problems with your faith, place your hand on your heart and pray.

[Spoken to God]

Sarang kwa ünhye wa chabi ka yöngwön hasin Hananim aböji

God the Father, who is love and grace and mercy eternal

Yesunim üi irüm üro Chu üi söngnyöng kkesö

In the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of the Lord

I sigan uri rül manjyö chusigil wönhamnida (Amen)

At this hour we want you to touch us.

Sangch'ö ibün uri maüm ül manjyö chusigo (Amen)

Touch our wounded hearts and

Naksim hanün simnyöng enün wiro hayö chusigo (Amen)

Lift up our depressed spirits and

Kot'ong kwa koeroum e innün kü maüm e p'yöngan ham ül chugil wönhamnida (Amen)

where there is pain and suffering in our hearts, we ask you to put peace.

When the intercessor finished and moved on to the next person, the recording captured others still regularly praying on this tonal center, harmonizing with it, departing from it, and then returning again. The role of pitch here, combined with fixed rhythm and increased tempo, seems to provide a semiotic mode of spiritual contact with the deity (through supplication), one that “carries over” to the mode of spiritual authorization (through blunt command) to speak “in the name of Jesus” in the world. That is, the alternating intercessory supplications and commands are riding on the collaborative cacophonous glossolalia and its tonal center as a complex, ethically ordered phonosonic nexus (Harkness 2014), wherein the intercessors and the prayerful align and reinforce a specific kind of phonic engagement with a specific kind of sonic orientation.

Glossolalic cacophony produces the reality described by Cho through carefully calibrated, layered, co-metricalized processes of “poetic intensification” (Friedrich 1979, 461) or the “intensification of style” qua “textural densification” (Feld 1994, 113, 119). Through these compounding processes, dynamic semiosis seems to congeal into something with a palpably real presence (Stasch 2011; Tambiah 1985, 123–66; Yelle 2013). For the prayerful in settings of cacophonous glossolalia, this collaborative semiotic intensification produces the collective reality of the spirit. At the service on July 17, 2013, the ordered sequencing of supplication, a triplicate vocative (*Chu yö!*) and sustained repetition of “Hallelujah” on the tonic of a hymn suppressed some elements of “normal” speech while intensifying others as a way of transitioning

[Spoken in the name of Jesus]
Nasaret Yesu Kūrisūdo ūi irūm ūro myōng hanoni
 In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I command
Modūn chilbyōng ūn mōrikkūt put'ō palkkūt kkaji
modu ttōna kal chiōda! (Amen!)
 Every disease from the tip of the head to the tip of the
 feet shall depart!

Simhan (?), *pulmyōnchūng*, *uulchūng*
(?) chōngsin chirhwan, *ch'imae hyōnsang mullō kara!*
 (Amen!)
 Severe (?), insomnia, depression (?), psychological
 disease, symptoms of dementia be gone!

Simjangpyōng i mullō kal chiōda! (Amen!)
 Heart disease shall be gone!

(?) mullō kal chiōda (Amen!)
 (?) shall be gone!

Kwanjōllyōm i mullō kal chiōda! (Amen!)
 Arthritis shall be gone!

Aksōng (?) to ttōna kal chiōda! (Amen!)
 Malignant (?) also shall be gone!

Kohyōrap kwa tangnyo nūn mullō kara! (Amen!)
 Hypertension and diabetes be gone!

Mok kwa p'ye t'ongchūng to mullō kal chiōda! (Amen!)
 Pains of the neck and lungs also shall be gone!

In these mass events of speaking in tongues at the Yoido Full Gospel Church, glossolalists intensify some features of cultural semiosis while suppressing others as they move from everyday forms of speech to a narrowed communicative space. In this narrowed space, musical pitch, rhythm, and tempo emerge as semiotic points of orientation to which other sounds may be indexically anchored within a cacophonous environment. Although these vocalizations are, practically speaking, produced at the ideological limits of language, their status as language is reinforced as church members integrate these sounds into commands and prophecies—denotational text uttered in Korean.

Conclusion: From the intensity of unintelligibility to the clarity of prophecy

The positive valence of collective effervescence is pronounced in the data I have analyzed. In these combined events of glossolalia and cacophony, the prayerful suppress and limit the normal functions of language and communication more broadly to pass through a narrowed, intensified channel of spiritual semiosis. As the prayerful move away from intelligible denotation, variable prosody, inclusive interaction, and differentiated social indexicality, they find a new semiotic orientation in pitch, rhythm, and tempo. This kind of pitched intensification in prayer

takes place in huge gatherings like the one described above, as well as within small, intimate groups. This collaborative intensity is the goal as the prayerful enter the prayer space. And as features of the synchronous prayers also become increasingly synchronized, this intensity is materialized by a cacophony that is anchored to a tonal, rhythmic center, becoming the very source from which to draw power in denotationally intelligible prayer once they depart from it. Via glossolalia, they collaboratively produce cacophony with a perceptible but evasive semiotic point of orientation, a sensuous environment that is at once disorienting and orienting, overwhelming and stabilizing.

