

# Xenoglossy in Reincarnation Cases

Xenoglossy is the rare anomaly, mainly found in mediumship and reincarnation cases, of people using languages they have not learned in their present lives. In reincarnation-related xenoglossy, the focus of this article, the language was spoken by the deceased person with whom the case subject identifies. This phenomenon has been reported both with spontaneous (involuntary) past-life memories and memories induced in age regression under hypnosis.

## Responsive, Recitative and Passive Xenoglossy

The term *xenoglossy* was coined by French physiologist and psychical researcher [Charles Richet](#) at the beginning of the twentieth century. He used it to refer to words in languages unknown to the writer that appeared in automatic scripts.<sup>1</sup> In 1974, [Ian Stevenson](#) distinguished between *responsive* and *recitative* xenoglossy in speech. In responsive xenoglossy, a person can converse intelligibly in an unlearned foreign language, whereas in recitative xenoglossy, the language is deployed in an uncomprehending, rote way only.<sup>2</sup> Most recently, [James Matlock](#) introduced the term *passive xenoglossy* to describe the unconscious influence of an unlearned language on pronunciation and other aspects of speech production, reading and writing.<sup>3</sup> Written xenoglossy is also called *xenography*.<sup>4</sup>

Xenoglossy involves the use of a real language, unlike glossolalia, or ‘speaking in tongues’, which is the utterance of nonsense syllables in a form that sounds like a real language. Xenoglossy is sometimes called xenoglossia, especially when it refers to the Biblical ‘gift of tongues’, a miraculous, divine bestowal of the ability to understand and speak an unlearned language.<sup>5</sup>

Many cases of apparent xenoglossy are demonstrably false. In one case studied by Stevenson, a set of Norwegian triplets thought to be speaking Finnish amongst themselves turned out to have developed a private language understandable only by them.<sup>6</sup> In other instances, case subjects used words of actual languages to which they had been exposed earlier in life. In one famous example, a young man under hypnosis spoke and then wrote some words in Oscan, an extinct language of southern Italy. Upon investigation, it was found that he had acquired the passage from a book that lay open on a library table within his view, although he was not consciously aware of having seen it.<sup>7</sup>

True xenoglossy in reincarnation cases occurs frequently when there is a difference in the language spoken by the previous person and the case subject, but it is not invariably present. When it is not, subjects may nevertheless learn the foreign language more readily than their peers do. The converse phenomenon, in which a case subject resists or is slow to learn the language of his or her birth family, also occurs. Stevenson called the latter phenomenon *xenophobia*.<sup>8</sup> Xenophobia is most likely to present when there is a radical difference between the languages of the previous and present lives, such as with a group of Burmese children who recalled having been Japanese soldiers killed in Burma during the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Xenoglossy and xenophobia may appear together in the same case.

Xenoglossy has been reported in relation to mediumship as well as reincarnation, but this article is restricted to reincarnation. The following cases demonstrate the varieties of xenoglossy in spontaneous and regression reincarnation cases, some of them 'solved', with identified previous persons known to have spoken the languages in question. All of the cases were studied in the field by investigators, who tried to address the issues regarding authenticity that arise in their connection.

## **Xenoglossy in Spontaneous Reincarnation Cases**

### **Uttara Huddar (Sharada)**

[Uttara Huddar](#) is a Maratha woman from western India. During her pregnancy with her, her mother dreamed of being bitten on the right toe by a snake, and from a young age, Uttara greatly feared snakes. She had a few imaged memories of a previous life in childhood, but did not talk much about them. At age 32, she entered a residential clinic to deal with some recalcitrant physical problems. While at the clinic, she began to meditate intensively and her behaviour changed radically. She became excitable and would wander away from the clinic, saying she wanted to go to the place she belonged. She began wearing her saris as Bengali women did, different from the Maratha fashion, and spoke in a language identified as Bengali.

