

A STUDY OF GLŌSSA IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

For many Bible translators, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1957) is a standard reference work in regard to exegetical matters, and one of the final authorities on questions in dispute. The purpose of this study is not to lower Arndt and Gingrich (hereafter referred to as A. and G.) from this lofty position, but rather to demonstrate that the decisions of even the best of authorities must be evaluated by the individual translator in the light of the language with which he is working. Many translators have relatively incomplete preparation for handling Greek, and are therefore prone to feel that for them even to question a judgement of a Greek scholar is the height of presumption. On the other hand, most present-day lexicons and commentaries were not written with translation in mind, nor in relation to the peculiar problems of non-Indo-European languages. Thus even though the individual translator feels inadequate in handling Greek independently, it is essential that he evaluate the decisions of the commentators and lexicographers in the light of his own experience in translating and working with a non-Indo-European language.

This study of the Greek word *glōssa* is an attempt to demonstrate the necessity of the translator making independent judgements regarding Greek. It is also hoped that it will provide some help to the translator as he encounters *glōssa* in his translating. This word study was first presented at a seminar attended by translators of the Wycliffe Bible Translators at their Translation Center in Mexico, in February 1963.

The following is a summary of the A. and G. classification of *glōssa* as it occurs in the New Testament:

1. *tongue*

a. literally

Luke 16: 24

Mark 7: 33, 35; Luke 1: 64; Rom. 3: 13; 14: 11; Jas. 3: 5 f. (as an organ of speech)

1 John 3: 18

1 Cor. 14: 9 (with the tongue, i.e. in speaking)

1 Pet. 3: 10 (keep the tongue from [saying] evil)

Rev. 16: 10

Acts 2: 26 (the organ for the person)

b. figuratively, of forked flames

Acts 2: 3

2. *language*

Acts 2: 11

Phil. 2: 11 (every language = every person)

Rev. 5: 9; 7: 9; 10: 11; 11: 9; 13: 7; 14: 6; 17: 15 (as synonym of *phulē, laos, ethnos*)3. *broken speech of persons in religious ecstasy*

Acts 10: 46; 19: 6; 1 Cor. 12: 10, 28, 30; 13: 18; 14: 1–27 (except 9), 39.

4. *other*

Mark 16: 17 (not clear, but apparently cited by A. and G. under 3. above)

Acts 2: 4 (two alternatives given by A. and G.: to speak with different [even 'other' than their own] tongues, or to speak in foreign languages)

Jas. 1: 6 (not cited by A. and G.)

A. and G. thus define *glōssa* under three general meanings: tongue, language, and ecstatic speech. All but one of the citations under 'tongue' are represented as being literal usages of the word. However, it is to be noted, even some of those occurrences classified by A. and G. as being literal are qualified and given a figurative meaning, e.g. Acts 2: 26, 'my tongue exulted (the organ for the person)'.

Of the A. and G. listings under 1.a, two of the occurrences are obviously literal usages of *glōssa* without reference to speech: Luke 16: 24 'cool the tongue in Hades'; and Rev. 16: 10 'men gnawed their tongues in anguish'. These literal usages cause no difficulty in their translation.

Two other occurrences are literal, but with the added implication that the tongue is the organ of speech: Mark 7: 33 'Jesus touched the mute's tongue'; and Jas. 3: 5 'the tongue is a little body part'. These occurrences do introduce a translation difficulty in those languages where some body part other than the tongue is thought of as the organ of speech. This is the case in Mezquital Otomi of Mexico, where speech is thought of as being produced by the whole mouth, and the tongue is not thought of as entering into speech at all: *šānc'o ri ne* 'your mouth is dirty', i.e. 'you use filthy language'.

This difficulty (where the tongue is not thought of as the organ of speech) is further accentuated in figurative uses of *glōssa*. In two instances (under 1.a) the word is used as representing the power of speech: Mark 7: 35 'the tongue was released'; and Luke 1: 64 'the tongue was loosed', in both of which the meaning is that the power of speech was restored. In those languages where the tongue is not considered to be the organ of speech, either some other figure must be used (if possible), or a literal rendering must be given.

