

Past-life Memories and Foreign Languages: An Exploration of Xenoglossy in Cases of the Reincarnation Type¹

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Abstract: *Objective.* Decades of research into children who appear to recall a past life have highlighted additional extraordinary features of this phenomenon. We explored a large past-life memory database to understand cases coded as exhibiting xenoglossy—the remarkable claim of individuals speaking a foreign language that they should not be able to speak naturally. *Methods.* We compared 40 cases that exhibited xenoglossy to 872 that did not, between 1959 and 2020. In a series of binary logistic regressions, we tested variables linked to a novel emotion-trauma hypothesis for the presence of xenoglossy, along with other variables that would suggest an ordinary explanation. *Results.* Xenoglossy was not associated with variables related to an ordinary explanation. The emotion-trauma hypothesis was supported, in that xenoglossy was associated with: (1) participants’ emotionality, (2) desires to return to their purported previous family, (3) claiming to have died as a result of intentional/violent means, and (4) having a stronger case, which is more suggestive of cases having an anomalous explanation. *Conclusion.* Akin to other remarkable features documented over the years of past-life memory research (i.e., birthmarks linked to a previous personality’s fatal wound, phobias, phillias), xenoglossy is another core feature of a previous personality that seems capable of transferring to a new life. The evidence from the database suggests that the phenomenon of speaking, unnaturally, in a foreign tongue is linked to—and strengthened by—the presence of emotion, distress, and violence/trauma in the expression of children’s past-life memories.

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Highlights

- We focused on 40 cases documented in a large database of past-life memory investigations that included claims of xenoglossy.
- Cases coded as exhibiting xenoglossy were not associated with a non-anomalous explanation (i.e., early verbal ability, parental education levels).
- Xenoglossy was significantly associated with factors related to high emotion, distress, and trauma.

The history of rigorously investigating the claims of children who express what appear to be memories of a past life often contains intriguing stories that can defy explanation (Stevenson & Pasricha, 1980). Typically, children between the ages of 2 and 7 spontaneously express memories that appear to be from a life before their current existence (Haraldsson, 1991; Stevenson, 1974, 2001; Tucker, 2008, 2021b). More than 60 years ago, Ian Stevenson initiated the process of forensically investigating these so-called “cases of the reincarnation type” (CORT; Stevenson, 1960a, 1960b), and his protocol was subsequently enhanced (Stevenson, 1977) and remains in use today. Once a potential CORT case has been identified, a trained researcher examines the evidence by systematically interviewing the child and all available sources who can provide first-hand information to support—or refute—the child’s claims. Many of these cases eventually lead to an identification of a “previous personality,” which in turn extends the investigation to include family and community members associated with the deceased individual, looking again for evidence to support or refute the past-life memory claims.

Although one could say that claims of past-life memories are remarkable on their own, decades of this research have shown that there are often layers of the extraordinary within these cases. For example, among the many documented cases in the CORT database (used with permission from the University of Virginia Division of Perceptual Studies), there are 631 cases (28%) in which a so-called “announcing dream” and/or a “departing dream” has been claimed by a member of the child’s family or by the previous personality’s family, respectively. A mother may tell investigators that, prior to the birth (or even conception) of their child, they had a dream in which the previous personality announced that they would be coming to the mother

(or asked permission to do so). Departing dreams occur when a member of the previous personality's family claims that they were told by their deceased relative in a dream that their relative would be reborn to another mother.

Another example of the extraordinary features associated with CORT cases is documentation of a biological connection between the previous personality and the child expressing past-life memories. The most common manifestations of this connection are seen in documented birthmarks and/or birth defects in the child that correspond to similar marks known to have existed on the body of the previous personality. These claims have been investigated in the context of so-called "experimental birthmarks" in which the body of a dying or recently deceased person is purposely marked by family members in the belief that their loved one will be more easily identified in their new body, based on the presence of a matching birthmark (Tucker & Keil, 2013). An even more extraordinary example of this biological connection between the previous personality and the current child is the correspondence between birthmarks and/or defects on the child and traumatic fatal wounds suffered by the previous personality, which are confirmed by postmortem reports whenever possible after that person has been identified (Stevenson, 1997). One such case involves a child known as "NK" who was born in India in 1982. A full account of NK's case (and 11 others) can be found in Pasricha et al. (2005). Briefly, this case details a child born with a linear area of abnormal skin on the left-front area of his head. The child insisted that he was from a different village and that his name was Babu (not his given name). The child claimed he had been killed by robbers who hit him in the head with an axe. Eventually, investigators were able to identify a Babu from the village claimed by the child, who had been murdered in 1978. The investigation confirmed that Babu had been killed by robbers with an axe, just as the child (and his birthmark) suggested, a fact supported by Babu's postmortem report. These sorts of birthmarks and birth defects related to the previous personality, especially when verified, are considered strong evidence by the researchers of an anomalous explanation for the phenomenon (Tucker, 2000).

Similar to the connection between the previous personality and the child as manifested in birth marks and defects are specific preferences and/or phobias in the child that seem linked to the previous personality. In the CORT database, 20% of the cases involve phobias present in the child that were verified as linked to the previous personality's mode of death and/or a documented trauma that person experienced prior to their death. There is, for example, the case of Sri Lankan child "SP" who presented as severely phobic around water, especially at bath time, only later to express memories of having previously died as a result of drowning (Tucker, 2021a). Conversely, there are cases of children who show an unusual desire for certain items (e.g., food

and music) that link to the previous personality's known preferences, and even documented addictions. In fact, 3% of cases in the database (75 children) were noted as having cravings for alcohol and/or tobacco, substances confirmed as prevalent in the life of the previous personality.