Uttara would return to her own personality after a bit, but on one occasion, after she discovered the clinic director dining with another woman in his private quarters, her alternate personality emerged in an especially profound way. Uttara felt unaccountably drawn to the clinic director, but he did not return her interest, and following this incident, he asked her family to take her home.

The alternate personality did not recognize any of Uttara's family and was unfamiliar with their modern way of life. She could not understand their Marathi language, nor could they understand her Bengali, so Uttara's parents arranged for Bengali speakers to meet with her. These people discovered that she could converse freely in Bengali, albeit in a somewhat archaic style in a particular regional dialect. She believed that her name was Sharada and that she was living in early nineteenth-century Bengal. She claimed that the clinic director was her husband. The last thing she remembered was being bitten on the right toe by a cobra.

A few weeks later, Sharada vanished and Uttara resumed control. Thereafter, for as long as the case was monitored by Stevenson, Sharada periodically took over, once for as long as 42 days. This circumstance permitted her to be observed by a succession of eight Bengali speakers, all of whom reached the conclusion that she was using Bengali responsively, although sometimes she seemed to be searching for words. Sharada was also able to read and write Bengali. Two tape recordings were made of her speech, and transcriptions allowed other experts to assess her proficiency. Only one dissented from the consensus view that Sharada's Bengali was consistent with her having lived at the time and in the place she said she did, holding that she spoke more like a modern Indian who had learned Bengali as a second language than like a native speaker, although he too had no doubt that she spoke Bengali responsively.

Stevenson's investigation showed that Uttara had studied Sanskrit, the extinct parent language of both Marathi and Bengali, and for a few weeks had taken lessons in reading Bengali. Her instructor spoke Bengali with a Marathi accent, however, so this brief exposure to the language would not have accounted for her being able to speak it in the dialect Sharada employed, and certainly not as well as she did.

Despite the wealth of detail Sharada supplied about her life, including the names of her husband and several members of his family, her existence remains unconfirmed. The family to which she said she belonged was traced and many of the names she recalled found listed in a private genealogy, but the genealogy was restricted to the male line. Stevenson and other researchers believe Sharada was most likely a previous personality of Uttara, who manifested almost like an alternate personality in a case of dissociative identity disorder, her initial appearance facilitated by Uttara's meditation at the clinic.[10](#)

### **Iris Farczády**

Hungarian Iris Farczády was the subject of a case of [replacement reincarnation](#), in which one personality leaves and is succeeded by another. Replacement reincarnation differs from the Sharada manifestations, which were more like the surfacing of an alternate personality out of Uttara Huddar's subconscious mind, as well as from transient or temporary states of spirit possession.

Iris practiced as a Spiritualist medium. She regularly became possessed by spirits, some of whom remained in control after the séances were over. When she was fifteen, a 41-year-old Spanish charwoman who called herself Lucía Altarez de Salvio took control, but did not leave, as earlier communicators had done. Lucía spoke Spanish, understood no Hungarian, and only gradually learned German, the language spoken by Iris's family. She said that she had died three months earlier in Madrid, leaving behind a husband and several children.

After the transformation, Iris found a new talent in cooking and enjoyed singing Spanish songs and flamenco dancing. Investigators were never able to find a record of Lucía in Madrid or elsewhere in Spain, however. Some people who came into contact with Lucía doubted that she really was from Madrid, although it was discovered that besides speaking Spanish responsively, and singing and dancing in a Spanish style, she was acquainted with devices that would have been appropriate to a Spanish woman at her putative station in life. In any event, as with Sharada, although the previous personality could not be identified, there seems to be no question about Lucía's ability to speak Spanish responsively after she took over Iris's body.[11](#)