Further removed from the literal meaning of tongue are the occurrences where a person's use of speech is represented: Acts 2: 26 'my tongue rejoiced', i.e. 'I rejoiced verbally'; Rom. 3: 13 'use the tongue to deceive', i.e. 'deceive verbally'; Jas. 3: 6 'the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world';

Jas. 3: 8 'tame the tongue'; 1 Pet. 3: 10 'keep the tongue from evil'; 1 John 3: 18 'do not love in tongue'.

Still further removed is the occurrence where the tongue represents a person: Rom. 14: 11 'every tongue shall give praise', i.e. 'every person shall give praise', probably including also an idea of speech.

Of the A. and G. classification under 2, one of the occurrences is the same as Rom. 14: 11 above: Phil. 2: 11 'every tongue shall confess', where the tongue represents a person. Curiously, A. and G. do not consider these two references together, even though referring them to the same Old Testament passage, Isa. 45: 23.

Certain occurrences under 2 represent the people of a language group: Rev. 5: 9 'from every tribe and tongue and people and nation'; and similarly Rev. 7: 9; 10: 11; 11: 9; 13: 7; 14: 6; 17: 15.

One occurrence under 2 refers to *glōssa* as representing a language or dialect: Acts 2: 11 'telling in our own tongues', i.e. 'telling in our own languages, dialects'.

Of the A. and G. citations under 3, two of the occurrences apparently represent a language or dialect, the same as Acts 2: 11 above: Acts 2: 4 'speak with other tongues', i.e. 'speak in other known languages'; and Mark 16: 17 'speak in new tongues', i.e. 'speak in new languages', new, that is, to the speaker, though probably extant languages.

This examination of the A. and G. classification of the occurrences of *glōssa* in the New Testament results in the following reclassification of the occurrences of the word (with A. and G. citations in parentheses):

A. the literal tongue as a body part

1. without reference to speech (1.a)
Luke 16: 24; Rev. 16: 10
2. as implying the speech organ (1.a)
Mark 7: 33; Jas. 3: 5

B. figurative uses of glōssa

1. as representing the power of speech (1.a)
Mark 7: 35; Luke 1: 64
2. as representing a person's use of speech
Acts 2: 26; Rom. 3: 13; Jas. 3: 6, 8; 1 Pet. 3: 10;
1 John 3: 18 (1.a)
Jas. 1: 26
3. as representing a person
Rom. 14: 11 (1.a)
Phil. 2: 11 (2)
4. as representing the people of a language group (2)
Rev. 5: 9; 7: 9; 10: 11; 11: 9; 13: 7; 14: 6; 17: 15
5. as representing a language or dialect
Mark 16: 17; Acts 2: 4 (3)
Acts 2: 11 (2)

6. as representing ecstatic speech
 Acts 10: 46; 19: 6; 1 Cor. 12: 10, 28, 30; 13: 1, 8;
 14: 2, 4-6, 13 f., 18 f., 22 f., 26 f., 39 (3)
 1 Cor. 14: 9 (1.a)
7. metaphorically as 'tongue-shaped' (1.b)
 Acts 2: 3

In two of these contexts *glōssa* is used with an apparent play on words. Acts 2: 3 speaks of it metaphorically, 'tongue-shaped', whereas in the next verse it represents a language or dialect. This subtle interchange cannot be successfully retained in many languages. In Mezquital Otomi, for example, the first figure can be retained by changing it to a simile: 'shaped like tongues', but the second figurative use of it is completely lost, for to speak of a language as a tongue would be ridiculous to the Otomi speaker.

Jas. 3: 5 speaks of *glōssa* with the implication that it is the speech organ. Verses 6 and 8 speak of it as representing a person's use of speech. This play on words, too, is of necessity lost in many languages.

Translating modifies a translator's view of words and communication. Word usages that he has always taken for granted as being literally used in his mother language become obviously figures of speech when there is the necessity of transferring the concept into a different language. To fail to recognize these figures of speech is to mistranslate. In the light of this, it is incumbent upon the translator, regardless of his facility in Greek, to make critical (though humble) evaluations of the judgements of the Greek authorities.