As with many of the features associated with a CORT case, it is possible that all these extraordinary elements layered into the past-life memory claims can be explained as non-anomalous in nature. Perhaps announcing dreams are the manifestations of hopes and dreams of an expecting parent, later expressed in a manner that tells a better story. Maybe a child hears early in her life about the birthmark on her head looking like she had been hit with a sharp tool, only later to convert those comments into a more compelling narrative. These attempts to understand the extraordinary with ordinary explanations become potentially less satisfying when they are considered alongside all the other elements that contribute to a strong CORT case with evidence that makes an ordinary explanation less likely. The most important of these, of course, are the memories themselves that are often verified and often so specific that they lead investigators directly to an identified person who seems to match the previous personality described by the child. We take these extraordinary facets of past-life memory cases as important elements of the CORT phenomenon and worthy of further exploration.

One of the most fascinating elements that has occasionally emerged over the years is the phenomenon known as *xenoglossy* (Richet, 1906). Derived from ancient Greek, the word translates simply to “foreign tongue (or language),” and is used to describe anomalous claims of a person speaking (or understanding) a foreign language that they have not learned (or been exposed to) previously and should not be able to speak naturally. A search of the documented investigations in the CORT database found 41 cases coded as exhibiting features of xenoglossy. Stevenson (1974b) distinguished between two types of xenoglossy: recitative and responsive. Recitative xenoglossy is said to manifest as an automatic, rote sort of experience, such that the person is using words or phrases from the foreign language, but not in an interactive, conversational manner. Responsive xenoglossy is said to occur when individuals can communicate intelligibly in the foreign language, in an interactive manner in response to the same foreign language being presented to them. There is also a view that a subtler form of this phenomenon exists, termed “passive xenoglossy,” which can manifest as regional dialects, for example, or as when a child seems to learn their native language significantly faster than would be expected for their age (Haraldsson & Matlock, 2017). Xenoglossy differs from *glossolalia* (commonly referred to as “speaking in tongues”) in that claims of the former involve the expression of a natural human language that the person should not know, whereas the latter involves claims of ut-

terances and speech-like sounds that do not correspond to an ordinary language in human society (Stevenson, 1974b).

Xenoglossy Cases

The evidence in the original investigation files supporting the cases coded as involving xenoglossy ranges from the remarkable to the mundane. On the dramatic end, we have a rare, but well-documented case of a participant from West Central India named Uttara Huddar (for details see Stevenson & Pasricha, 1979, 1980). This case contained several unusual features, the most notable one being xenoglossy of the responsive type that, according to Stevenson and Pasricha (1980), was best thought of as “possession syndrome.” That is, in this unique case Huddar began to have apparent memories of a previous life in her thirties (significantly older than the majority of CORT cases) and her memories only occurred during periods of a dramatic personality change, such that the previous personality seemed to take over her body and communicated in Bengali, a language that Huddar purportedly did not know. Although Stevenson (1984) noted that this case was distinct from typical cases of the reincarnation type, he concluded that it was best thought of as a case of reincarnation with unusual features. This was due in part to Huddar’s childhood phobia of snakes, which might be linked to the previous personality’s death.

Another example of cases that provide fascinating claims of xenoglossy comes from an investigation in 1977, focused on two Burmese twin girls named Khin San Yin and Khin San Tin. In this case, Stevenson’s notes document the claims made by the parents of the twins as well as other members of the family’s village. According to these reports (Stevenson, 1997), the twins had specific memories of having been brothers (not twins) from Japan who fought during World War II in Burma. According to the twins, they had been in the same military company on the same battlefield when—at a time when the British Air Force was actively bombing in that area—they faced a barrage of bombs from enemy planes. The twins claimed that as they took shelter from the bombing, they recalled being killed at the same time when their own hand grenades exploded. According to the family and villagers, the Burmese twins would speak to each other in Japanese when they were very young, which was a language no one knew or understood in their home and neighborhood. The twins eventually stopped speaking Japanese, but even when they were speaking Burmese later in life (which they reportedly struggled to learn), they were described as having a “foreign accent” compared to other people from the region.

Most cases classified as exhibiting xenoglossy are not nearly as remarkable as the Huddar or Khin San Yin and Khin San Tin ones. Much more common in the files are children speaking a few words randomly, for a short period of time, that many in the child's family did not even know was a foreign language until later confirmed by another family member or a neighbor. For example, there is a case of an American child whose previous personality was linked to Japan. This child apparently said the Japanese word for "ouch" when he fell and later confounded his parents (who did not speak Japanese) by correcting their pronunciation of the Japanese dish *sukiyaki* (often pronounced "soo-kee-ah-kee" by Americans), with the proper Japanese pronunciation of "sky-ah-kee." There is also a case from Canada in which the memories suggested that the previous personality could be the child's grandmother, who spoke Gitxsan, an endangered Tsimshianic language of northwestern British Columbia so rare that there are apparently fewer than 700 people who even understand it, let alone can speak it fluently (Dunlop et al., 2018). According to the child's mother (who did not speak the language), the participant spoke a few words of Gitxsan as a toddler, and only later confirmed that the words were from that language.

As far as extraordinary experiences (or claims of such experiences) go, xenoglossy is among the most debated. Linguistic researchers (see Thomason & Poser, 2020) have questioned the details and evidence provided by Stevenson (Stevenson, 1974b, 1984). Others have suggested the phenomenon is better explained as *cryptomnesia*, which is when an individual misinterprets a forgotten memory (or forgets that they had been exposed to the foreign language) as a new experience or idea (Draaisma, 2015). Stevenson did suggest that cryptomnesia could explain some of the cases he investigated (Stevenson, 1974b). Others have asserted that claims of xenoglossy can be explained as manifesting from dissociative states and not from paranormal causes (Pickford, 1943). Although cryptomnesia and dissociative states are worthy of consideration as explanations for apparent xenoglossy among adults, they are less likely to explain the phenomenon in very young children who have no diagnosis of dissociation.

It is important to note that determining whether xenoglossy is occurring can be difficult, especially given that other individuals interacting with the person apparently speaking the foreign language often do not know the language themselves. There is also evidence (Stevenson, 1974b) that in at least one investigation Norwegian children believed to be speaking Finnish were actually communicating in a language they developed themselves, without sharing its basic rules with others. Thus, many cases of apparent xenoglossy are only determined to be potentially legitimate retrospectively, after others with knowledge of the language get involved.