### **Bongkuch Promsin**

Laos borders Thailand to the north and east and there are many ethnic Laotians living in Thailand. [Bongkuch Promsin](#) was a Thai boy who recalled the life of a murdered Laotian youth from one of these expatriate families. His memories were clear and specific enough to allow the youth to be identified. In addition to his verified memories, Bongkuch behaved in ways out of keeping with his family but in accord with Laotian practices. He ate with his hands rather than with a spoon and

washed his hands by immersion in a bowl rather than running water over them. Asked to account for this behaviour, he said, 'I am not Thai. I am Laotian'. He referred to fruits and vegetables by words his mother did not recognize but came to find out were Laotian, and used other Laotian words. He was observed to converse in Laotian with the friends of the person he believed himself to have been. He spoke Thai with a Laotian accent, an example of passive xenoglossy.[12](#)

### **Tutkhorn Chitpricha**

A Thai boy from Bangkok, Tutkhorn Chitpricha, identified himself with his father's elder brother, Dang. Dang Chitpricha had lived in another part of Thailand, where a different dialect was spoken. He had owned a company that supplied construction vehicles but had died in an automobile accident a few months before Tutkhorn was born. Tutkhorn suffered from nightmares and phobias apparently related to Dang's death and when he was between eighteen and 27 months old, recognized two of Dang's employees. He called them by their nicknames and spoke to them in their dialect, using a linguistic form appropriate for a man addressing an inferior. He understood them when they spoke to him and replied appropriately, although his vocabulary was limited.[13](#)

### **Nawal Daw**

A Lebanese Druze girl named Nawal Daw was intensely fond of Indian music and had a strong preference for Indian styles of dress. She refused to learn Arabic and chatted away to herself in a language her parents did not recognize. When she was four, her parents took her to a popular tourist site in Lebanon. There she spotted a group of Indian Sikhs and ran over to them, speaking her language to them. They seemed to understand her and to interact naturally with her. Unfortunately, they did not speak Arabic, so were unable to communicate effectively with Nawal's parents, who had to drag Nawal away when it was time for them to leave. For a while thereafter, Nawal did not talk at all. The following year she began to speak Arabic with her parents and by the time Stevenson met her, when she was nine, she had forgotten her childhood language. When Stevenson introduced her to a native speaker of Hindi and Punjabi, she showed no signs of understanding either.[14](#)

### **Simone**

Nawal Daw encountered native speakers of the language she recalled and was able to demonstrate her responsive command of it. Most other children who have used words strange to their families have had no such opportunity. One is Simone, a Brazilian girl whose case was studied by Stevenson and Hernani Andrade.

When her Portuguese-speaking grandmother picked her up for the first time, she surprised herself by greeting Simone with the Italian phrase, 'amore mio', 'my love'. Simone appeared to respond with a happy smile as if she had understood. When she started talking, Simone herself used Italian words and phrases from time to time. Once when her mother came to wake her up, Simone called her 'mamina' rather than 'mamãe'. Later that day, her mother happened to tell a friend what Simone had said. The friend commented, 'nobody here speaks Italian', to which Simone replied, 'lo parlo' ('I speak it'), and afterwards used it frequently. Her grandmother

made notes of everything she said about her life in Italy. Between the ages of two and five, Simone used thirty different Italian words, but since there were no Italian speakers in her town, she did not have a chance to use it in conversation. Nor was it possible to identify the person whose life she recalled, even though she described the neighbourhood where she had lived and apparently died in Rome.[15](#)

### **Wijanama Ariyawansa**

Wijanama Ariyawansa was a Sinhalese Buddhist village boy who recalled having been a Muslim from Kandy, the capital city of Sri Lanka. He was about four and a half years old when he began to talk about the previous life, which he contrasted with his present one. His previous family ate meat, he said; they had electricity and running water in the house and they worshipped without idols. Wijanama's eating habits and dress preferences differed from his family but were in keeping with those of the Muslim community of Kandy. Unfortunately, he did not give names or enough specific information to permit the person whose life he was remembering to be identified.

