Multilingualism in Lystra – a sociolinguistic reading of Acts 14:8-20 – leveraging multilingualism for mission

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism has reached high levels in our increasingly interconnected, globalizing world. Multilingual complexities are not new in the world of missions. Barnabas and Paul's initial visit to Lystra (Acts 14:8-20) was occasioned by significant linguistic complexity. A sociolinguistic reading of this narrative provides a nuanced understanding of what was occurring during this event and the impact of these misunderstandings. This study provides insights on navigating complex multilingual environments in current missions and is accompanied by innovative ministry strategies that communicate in the best language(s) without requiring missionaries or church planters to learn multiple languages.

Sociolinguistics and theology

Sociolinguistics analyzes the linguistic choices people make when two or more lan-guages are in contact with each other. Issues of prestige, allegiance, identity, intimacy, and comprehension all influence which language(s) people choose in various social settings. Recently, theologians have examined some biblical texts using the lens of

sociolinguistics which has illuminated their understanding not only of which language choices were being made but also the deep social complexity of the peoples described in Scripture. An important example of this is Hughson Ong's *The Multilingual Jesus*, in which he describes the sociolinguistic situation of first century Palestine. He identifies the languages that Jesus likely spoke by harmonizing textual information with the sociolinguistic setting of first century Palestine, particularly the areas Jesus lived and traveled. Lam's (2020) examination of the same context using a more nuanced application of sociolinguistic theory offers another examination of this same time and setting. Such applications of sociolinguistic theory clarify the complex life experiences of multilingual speakers in various biblical settings.

While multilingualism has been studied for some time in theological circles, Ong (2015a) observed that only a few scholars (Grimes, 1987; Lam, 2020; Lee, 2012; Ong, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b; Porter 1991, 2000, 2004; Porter and Pitts, 2013; Watt, 1997) have applied the lens of sociolinguistics to biblical accounts. This is due partially to the fact that sociolinguistics as a discipline only gained prominence in the West in the 1960s with the pioneering work of Joshua Fishman, Charles Ferguson, Ralph Fasold, and others. Ong (2015a, 331) has highlighted this interpretive lacuna and calls for its remedy:

> Previous attempts at handling and interpreting the linguistic evidence have been advanced largely via historical and grammatical means and logical inference. With this current scholarship scenario in view, the challenge now for future scholarship on this linguistic issue is how to be able to characterize more accurately the multilingual society of ancient Palestine. More precisely, this challenge primarily concerns how multilingualism theories could (and should) be applied to the linguistic evidence.

Through the work of Ong, Lam, Porter, and others, sociolinguistics is being used as a lens to study biblical accounts and texts with increasing sophistication. One passage that to this point has not been adequately examined using this approach is the Lystra narrative in Acts 14:8-20. A survey of the historical and social context of this Anatolian outpost examined through the sociolinguistic theory of diglossia provides a nuanced explanation of the linguistic evidence presented in the Acts 14 passage.

Diglossia

When Ferguson (1959) first coined the term "diglossia", he was referring to the contrast of usage between linguistic forms of a single language like High German and Swiss German, two registers of the same language. Later sociolinguists (Fasold, 1985; Fishman, 1972) expanded the application of diglossia to the interactions between separate languages that were distributed functionally and in a hierarchal fashion. Language hierarchy is a central concept within diglossia. One language tends to function as the more prestigious or "high language" (H) while the less prestigious or less powerful language is labeled the "low language" (L). It is Fishman and Fasold's approach to diglossia that provides a more useful theoretical frame for understanding the functional distribution of languages in Lystra.

The way these languages function in relationship with one another is better understood through the idea of language domains. Language domains are specific social contexts that tend to be dominated by either the high or low language or by some combination of them. For example, high languages tend to command the domains of government, education, writing, and sometimes business while low languages tend to be prevalent in the domains of family, community, courtship, dreams, traditional music and arts, and folk religious practices.

Domains are defined partially by the speakers present. It is common in multilingual societies for people to linguistically accommodate whoever is present in a social context. If a group of people are speaking the low language and a speaker of the high language walks up, the conversation may change entirely to the high language as an act of hospitality and respect toward the speaker of the high language. This can also provide a way for the speakers to heighten their own prestige by demonstrating their competency in the high language. So, there is a strong social component to language choice, including questions about which identity speakers wish to project (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985).