Dual-Pathways to Past-Life Memories

Six decades of lessons from researchers investigating CORT cases led us to develop a dual-pathway model to understand how some children may come to express apparent past-life memories. One pathway, the “enhanced memory” pathway, identifies those children who seem to recall many details and moments from their purported past life, often without a great deal of emotionality and without a known link to trauma in the past or current life. One classic example of a CORT case reflective of this pathway is the well-documented American case of Ryan Hammons (Tucker, 2021a). His case included dozens of mostly accurate statements he made as a child about the life of Marty Martyn, a movie extra from the 1930s who later became an agent in Hollywood. In support of this enhanced memory pathway, prior research has documented that many American CORT children show significantly higher intelligence and verbal skills than peer children (Tucker & Nidiffer, 2014), both of which have been linked to working memory and autobiographical memory abilities in young children (Aubry et al., 2021; Bauer & Larkina, 2019; Schneider & Niklas, 2017). Earlier research comparing Sri Lankan children with past-life memories to matched controls similarly showed higher intelligence and memory among these children, supporting a hypothesized CORT pathway as a result of enhanced memory (Haraldsson, 1997).

The second, “emotional-trauma” pathway, identifies children who are more likely to recall traumatic, unnatural deaths in their previous life. They are also more likely to exhibit emotional distress during recall and even signs of trauma persisting from that past life into their current one. A classic example of a CORT case indicative of this pathway is the case of American James Leininger (Tucker, 2008). Unlike Ryan Hammons, James showed many traumatic behaviors (including nightmares and traumatic play) linked to an ostensible past life that ended violently. In further contrast to Ryan, James expressed significantly fewer memories in total (although those he did express were specific and verified), and his memories appeared more emotional and distressing in nature. The Leininger case is part of the 65% of children in the database who report past lives that ended unnaturally and often violently. Supporting the emotional-trauma pathway, prior research with Lebanese children found that some CORT children showed symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder, such as heightened fear responses, anger, and anxiety, compared to control children (Haraldsson, 2003).

Hypothesized Pathway to Xenoglossy

Given our focus on the anomalous claims of xenoglossy in some CORT cases, which suggests a transfer of sorts of a core trait of the previous personality to the current existence, we predicted that this phenomenon might best be explained via the emotional-trauma pathway. We view a previous language potentially being transferred to a new life as similar to the apparent transfer of birthmarks and/or defects on CORT children that match the traumatic fatal wounds suffered by the previous personality (Stevenson, 1997). The same can be said for the evidence of intense phobias and emotions linked to the previous personality's death, seemingly being transferred to the new life (Tucker, 2021a).

In this study, we conducted the first formal investigation of trauma as one possible pathway to past-life memories using a large curated collection of cases, advancing from important previous explorations of trauma-related processes that relied on a small number of individual case studies (Haraldsson, 2003). Analyzing data from all the CORT cases featuring xenoglossy in the database requires a cautious approach when it comes to *a priori* hypotheses. Although we were able to discover why the original cases were coded as featuring xenoglossy (described in more detail below), the historic nature of the database precludes us from verifying for ourselves that the cases involved clear, unassailable manifestations of xenoglossy. Working with this extraordinary database, carefully curated over the decades (Stevenson, 1977; Tucker, 2008), requires a thoughtful approach when extracting inferences from the data. That said, we did set out to test a straightforward hypothesis with the xenoglossy-coded cases.

The null hypothesis would predict that the xenoglossy cases are distributed within the database randomly, with no coherent or systematic relationships with other key variables, relative to cases explicitly coded as not involving xenoglossy. Conversely, an alternative hypothesis—which could suggest a possible explanation for the emergence of xenoglossy—would predict that the xenoglossy-coded cases are uniquely, coherently, and systematically related to CORT variables that map onto our hypothesized emotion-trauma pathway, when compared to the non-xenoglossy cases.

Method

The CORT Database

The CORT database contains 2,254 documented cases of individuals, mostly children, who seem to recall past-life memories. Researchers investigate and document the claims according to a strict protocol developed by Stevenson (1974b, 1984). Once it is determined that an emerging case warrants further scrutiny, a trained investigator meets with the source of the memories, his or her parents, close relatives, and sometimes even family friends and neighbors, all of whom are probed for first-hand information regarding the case. Ultimately, the investigators evaluate and confirm evidence linked to the claims to determine a possible explanation for the case, whether it is an anomalous or a normal explanation, such as children's fantasies, fraud, or socio-psychological needs of families with a belief in reincarnation (Moraes et al., 2022; Tucker, 2000). These qualitative interviews are then standardized according to a registration form that includes a checklist of salient CORT features. All people interviewed provide informed consent and child participants provide assent, and this study was approved by the University of Virginia's Institutional Review Board for Social and Behavioral Sciences (protocol # 2601).

Once the evidence is gathered, trained research assistants rely on an 83-page standardized coding manual that provides guidance and explanations for each of the 208 possible variables in the database. The trained coders use the manual to convert the information gathered in the registration form and derived from the investigator's notes into values for the SPSS 29 CORT database. Researchers have used this aggregate database previously to explore relevant features across multiple cases to understand processes underlying the past-life memory phenomenon (Pehlivanova et al., 2018; Sharma & Tucker, 2004; Stevenson & Haraldsson, 2003; Tucker, 2000).

Sample and Key Variables

Xenoglossy. For the current study, we focused on cases that were clearly coded in the database as having—or not having—claims of xenoglossy. This variable has three possible codes, based on the investigative process described above: “yes,” “no,” or “unknown.” Based on these codes, we selected only those cases that were determined to have confidently asked and answered the question regarding xenoglossy as a claimed feature of the case. From the full database of 2,254 cases, 41 cases had a

xenoglossy claim, 872 a clear “no xenoglossy” determination, and 1,341 an unknown/undetermined xenoglossy code.