Beginning when he was three and a half, a year before he started to talk about the previous life, Wijanama would sit up in bed during the night, cross his legs, and mutter words in a variety of Tamil spoken by Sri Lankan Muslims. After about five minutes, he would lie down and return to sleep. Wijanama was still doing this at eleven, when Stevenson met him. He also sometimes used Tamil during waking hours, although the most extensive use of it came during his interrupted sleep. Stevenson obtained a tape recording of Wijanama's nocturnal speech and played it for a Muslim man from Kandy. The man identified several of the words as characteristic of his community. He was strongly impressed by Wijanama's pronunciation, which he judged to be that of a native speaker. Wijanama was never introduced to Sri Lankan Muslims or other Tamil speakers, however, so the extent of his ability to speak the language responsively is unknown.[16](#)

### **Kumkum Verma**

Differences of caste and socio-economic circumstance figure prominently in the case of Kumkum Verma, an Indian village girl who recalled being a woman from a nearby city. Her memories were extensive enough for the person she recalled to be traced and many of her memories were confirmed. Kumkum recognized people from the previous life when she met them. Her personality was very similar to and she behaved in several ways like the woman she believed she had been. She was noticeably more religious than her siblings, she stayed in the family shrine longer than they did, and she showed an unusual concern for beggars, all habits of the deceased woman. Many of these behavioural traits persisted into her teens, well after her imaged memories had faded.

When she was young, Kumkum tended to talk about the previous life in the present tense and became so absorbed in narrating her memories that she seemed at times to be oblivious to her surroundings. She spoke with a city accent and used several dialectical expressions common in the city, but not found in the surrounding villages, including her own.[17](#)

## **Bishen Chand Kapoor**

[Bishen Chand Kapoor](#), an Indian boy, had many memories of a previous life that were recorded in writing before the person he was talking about was identified. In addition to his verified memories, he behaved in many ways like this person, a man named Laxmi Narain who had died of illness when he was 32. Bishen Chand demonstrated great affection for Laxmi Narain's mother and animosity toward his uncle and other relatives with whom Laxmi Narain had been engaged in a lawsuit. He recognized several of Laxmi Narain's family and addressed them by the names Laxmi Narain had used for them.

The families of Bishen Chand and Laxmi Narain belonged to different castes. Bishen Chand's family were vegetarians; Laxmi Narain's were not, and Bishen Chand wanted to eat meat. His family also were teetotalers, but kept a small amount of brandy in the house for medicinal purposes. This was noticed to be declining in quantity, and then Bishen Chand's sister found him surreptitiously drinking it. Laxmi Narian had enjoyed music and dancing, and Bishen Chand could play tablas drums without instruction. He spoke a few words of Urdu, a language not used by his family, but known to Laxmi Narain. According to his older brother, he could also read Urdu before being taught it.[18](#)

## **Tomo**

Tomo is a Japanese child who claimed to remember having lived in Scotland in a previous life, although it proved impossible to trace the person he was talking about. When he heard the Carpenters' song *Top of the World* for the first time during his second year, he surprised his mother by singing along to it. He learned to read Latin letters before Japanese characters and wrote his name in Latin letters for the first time when he was about 34 months old.[19](#)

## **Stephen Stein**

Stephen Stein is American. When he was three years old, his mother and her sister took him to a Mexican restaurant. Stephen had been born in Philadelphia and had never before been exposed to Mexican food or culture, or to the Spanish language. At the restaurant, he saw a large map of Mexico on the wall. After studying it quietly for a while, he pointed to a town, pronounced the name correctly and said that was where he was from. Not long thereafter, still not yet four, while watching a television programme on the [Battle of the Alamo](#) with his mother, he traced his finger around the screen and told her what it had been like to be there. He pointed to a specific place and said that is where he had been killed. Stephen has maintained a fondness for Mexican food, music and culture. Although he has never studied Spanish, as an adult he finds that the meanings of words sometimes 'just come' to him, and more than once corrected his mother's pronunciation as she was trying to learn the language.[20](#)

## **Bianca Battista**

Recitative xenoglossy differs from responsive and passive xenoglossy in lacking any suggestion of an underlying mastery of an unlearned language. Many cases of



apparent recitative xenoglossy have turned out to be grounded in cryptomnesia or are otherwise false, as in the Oscan example described above.[21](#) True recitative xenoglossy reflects language employed in a similarly rote way in a previous life, for instance in memorized songs or chants. The earliest example on record occurred in the 1911 Italian case of Bianca Battista.