Although prayer is defined locally as communication with God, and glossolalia is defined locally as secret communication with God, there is plenty of evidence that interaction qua broadly cultural semiosis is taking place with others, even though it is not denotational and is not usually acknowledged as interaction. On the one hand, glossolalia serves as a privileged medium for sharing secrets with God. On the other hand, it also might allow the prayerful to tune in intersubjectively with others quasi-musically, through pitch, rhythm, and tempo, below the level of awareness. Cacophonous glossolalia allows the prayerful to disconnect from others denotationally while connecting with others through a broader, covert set of pragmatic processes ritually organized into poetic form.

The powerfully felt effects of glossolalia—the sensation of secrecy as intimacy and concealment as contact—lie not only in overt, unintelligible speech alone, nor even in the extremely personal, private space of spiritual connection, but also in the more covert modes of sociality in which the prayerful place themselves: hiding secrets from others while telling secrets in the presence of others, and orienting to the deity linguistically while orienting to other humans musically. When these Christians are making private, secret, intimate contact with their deity, they also are making plenty of contact with one another. Although glossolalia and cacophony jointly suppress denotation to generate spiritual contact, they also jointly draw on social contact to fulfill the promise of enhanced denotation. When the prayerful return to forms of communication that they take to be more directly intelligible to one another, they say that their hearts are refreshed, and their speech seems more pure and potent. Some have even made a bold new proposal that expands this ritual process into an ambitious religious program: now that so many Korean Christians can speak in tongues, now that glossolalia is so habitual, now that unintelligibility is so familiar, it is time to move on to prophecy. For they have taken speech to the ideological limits of language and converted a collaborative cultural experience that is intense beyond words into the social force of propositional truth.

Notes

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1. The data for this article consist of repeated conversations with key interlocutors and extensive audio recording starting in 2005, with a sustained focus on glossolalia beginning in the summer of 2013. While this article focuses on the Yoido Full Gospel Church as an emanating center of glossolalia, participants in this research included members of churches of various sizes, from different denominations. Young-hoon Lee has been head pastor of the church since 2008, when he succeeded the founder, Yonggi “David” Cho. I use the pastors’ real names, since both Cho and Lee are public figures whose sermons are widely recorded and circulated, who have authored books, and who preside over massive church gatherings open to anyone. Permission to record the massive public events was neither required nor sought, since both official church recordings and personal recordings of church services are widely available (e.g., <http://www.yfgc.com>). In February 2014, as I was conducting fieldwork in Seoul, Cho and his eldest son were convicted of embezzlement and tax evasion.

2. In non-Christian contexts, the Sino-Korean term *pangŏn* refers to a regional dialect.

3. Christians commonly refer to Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians for scriptural justification of and guidance on glossolalia.

4. It is worth remembering that the negative, differential function of the phoneme formed the explicit analogy for 20th-century structuralism, and that the conceptual fullness of the lexeme (and denotation more generally) formed the basic analogy for 20th-century “symbolic” anthropology.

5. Although his own church has been accused of syncretism, heresy, and fakery, Pastor Young-hoon Lee called on Korean churches to unite to prevent the “wave of fakery, heresy, homosexuality, Islam, and anti-discrimination laws.” He did so in the spring of 2017 after being forced to resign as executive director of the Christian Council of Korea because of violations of council regulations on reelection. Lee’s erstwhile challenger for the office, Pastor No-a Kim, has also been labeled heretical.

6. In Charles Peirce’s terms, “a virtual X (where X is a common noun) is something, not an X, which has the efficiency (*virtus*) of an X,” whereas “potential” is “almost its contrary,” that is, “the potential X is of the nature of X, but is without actual efficiency” (1902, 763).

7. The sample follows standard Korean phonology, with the exception of the onset [l] and the consonant-vowel sequence [ʃa] (e.g., *lasyak’ap’at’e*), both of which are found in loanwords. The Korean phonetics of Cho’s glossolalia allowed me to easily render it in hangul as well as Romanized Korean using the McCune-Reischauer system.

8. Some of glossolalia’s mystical character leaked into the interpretation in lines 6, 8, and 9 when Cho spoke with a trilled [r] and used the archaic exclamatory verb ending *-toda* (instead of the more familiar *-kuna*).

9. In line 11, Cho’s own perspective broke through into his recitation of God’s message in the interpretation. Using a fixed pattern, he substituted the honorific verb *kye* (to be) and obligatory

honorific infix *-si* in the phrase *sara kyesin nŭngnyŏk* (living power). God, it seems, is referring to his own “living power.” Normally, a speaker does not raise oneself with honorifics, suggesting that this honorification is a momentary leakage of voicing, as Cho’s personal perspective permeates the Word of God rather than the other way around.

10. (?) indicates uncertain speech.

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