Given the extraordinary nature of xenoglossy claims, we manually reviewed all the original documents and investigator notes in the case files with permission from the Division of Perceptual Studies archive to confirm that the 41 cases did contain documentation to support the xenoglossy claims. This review of the original investigation files revealed that one of the 41 cases coded as containing claims of xenoglossy was incorrectly coded. Thus, we removed that case from the current study, resulting in a final sample of 912 cases: 872 known to have no xenoglossy claims and 40 cases with a xenoglossy feature. The dates of the first substantial investigation for these 912 cases ranged from 1959 to 2020.

We tested two potential confounds that could explain why the “xenoglossy question” was asked in some cases but not others. One potential confound could be the distance between the participant’s country of residence and the previous personality’s residence, as that might have biased the investigators to seek a clear answer only in cases with a greater distance between the two. An independent-samples *t*-test revealed no significant difference in kilometers between our selected cases ($n = 501$; $M = 269.73$, $SD = 1,181.92$) and the unselected cases ($n = 660$; $M = 338.79$, $SD = 1,357.04$), for those with valid distance values, $t(1,159) = -0.91$, $p > .05$, one-tailed. Thus, there was not a tendency for investigators to only ask the xenoglossy question if they had discovered a large distance between the participant’s residence and the previous personality’s residence. The second potential confound was the time of the initial investigation, as xenoglossy cases were a particular focus of Stevenson’s (e.g., Stevenson, 1976; Stevenson & Pasricha, 1980). An independent-samples *t*-test revealed no significant difference in months since the first official investigation between our selected cases ($n = 911$; $M = 528.17$, $SD = 150.82$) and the unselected cases ($n = 1,341$; $M = 524.12$, $SD = 185.76$), for those with valid values, $t(2,250) = 0.55$, $p > .05$, one-tailed.

Further validating the xenoglossy-coding in the CORT database (and based on the expectation of xenoglossy cases involving a previous personality who lived in a foreign country), we found a significant difference in the distance (in kilometers) between the participant’s residence and the previous personality’s residence, such that xenoglossy cases ($M = 1285.15$, $SD = 1934.78$) were significantly farther away than were non-xenoglossy cases ($M = 234.06$, $SD = 1133.38$), $t(16.38) = 2.23$, $p = .02$, Welch-corrected, one-tailed. The gender breakdown of the cases was 351 (38.5%) girls and 561 boys (61.5%); the median age of when the children first spoke about their past-life memories was 33 months. It is important to note that we do not have valid scores for

each participant on all the variables included in our analyses, so the actual number of xenoglossy and non-xenoglossy cases will be highlighted in each step of the results section.

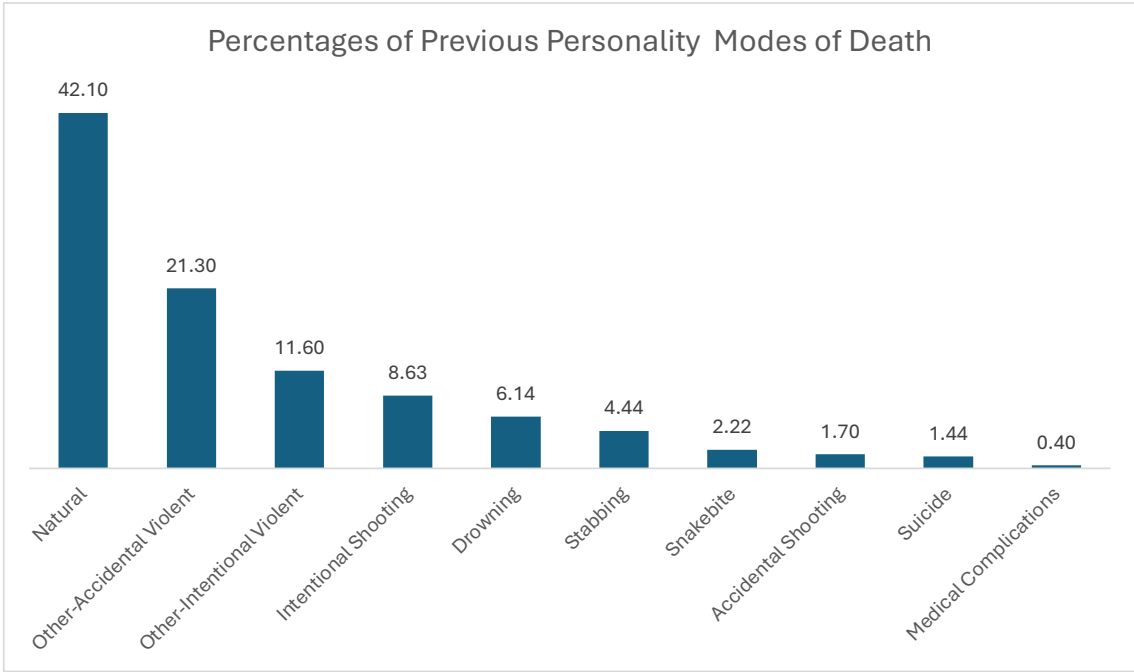
Key variables. To test our hypothesis of whether xenoglossy cases were distributed randomly or systematically in the CORT database, we focused on variables that could either point to an ordinary explanation or that are features of compelling CORT cases that are more suggestive of an anomalous explanation (i.e., driven by the emotion-trauma pathway). Given the purportedly exceptional verbal abilities of the xenoglossy participants, we included the documented age at which they first spoke in coherent phrases in their native language as one of the “ordinary explanation” variables. We had 526 valid scores on this variable in our sample, with a median age of 23 months. Another potential ordinary explanation is the level of education of the participants’ parents, as it is known that parent educational attainment (often used as a proxy for socioeconomic status) is a significant predictor of academic success and advanced verbal competence in children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Davis-Kean et al., 2021). The education level question for each parent was coded as: (1) *No school/illiterate*, (2) *Some elementary school*, (3) *Completed elementary school*, (4) *Some high school*, (5) *Completed high school*, (6) *Some college*, (7) *Completed college*, (8) *Graduate degree*. Because the literature suggests that Likert or ordinal variables with five or more categories can be used analytically as continuous variables (Johnson & Creech, 1983; Norman, 2010; Sullivan & Artino, 2013), we calculated a Pearson’s correlation for the scores of mothers and fathers of each case, which was significant, $r(835) = .71, p < .001$. Thus, we calculated a “family education level” variable by averaging the education level of both parents (if only one parent score was available, we took that one). We had 272 valid scores on this new variable, revealing an average educational level for parents right around “some high school” ($M = 3.93, SD = 2.23$).