Bianca was recognized as the reincarnation of a sister who had died a few years before she was born. Her mother was three months pregnant with her when she saw the apparition of her deceased daughter, who announced that she would be returning as the child she was carrying. Bianca looked physically very much like her sister and had a similar personality. She never claimed to have any memories of her sister's life, but one night her parents heard her singing a French lullaby that their former nanny had often sung in trying to put the child to sleep. Bianca knew only a few words of French she had picked up from her older sisters. Her father asked who had taught her the song. She replied, 'No one. I just know it by myself', and resumed singing with a perfect French accent.[22](#)

### **Swarnlata Mishra**

Swarnlata Mishra was a Hindi-speaking Indian girl who recalled two previous lives. Her memories of the earlier one were more detailed and were verified, but she performed songs and dances from an intermediate life she said she had lived in Bengal. Neither she nor her parents spoke Bengali. She did not understand the words and could sing them only when she performed the dances, but her singing was good enough for the songs to be transcribed and identified as Bengali folk tunes.[23](#)

### **Duminda Ratnayake**

Recitative xenoglossy was displayed also by three Sri Lankan boys who claimed to have been Buddhist monks and who chanted stanzas in Pali, the extinct Buddhist ritual language, without ever having been near a temple or seen monks engaged in this behaviour. One of these boys, Duminda Ratnayake, held a fan in front of his face as he recited the stanzas, as monks did. He liked to carry his clothes like a monk and wanted to wear a monk's robe, which his mother rarely allowed him to do. Every morning and evening he went to a chapel near his house and there placed flowers he had plucked, in typical Buddhist fashion. He insisted on cleanliness and asked to be called 'little monk'. From the age of three, he spoke about the life he remembered, in sufficient detail for the person he was talking about to be identified. When he grew older, he entered a monastery, but when he was 21, he left it, disrobed and took up computer science.[24](#)

## **Responsive Xenoglossy during Past Life Regression**

Foreign words in putatively unlearned languages are regularly used by persons undergoing age regression to previous lives, but these cases of apparent xenoglossy have rarely been studied with the same care spontaneous cases of past-life memory have been. Stevenson[25](#) briefly reviewed two cases that received some scrutiny, Whitton[26](#) described two more, and Thomason[27](#) examined three others. The most

extensive investigations of xenoglossy during age regression are the three cases summarized below.

## **Jensen**

Jensen is the name given by the previous person in a regression case studied by Stevenson beginning in 1958, on the basis of tapes and transcripts of sessions conducted in 1955 and 1956. Jensen manifested and spoke Swedish in five sessions during this period, the last three when native speakers of that language were present. He rarely used complete sentences but seemed to understand the Swedish spoken to him and gave appropriate replies in Swedish. An analysis showed that he introduced a considerable number of words before they were employed by his interlocutors, in the same or earlier sessions. For the most part his grammar was correct, yet there were occasional solecisms. His accent was judged to be native, although sometimes tinged with Norwegian. Both his words and accent suggested an archaic Swedish dialect, perhaps from an area near the Swedish border with Norway. He claimed that his mother was Norwegian, so his speech might have been influenced by hers also.