Turning to variables that are supportive of the emotion-trauma pathway to CORT, we included a variable assessing whether the child evidenced emotion during recall of their past-life memories. This variable is coded on a four-point scale with response codes of: (1) *No*, (2) *Yes, slight*, (3) *Yes, moderate*, and (4) *Yes, extreme*. We had 427 valid scores on this variable ($M = 1.86, SD = 1.13$).

The database also includes the mode of death for each previous personality, often based on the claims made by the participant during the investigation and sometimes confirmed by investigators. Notably, 65% of the cases documented in the database describe unnatural, and even intentionally violent/traumatic deaths (including suicide) of the previous personality. Figure 1 depicts the frequency of this variable

across 10 possible modes of death, based on 765 cases with a known code. To test our emotion-trauma hypothesis, we collapsed across multiple modes to create a binary variable that distinguished between violent/intentional deaths (i.e., murder or suicide; $n = 200$) and all other forms of death ($n = 565$).

Figure 1
Percentages of Known Modes of Death for Volunteers' Claimed Previous Personality



The next key variable coded the participants' strong desire to return to the previous personality's family, often an emotionally-laden feature that can be distressing for the participant and their current family. This assessment ranged from: (1) the child's previous personality was from the same family, 2) *strong reluctance* (to return), (3) *moderate reluctance*, (4) *neutral*, (5) *moderate desire*, and (6) a *strong desire* expressed by the child to return to the previous personality's family, with 649 cases with valid scores ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 2.00$).

The final variable we included in the analysis was the strength-of-case score (SOCS), based on four broad categories that provide evidence that cases may have an anomalous explanation (Tucker, 2000). These categories—each of which consists of numerous variables from the database—were derived after decades of collecting evidence via CORT investigations and were validated by Tucker (2000). The first two are directly linked to our emotion-trauma pathway hypothesis. The first is the extent to which the participant has birthmarks and/or birth defects that correspond to wounds on the previous personality, often formed in the process of that person's death (e.g.,

bullet holes, lost limbs/digits). The second category is focused on behaviors of the child that link to known behaviors of the previous personality. This could be a CORT child demonstrating phobias linked to the manner of the previous person's death (e.g., a child afraid of the bathtub when the previous personality was found to have died by drowning), and/or a child showing a clear preference for a food or a drink that was preferred by the previous personality, to name a couple of examples. The third SOCS category awards points for statements made by the CORT participant if those statements are verified in the context of the previous personality's life, and it subtracts points if the statements made are later found to be incorrect. Finally, the fourth category awards more points to the case if the distance between the participant and the previous personality is greater, in terms of physical distance, cultural distance, and if the families of the participant and the previous personality did not know each other. The less associated (or close) the participant and previous personality are the more points, as it would be more difficult for the child to have learned about the previous personality via normal means. Because we know that the xenoglossy-coded cases are significantly more distant from the previous personality's place of residence, we recalculated the SOCS after removing this distance category. Among our selected sample, this adjusted variable ranged from -3 (very weak cases) to 40 (very strong cases), with a mean of 7.03 and a *SD* of 7.39.

Of the total 912 cases, 28% came from Burma (Myanmar), 22% from Turkey, 20% from the United States, 7% from Nigeria, 6 % from Sri Lanka, 4% from Canada, 3% from India, 3% from Thailand, 1% from the United Kingdom, 1% from Brazil, 1% from Lebanon, with the remaining 4% coming from 20 other countries. Finally, our selected sample of cases involved past-life memories expressed by 351 girls (38.5%) and 561 boys.

Statistical Analyses

Our analytic approach was to explore the database for relations and patterns among (and between) our variables of interest. We used SPSS version 29 to conduct the analyses, which consisted of six binary logistic regressions, coding xenoglossy cases as 1 and non-xenoglossy cases as 0. To reduce the chance of Type I error, we set a Bonferroni correction for our six statistical tests, such that our corrected p value to determine significance was $.05/6 = .008$. We also conducted one final multivariate binary logistic regression, adding all significant individual variables to the model to see which CORT-related features (i.e., emotion, intentional vs unintentional death, desire to return to the previous family, strength of case) significantly related to xenoglossy, controlling for the other variables. As stated earlier, our goal was to determine if the

40 xenoglossy-coded cases systematically and coherently related to other relevant variables in the CORT database, or if they were randomly distributed through the cases, suggesting no potential explanation for the appearance of alleged xenoglossy. To assess the authors' *a priori* beliefs in the main hypothesis of this study, we used the journal's suggested 5-point response scale such that 5 = *strong belief* in the success of the study, 4 = *moderate belief*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *moderate non-belief*, and 1 = *strong non-belief* in the success of the study. Our reported belief scores were: author PJC = 4; author MP = 4; author JBT = 3.

Results

Ordinary Explanation Variables

We regressed our binary xenoglossy variable onto the age in months that the participant first spoke in coherent phrases. There was no significant relation between the age of first speaking coherent phrases and cases being coded as involving xenoglossy, $OR = 1.01$, $CI: [.97, 1.04]$; see Table 1 for all univariate analyses). On the variable assessing the parental education level for each case, there was no significant relation between education and cases being coded as involving xenoglossy, $OR = .94$, $CI: [.75, 1.18]$.