Jensen talked in fair detail about his life, albeit in a disconnected way. He could understand questions put to him in English and sometimes replied in heavily accented English. Stevenson concluded that he was most likely talking about a life in seventeenth-century Sweden but that he might have emigrated to New Sweden, a group of Swedish colonies along the lower Delaware River (which runs through the of the American states of Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania), in existence between 1638 and 1655. The subject of the case was born in Philadelphia in 1918.[28](#)

## **Gretchen**

Stevenson studied the case of [Gretchen](#), a German-speaking trance personality, in the 1970s. He participated in some of the hypnotic sessions, and because he had some facility with German, was able to assess Gretchen's language proficiency for himself. He also introduced three native speakers of German to her. Gretchen spoke German during four sessions before Stevenson or any other German speakers were present. Two of these German speakers as well as Stevenson were convinced that she did understand and speak German responsively, although she never answered questions in complete sentences and made a number of grammatical errors. On the whole, her pronunciation was good, more suggestive of a native speaker than of someone for whom it was a second language. The case subject, Dolores Jay (DJ), and her husband, Carroll, the hypnotist, denied that DJ had had any exposure to German before Gretchen's first appearance, and Stevenson's extensive probing of her background turned up no reason to doubt them.

Before Gretchen first appeared, DJ dreamed of a girl she later identified with Gretchen, and at times, she had a sense of Gretchen's presence about her. Once she believed she caught sight of her apparition. Although Gretchen otherwise manifested during age regression under hypnosis, Stevenson was not convinced that she represented DJ in a previous life. Gretchen's account of herself did not allow her to be identified with anyone who had lived previously and Stevenson came to believe that 'the phenomenal Gretchen personality could be a mixture



blended from parts of D.J.'s own personality and elements of a discarnate Gretchen lying behind and influencing the manifest communicator'. Regardless, he was convinced that the German the Gretchen personality spoke was authentic and responsive, its lack of fluency and grammatical flaws notwithstanding.[29](#)

## **Rataraju**

In keeping with Stevenson's practice of naming regression cases with xenoglossy after the manifesting previous personality, we may call this third example the case of Rataraju. Rataraju represented himself as a Nepalese village chief. The hypnotic subject was a Japanese woman named Risa. The first author of the report, Masayuki Ohkado, a Japanese linguist, invited a linguist familiar with Nepali, an anthropologist who worked in Nepal, and a Nepalese-speaking graduate student to study the case with him.

Rataraju spoke two sentences in Nepali in one session and then talked for 24 minutes in Nepali in another session arranged for Ohkado. The team concluded that Rataraju did comprehend and respond appropriately in Nepali, although his command of it was not at the level of a native speaker. Rataraju responded to questions about his life and gave a sufficient number of names and other details to warrant an effort to trace him. Ohkado travelled to Nepal with the anthropologist, but unfortunately, although they went to the village Rataraju claimed he led, they could not identify him with any specific person. Many of the details of his life were plausible, but his story as a whole did not hang together, as if it were a fantasy constructed from an array of disparate facts.[30](#)

## **Questions about Xenoglossy in Reincarnation Cases**

Ohkado was impressed by the similarities between the Rataraju case and the cases of Jensen and Gretchen. The three personalities gave detailed accounts of their lives that should have allowed for verification, if they had existed, but upon checking, the stories were full of inconsistencies. James Matlock observes that this is typical of regression accounts in general. The identity of the previous person often seems to be intentionally obscured by the subconscious mind of the person undergoing regression.[31](#)

Ohkado also noted similarities in the expression of the xenoglossy in the three regression cases. Jensen, Gretchen and Rataraju all had limited vocabularies, employed defective grammars, and frequently responded to questions in monosyllables or sentence fragments. Sometimes they did not seem to understand what was said to them, but at other times, they gave sensible replies, and they introduced a good number of new words into the conversation. Rataraju was more limited than Jensen and Gretchen, but he had less opportunity to speak than they did. The xenoglossy of both Jensen and Gretchen improved over their sessions, and so it might have been with Rataraju, had it been possible to schedule other sessions with him. In Ohkado's estimation, the major difference between Rataraju and Stevenson's subjects is that the Nepalese language has no genetic relation to Japanese, so its use by Risa is more surprising and harder to explain.[32](#)