Table 1
Univariate Logistic Regressions Predicting Xenoglossy

Predictor	<i>N</i>	Category	<i>OR</i>	Wald ₁	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i> for <i>OR</i>
Age at 1st speaking in coherent phrases	526	--	1.01	.10	.75	[.97, 1.04]
Average parental education	272	--	.94	.30	.59	[.75, 1.18]
Degree of emotion during recall	427	--	1.71	10.07	.002*	[1.23, 2.39]
Mode of death	765	Intentionally violent/ Other (reference)	2.80	8.26	.004*	[1.39, 5.66]

Desire to return to PP family	648	--	1.41	8.77	.003*	[1.12, 1.77]
Strength of case	912	--	1.05	8.22	.004*	[1.02, 1.09]

Note. *OR* = odds ratio; Wald_1 = Wald statistic with 1 degree of freedom; CI = confidence

* Significant after Bonferroni correction.

Emotion-Trauma Variables

The four-point variable assessing whether the participant experienced emotion during recall of their purported past-life memories had a significant relation with xenoglossy. The more participants experienced emotions during recall of their past-life memories, the more likely they were to exhibit xenoglossy, *OR* = 1.71, CI: [1.23, 2.39]. The next analysis regressed xenoglossy onto the previous personality mode of death that distinguished between violent/intentional deaths (i.e., murder or suicide) and all other forms of death; participants who recalled a violent/intentional death in their purported previous life were significantly more likely to exhibit xenoglossy, *OR* = 2.80, CI: [1.34, 5.66]. The next key variable analysis showed that the more participants desired to leave their current family for their previous one, the more likely they were to exhibit xenoglossy, *OR* = 1.41, CI: [1.12, 1.77]. The final variable was the strength of case scale, adjusted to exclude the geographic distance between the participant and the previous personality. Stronger cases were significantly more likely to exhibit xenoglossy, *OR* = 1.05, CI: [1.02, 1.09].

In our final analysis, we regressed the xenoglossy-coded variable onto all four of the individual variables significantly associated with xenoglossy. That multivariate analysis (Table 2) revealed that only emotions expressed during recall, *OR* = 1.76, CI: [1.20, 2.59], and mode of death, *OR* = 2.75, CI: [1.06, 7.06], were significantly associated with xenoglossy, controlling for the other variables in the model.

Table 2
Multivariate Logistic Regression Predicting Xenoglossy (N = 301; 21 Xenoglossy)

Predictor	Category	OR	Wald ₁	p	95% CI for OR
Expression of emotion during recall	--	1.76	8.36	.004	[1.20, 2.59]
Mode of death	Intentionally violent	2.75	4.45	.035	[1.07, 7.06]
	Other (reference)				
Desire to return to PP family	--	1.21	1.43	.23	[.88, 1.66]
Strength of case	--	.99	.14	.71	[.93, 1.05]

Note. OR = odds ratio; Wald₁ = Wald statistic with 1 degree of freedom; CI = confidence interval.

Discussion

We tested the hypothesis that 40 cases in a large CORT database coded as having features indicative of xenoglossy would either be distributed in the database randomly or would be systematically related to variables linked to an emotion-trauma pathway to CORT. The findings indicate that two ordinary explanations for the reports of xenoglossy—verbal ability and parental education level—were not related to the apparent occurrence of the phenomenon. That is, despite allegedly exhibiting the remarkable linguistic ability of using a language (to varying degrees) they could not have known, the xenoglossy-coded participants did not speak coherently in their *native tongue* any earlier than non-xenoglossy ones. Similarly, the xenoglossy-coded participants were not raised in a home with a higher-level of education compared to the non-xenoglossy ones.

The findings, however, did indicate an apparent coherent relation between the xenoglossy-coded cases and a set of important variables associated with emotion and trauma. Specifically, we found that xenoglossy-coded participants (compared to non-xenoglossy ones) were: (a) significantly more likely to evidence more emotion during the recall of their apparent past-life memories; (b) significantly more likely to express desires to leave their current family so they could return to their purported previous family; (c) significantly more likely to be linked to a previous personality who died as a result of intentional/violent means (i.e., murder, suicide); and (d) signifi-

cantly more likely to have stronger cases, which—according to Tucker (2000)—is more suggestive of cases having an anomalous explanation.

Making sense of CORT xenoglossy. We set out with this investigation to determine if there was a coherent and systematic story that could help make sense of the 40 cases of xenoglossy in the CORT database. We approached this goal cautiously, given that the retrospective nature of the database precludes us from validating the actual existence of xenoglossy, beyond finding documentation of the claims in the original investigation notes. This caution led to a straightforward assumption: if these xenoglossy cases were simply the result of noise, fraud, and/or exaggeration (to name only a few non-systematic causes) we would expect to find that they were distributed in the database randomly, without any coherent evidence tying them together. The alternative to this, of course, would be to find that the presence of these cases could be explained more systematically. To that end, we explored ordinary explanations that related to the verbal and educational qualities of the participants and we explored some explanations associated with a hypothesized emotion-trauma pathway.

Our findings suggest that the 40 xenoglossy-coded cases in the database are not distributed randomly. Moreover, their presence in the database is likely not the result of parents mischaracterizing the vocal skills of highly verbal children raised in educationally rich households. Instead, these cases seem to be tied coherently to some key CORT-related variables suggestive of something more anomalous than ordinary. Specifically, our findings point to the presence of xenoglossy claims in the database as reflective of highly emotional, distressing, traumatic, and anomalous cases of the reincarnation type.

Cautious inferences. One interesting area of research in which to contextualize our findings is the study of bilinguals and related evidence suggesting that a person's first and second language are often differentially activated and/or associated with emotional experiences. Although there is a good deal of nuance in this research, evidence does suggest that in the context of vocabulary, there is greater emotional resonance in a person's native/first language compared to those languages learned later in life (Javier, 1989). For example, there is evidence that bilinguals are more likely to "code switch" (flip between their known languages) during emotional episodes, with a stronger effect of switching from their second language to their first, "native," language when experiencing negative emotions (Williams et al., 2019). There is also evidence that bilinguals using their first language when highly emotional most often occurs when their first language is dominant and they are less proficient in their secondary language, which would be true for many of the CORT children who are still

learning their language (e.g., Dewaele, 2010). It is intriguing to speculate, within a “re-incarnation hypothesis” framework, that the aspect of consciousness transferring into a new existence might return through the emotion-trauma pathway. If that is the case, this process could carry fundamental elements of consciousness with it that manifest in human culture, such as connections to one’s family and language.

To be clear, we are not making a direct assertion that the expressions of apparent xenoglossy documented in the 40 CORT cases represent the participants’ “first” or native language relative to their “second,” current language. However, we assert that the unique and potentially anomalous nature of the CORT phenomenon does allow for some degree of speculation. Specifically, it is interesting that our emotion-trauma pathway predicts CORT participants using a previous personality’s language, which also maps onto a well-documented effect from research exploring the connection between multiple languages and the experience of emotionality.

Limitations and future directions. An important limitation of this study is our inability to verify—independent of the original investigator case notes—that xenoglossy actually occurred. A further limitation is the archival nature of the CORT database we used, which prevented us from making specific *a priori* hypotheses about the variables we investigated and the processes that we discovered. Our findings are correlational, and we have sought only to describe them in the context of our basic hypothesis test. We also acknowledge that the large disparity in group sample sizes is unusual for traditional quantitative research. Although in most cases it would be fair to question analyses that compare 40 people in one group to hundreds in another group, we would assert that the extraordinary nature of the xenoglossy-coded cases tempers those concerns. As appropriate as it might be to point to the low number of people in that group (from an ordinary research perspective), it is just as appropriate for us to comment on how remarkable it is that there are 40 documented cases suggestive of xenoglossy.

Moving forward with emerging CORT cases that include claims of xenoglossy, it will be important for researchers to document and record the phenomenon in real time to verify the claims linguistically, whenever possible. Additionally, the findings from this paper should guide future investigations of new cases so that researchers can explore—with more depth—processes related to emotionality, trauma, and strength of case. It will be central to seek evidence supporting—or refuting—claims of this anomalous experience, while also working to understand the extraordinary processes of how such experiences manifest.

Conclusion. For more than 60 years, researchers have investigated and documented remarkable cases of mostly young children seemingly recalling memories of a past life. Embedded within many of these cases, investigators have also reported additional extraordinary evidence, suggesting—for example—the possibility that biological features from one life may transfer to a new one (Stevenson, 1997), and that the presence of phobias and/or phobias may also be directly linked to the experience of a previous existence (e.g., Tucker, 2021a). The research presented here adds to the literature built by past scholars, in the context of xenoglossy. Although we are unable to provide definitive evidence of these archived cases manifesting the actual phenomenon of speaking in a foreign tongue, we can say that those cases are linked to—and strengthened by—the presence of emotion, distress, and violence/trauma in the expression of these memories. We believe these findings may lead to a deeper understanding of the many layers of the extraordinary that are inherent in the remarkable phenomenon of children's past-life memories.

Authors' Note: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose. PC designed the study, analyzed the data, and wrote the first version of the manuscript. MP helped with statistical analyses and was actively involved in revising the manuscript. JT provided overall guidance and helped revise the manuscript.

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Souvenirs de Vies Antérieures et Langues Etrangères : Une Exploration de la Xénoglossie dans les Cas de Réincarnation

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Résumé : *Objectif.* Des décennies de recherche sur des enfants semblant se souvenir d’une vie antérieure ont mis en évidence de nouvelles caractéristiques extraordinaires de ce phénomène. Nous avons exploré une large base de données sur les souvenirs de vies antérieures afin de comprendre les cas codés comme présentant de la xénoglossie : l’affirmation remarquable d’individus parlant une langue étrangère qu’ils ne devraient pas connaître naturellement. *Méthodes.* Nous avons comparé 40 cas de xénoglossie à 872 cas sans xénoglossie, entre 1959 et 2020. Par une série de régressions logistiques binaires, nous avons testé des variables liées à une nouvelle hypothèse émotion-trauma expliquant la présence de xénoglossie, ainsi que d’autres variables suggérant une explication ordinaire. *Résultats.* La xénoglossie n’était pas associée à des variables d’explication ordinaire. L’hypothèse émotion-trauma a été confirmée : la xénoglossie était liée (1) à l’émotivité des participants, (2) à leur désir de retourner vers leur présumée famille antérieure, (3) au fait d’affirmer être mort de façon intentionnelle/violente, et (4) à la solidité du cas, suggérant davantage une explication anormale. *Conclusion.* Comme d’autres caractéristiques remarquables documentées dans la recherche sur les souvenirs de vies antérieures (par ex. taches de naissance liées à une blessure mortelle d’une personnalité antérieure, phobies, philies), la xénoglossie apparaît comme une autre caractéristique essentielle d’une personnalité précédente, susceptible de se transférer dans une nouvelle vie. Les données suggèrent que le fait de parler, de manière non naturelle, une langue étrangère est lié à (et renforcé par) la présence d’émotions, de détresse et de violence/trauma dans l’expression des souvenirs de vies antérieures chez l’enfant.

French translation by Antoine Bioy, Ph. D.