The overall assessment of Ohkado's team was that Rataraju did speak Nepali responsively, although the language was far inferior to what one would expect of a native speaker. They imply, as Stevenson did, that the deficiency in linguistic expression is a feature of the hypnosis facilitating the past-life memory, if not of the reincarnation process itself. Their conclusion stands in strong contrast to the opinions of other linguists who have examined Stevenson's regression cases, based on published transcripts and summary accounts, rather than on first-hand acquaintance with the speech or recordings of it.

Sarah Thomason's dismissals of the Jensen and Gretchen cases<sup>33</sup> are often cited by the sceptical community. Thomason accepts that Stevenson's investigations were sufficient to rule out fraud but believes that he did not demonstrate a capacity for Jensen and Gretchen to speak their respective languages. She says that Stevenson's 'notion of "responsive xenoglossy" is fatally flawed as a methodological criterion for determining a person's ability to speak a language' because 'his subjects show no sign of any extensive exposure to Swedish or German, in any lifetime'.<sup>34</sup> She reaches this conclusion because their vocabulary is restricted and their syntax simplified. Matlock points out that Thomason and other linguists want to see signs that Jensen and Gretchen can perform like mature native speakers, whereas Stevenson is looking only for evidence that they possess some degree of language proficiency. The linguists assume that language transmitted across lives will be structured like language spoken in any given life, but Stevenson is open to a wider range of possibilities.<sup>35</sup>

The case of Uttara Huddar or Sharada presents a different set of challenges to critics, and they have responded to it in a different way. Thomason acknowledges that Sharada is said to have spoken mostly in full, grammatically-correct sentences, but emphasizes the dissenting evaluation of the linguist who judged her speech on the basis of a tape recording and concluded she had learned it as a second language. Thomason appears to embrace the idea that Uttara's lessons in reading Bengali and her study of Sanskrit, a language no longer spoken anywhere, led to Sharada's speaking ability.<sup>36</sup> She fails to offer a proper counter-explanation to this complex case, evidently content to raise questions about it, which she does by selectively citing some facts while ignoring many others that support Stevenson's point of view better than her own.<sup>37</sup>

Philosopher Stephen Braude takes a very different approach. He supposes that Uttara was motivated to imagine the Sharada personality as a vehicle for the expression of her own emotional needs and that she could have acquired her ability to speak Bengali through extrasensory perception during the altered states of consciousness in which Sharada manifested.<sup>38</sup> Braude is not deterred by the fact that there is no independent evidence that skills of any sort may be acquired through extrasensory perception. His idea that Sharada is wholly a figment of Uttara's imagination is untenable as well, according to Matlock. Matlock takes reincarnation to mean that the consciousness of the previous person has outlasted death and is now part of the subconscious of the case subject. From this perspective, Uttara and Sharada and Uttara are aspects of the same person and both have roles to play in the expression of past-life memory. Although Uttara's emotional state might be a contributing factor to the emergence of Sharada, so was

Sharada's encounter with the man she believed to be the reincarnation of her husband.[39](#)

No critics have dealt with xenoglossy in spontaneous cases other than that of Uttara Huddar, but these cases are hugely interesting and instructive, Matlock thinks. In them, the xenoglossy may be accompanied by a range of other memories and behaviors, and in some cases, the previous person has been traced. Interestingly, apart from Uttara Huddar and Iris Farczády, both exceptional cases, the spontaneous cases reveal the same linguistic deficiencies as the regression cases. Usually it is only a few words that are spoken, and when responsiveness in conversation is attested, the level of proficiency is low. An important caution is due here, however. Although the testimony seems sound in these cases, in most of them investigators had no opportunity to observe the subject speaking, and only rarely have voice recordings been made for evaluation later. Much more work must be done before we can be confident that responsive xenoglossy is possible, but these spontaneous cases suggest that it is, and that makes the xenoglossy of the regression cases more plausible.[40](#)