Erinnerungen an frühere Leben und fremde Sprachen: Eine Xenoglossie-Untersuchung bei Fällen vom Typus Reinkarnation

Philip J. Cozzolino Marieta Pehlivanova Jim B. Tucker

Zusammenfassung: *Gegenstand.* Jahrzehntelange Forschungen zu Kindern, die sich offenbar an ein früheres Leben erinnern, haben weitere außergewöhnliche Merkmale dieses Phänomens aufgezeigt. Wir haben eine große Datenbank mit Erinnerungen an frühere Leben untersucht, um Fälle zu verstehen, die als Xenoglossie kodiert wurden – die bemerkenswerte Behauptung von Personen, eine Fremdsprache zu sprechen, die zu sprechen sie eigentlich nicht in der Lage sein sollten. *Methoden.* Wir verglichen im Zeitraum 1959 bis 2020 40 Fälle, die Xenoglossie aufwiesen, mit 872 Fällen, bei denen dies nicht der Fall war. Mittels einer Reihe von binären logistischen Regressionen testeten wir Variablen, die mit einer neuartigen Emotions-Trauma-Hypothese für das Auftreten von Xenoglossie in Verbindung stehen, zusammen mit anderen Variablen, die eine konventionelle Erklärung nahelegen würden. *Ergebnisse.* Xenoglossie war nicht mit Variablen verbunden, die mit einer konventionellen Erklärung in Zusammenhang stehen. Die Emotions-Trauma-Hypothese wurde insofern bestätigt, als Xenoglossie mit folgenden Faktoren in Verbindung stand: (1) Emotionalität der Teilnehmer, (2) Wunsch, zu ihrer angeblichen früheren Familie zurückzukehren, (3) Behauptung, durch vorsätzliche/gewaltsame Mittel ums Leben gekommen zu sein, und (4) Vorliegen eines stärkeren Falls, was eher auf Fälle mit einer anomalen Erklärung hindeutet. *Schlussfolgerung.* Ähnlich wie andere bemerkenswerte Merkmale, die im Laufe der Jahre der Forschung zu Erinnerungen an frühere Leben dokumentiert wurden (z. B. Muttermale, die mit einer tödlichen Wunde einer früheren Persönlichkeit in Verbindung stehen, Phobien, Philien), ist Xenoglossie ein weiteres Kernmerkmal einer früheren Persönlichkeit, das offenbar in ein neues Leben übertragen werden kann. Die Daten aus der Datenbank deuten darauf hin, dass das Phänomen, auf unnatürliche Weise in einer Fremdsprache zu sprechen, mit dem Vorhandensein von Emotionen, Stress und Gewalt/Trauma im Ausdruck der Erinnerungen von Kindern an frühere Leben zusammenhängt und durch diese verstärkt wird.

German translation by Eberhard Bauer, Ph. D.

Memórias de Vidas Passadas e Línguas Estrangeiras: Uma Exploração da Xenoglossia em Casos Sugestivos de Reencarnação

Filipe J. Cozzolino Marieta Pehlivanova Jim B. Tucker

Resumo: *Objetivo.* Décadas de pesquisas sobre crianças que parecem recordar de uma vida passada têm apresentado características adicionais extraordinárias desse fenômeno. Exploramos um grande banco de dados de memórias de vidas passadas para entender casos codificados como exibindo xenoglossia – a

notável alegação de indivíduos que falam uma língua estrangeira que não deveriam ser capazes de falar naturalmente. *Métodos.* Comparamos 40 casos que exibiram xenoglossia com 872 que não exibiram, entre 1959 e 2020. Em uma série de regressões logísticas binárias, testamos variáveis ligadas a uma nova hipótese de traumas emocionais para a presença de xenoglossia, juntamente com outras variáveis que sugeririam uma explicação convencional. *Resultados.* A xenoglossia não pode ser associada a variáveis relacionadas a uma explicação convencional. A hipótese de trauma emocional foi sustentada, na medida em que a xenoglossia foi associada a: (1) emocionalidade dos participantes, (2) desejos de retornar à sua suposta família anterior, (3) alegar ter morrido como resultado de meios intencionais/violentos e (4) ter um caso mais forte, o que é mais sugestivo de casos com uma explicação anômala. *Conclusão.* Semelhante a outras características notáveis documentadas ao longo dos anos de pesquisa de memória de vidas passadas (por exemplo, marcas de nascença ligadas à ferida fatal de uma personalidade anterior, fobias, filias), a xenoglossia é outra característica central de uma personalidade anterior que parece capaz de ser transferida para uma nova vida. As evidências do banco de dados sugerem que o fenômeno de falar, de forma não natural, em uma língua estrangeira está ligado a – e fortalecido pela – presença de emoção, angústia e violência/trauma na expressão das memórias de vidas passadas das crianças.

Portuguese translation by Antônio Lima, Ph. D.

Memorias de Vidas Pasadas y Lenguas Extranjeras: Un Estudio de Xenoglosia en Casos de Tipo Reencarnación

Philip J. Cozzolino Marieta Pehlivanova Jim B. Tucker

Resumen: *Objetivo.* Décadas de investigación con niños que aparentemente recuerdan una vida pasada han puesto de relieve otras características extraordinarias de este fenómeno. Analizamos una base extensa de datos sobre memorias de vidas pasadas para entender mejor los casos codificados como de xenoglosia –la extraordinaria afirmación de algunos individuos de poder hablar un idioma extranjero que no deberían poder hablar. *Métodos.* Comparamos 40 casos que presentaron con xenoglosia con 872 que no, entre 1959 y 2020. En una serie de regresiones logísticas binarias, evaluamos variables vinculadas a una hipótesis nueva de emoción-trauma para explicar la presencia de xenoglosia, junto con otras variables que sugerirían una explicación ordinaria. *Resultados.* La xenoglosia no se relacionó con variables asociadas a una explicación ordinaria. La hipótesis emoción-trauma fue apoyada en el sentido de que la xenoglosia se asoció con: (1) la emotividad de los participantes, (2) los deseos de volver a su presunta familia anterior, (3) la creencia de haber muerto como resultado de acciones intencionales/violentas, y (4) tener un caso más fuerte, lo que sugiere que los casos tienen una explicación anómala. *Conclusiones.* Al igual que otros rasgos notables documentados a lo largo de los años de investigación sobre memorias de vidas pasadas (es decir, marcas de nacimiento vinculadas a la herida mortal de una personalidad anterior, fobias, filias),

la xenoglosia es otro rasgo central de una personalidad anterior que parece poder transferirse a una vida nueva. La evidencia de la base de datos sugiere que el fenómeno de hablar, de forma no natural, en una lengua extranjera está vinculado a -y reforzado por- la presencia de emoción, angustia, y violencia/trauma en la expresión de las memorias de niños de vidas pasadas.

Spanish translation by Etzel Cardeña, Ph. D.