Acceptance of the xenoglossy phenomenon by linguists will come faster if a satisfactory theory of the transmission of language in reincarnation is developed, Matlock thinks. Vocabulary and language skills might be carried in the subconscious mind along with other sorts of memory and be passed through reincarnation from one person to another. The problem then is explaining how these things move from the subconscious into conscious awareness and why they do so in different ways with different people and in different situations. It should not be surprising to find that higher order language skills, such as the rules of grammatical inflection and sentence formation, are the first to be lost, even by a former native speaker. Basic vocabulary can be expected to be retained the longest, and to be retrieved most easily by association. In fact, this is what we see in many xenoglossy cases.

Another issue is speech production, which involves not only the mobilization of a vocabulary according to grammatical rules, but brain structures and control of the larynx as well. The many reports of the proper pronunciation in xenoglossy suggest that practised patterns can be impressed on a new brain somehow, but how that happens is not yet clear. Matlock suggests that it may come about by the reincarnating stream laying down the appropriate neural pathways in the new brain. However, it is probably unreasonable to expect to find fully developed languages appearing after reincarnation, either in spontaneous cases or under hypnosis. Even in the most extraordinary cases, such as Uttara Huddar's Sharada, the language competency is not at the level of a native speaker.[41](#)

James G Matlock

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1](#). Richet (1905-1907).
- [2](#). Stevenson (1974b), 1-8.
- [3](#). Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), chap. 28; Matlock (2019).
- [4](#). Stevenson (1974b), 8-10.
- [5](#). Stevenson (1974b), 1.
- [6](#). Stevenson (1974b), 10-14.
- [7](#). Rosen (1956), xvi-xviii .
- [8](#). Stevenson (2001), 127, 283 n32.
- [9](#). Stevenson & Keil (2005), 177-78.
- [10](#). Stevenson (1984); Akolkar (1992).
- [11](#). Barrington, Mulacz, & Rivas (2005).
- [12](#). Stevenson (1983), 102-39.

- [13.](#) Keil (1991), 42-47.
- [14.](#) Stevenson (1974b), 17.
- [15.](#) Andrade (1988, chap. 2); Playfair (2006, 59-64). Stevenson (1974b, 18) has a brief summary of this case under the name Viviane Silvino.
- [16.](#) Stevenson (1974b), 16-17.
- [17.](#) Stevenson (1975), 206-40. For discussion of Kumkum's dialectal expressions, see p. 227.
- [18.](#) Sahay (1927); Stevenson (1975), 176-205.
- [19.](#) Ohkado (2013),
- [20.](#) Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 240-44.
- [21.](#) Stevenson (1974b), 2-5.
- [22.](#) Stevenson (2003), 22-23.
- [23.](#) Stevenson (1974a), 67-91.
- [24.](#) Haraldsson & Samararatne (1999); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), chap. 3.
- [25.](#) Stevenson (1974b), 19.
- [26.](#) Whitton (1978).
- [27.](#) Thomason (1984).
- [28.](#) Stevenson (1974b).
- [29.](#) Stevenson (1976), 76. Stevenson (1984) includes a longer presentation of this case. See also the book by Carroll Jay (1977).
- [30.](#) Ohkado & Okamoto (2014).
- [31.](#) Matlock (2019), 219.
- [32.](#) Ohkado & Okamoto (2014), 9.
- [33.](#) Thomason (1987, 1996).
- [34.](#) Thomason (1987), 369.
- [35.](#) Matlock (2019), 218.
- [36.](#) Thomason (1996).
- [37.](#) Matlock (2019), 213.
- [38.](#) Braude (2003), 101-32.
- [39.](#) Matlock (2019), 211-13. See also Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 264-65.
- [40.](#) Matlock (2019).
- [41.](#) Matlock (2019).