Another element influencing language choice in different domains is linguistic competence or understanding. For example, men who go to the market daily to sell their goods will have a strong command of high language for economic purposes. However, they may not know much high language terminology related to family issues. So, they know the high language but only in certain subject areas. Similarly, women who go to the market less frequently may have lower fluency in the high language and children may have none at all. Similarly, if a high language speaker visits the home of low language speakers, he may know enough of the low language for greetings but is often completely unaware of domestic terminology.

While serving in Russia several years ago, I was watching a Russian-language movie. I could discuss a wide range of topics fluently – family life, politics, history, anthropology, linguistics, religion, and art. The movie told an emotional story of a father and his two sons dealing with life after his wife's death. Midway through the movie, the scene changed, and I was completely lost – I could not understand most of what was being said. Fumbling for the remote, I embarrassedly turned on English subtitles; the words scrolled across the bottom of the screen – fishing line, tackle box, lures, bait, poles, etc. The movie had entered a language domain with which I was totally unfamiliar in Russian – fishing. Though I could discuss any number of topics easily in Russian, I had never learned the terminology related to fishing, and so I was incapable of effectively processing lexical items in that language domain in Russian. Language domains are very often topic specific. A person may work for the government and understand all of the accompanying terminology in the high language but may only be able to discuss family or recreation fluently in the low language.

A common oversimplification is to think of religion exclusively as the domain of languages of wider communication (LWCs).[1] Most high religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc) are practiced in LWCs, but most folk religious practices are conducted in vernacular languages. A sociolinguistic reading of Acts 14 will reveal that this was as true of the Lystrans as it is in contemporary missions' contexts.

The language situation in Lystra

Lystra was founded thousands of years prior to the Acts narrative. Ramsay (1908: 154) described Lystra as an ancient village that had been under both Persian and Greek control, and it was probably a moderately important market town prior to the Roman conquest (Potter, 1992: 426). Augustus designated it as a Roman colony in 6 BCE (Schnabel, 2012: 605). During Roman times, it was likely an "active and prosperous community, a thriving, rather rustic market town" (Levick, 1967: 154). More recent scholars suggest that though it was not on the main road, the *via Sebaste*, it was fairly prosperous (Blaiklock, 1965: 1113; Schnabel, 2012: 605), but it was certainly never as important as Iconium.

The choice of Lystra as a location for a Roman colony was probably based on it being one of six colonies from which the Romans pacified the nearby Homanadenses as well as on the need to defend the various trade routes in the area (Levick, 1967: 52; Ramsay, 1917: 239ff). The settlers who established the Roman colony there were probably composed of 1000-2000 veterans of the Roman army (Blaiklock, 1965: 1112) who became thoroughly integrated with the local population. The persistence of Latin inscriptions over time suggests that there was some idealization of Latin culture (Potter, 1992: 426).

The Greek language would have been introduced at the time of the Greek conquest around 334-333 BCE (Potter, 1992: 426). With the establishment of the Roman colony (6 BCE), Latin would have been introduced limitedly while Greek was retained, as was typical practice in the Roman Empire. Greek would have functioned as the language of government, formal education, and some trade and would have been a potent tool in upward mobility for a segment of the population. The members of the Roman garrison would have spoken Greek and Latin. The persistence of Latin on funeral inscriptions from that era in contrast to more common Greek language inscriptions in other nearby locations (Blaiklock, 1965: 1112) may indicate a triglossic situation in which Latin and Greek both functioned as prestige languages while Lycaonian would have dominated the domains of everyday life.

Lystra in the first century would have three primary social groupings: Roman colonists, Lystrans educated with Greek manners (Hellenes), and the uneducated Lystran population (Ramsay, 1908: 417–418). Whether or not the Hellenes maintained the Lycaonian language is a secondary question. In terms of identification, they embraced Hellenization. A similar dynamic can be seen in the Gospels and Acts where some members of the Jewish community living in Palestine had embraced a Greek identity of which the Greek language was an important marker (Acts 6:1).

Porter (2008) has studied Lycaonian linguistically and identified the language family to which it most likely belongs; however, no scholar has discussed the Acts 14 narrative from a sociolinguistic perspective.[2] The use of Lycaonian in Lystra persisted through the fifth century (Breytenbach, 1993: 399). This was not atypical for the region. Except for a few major cities, local languages in Anatolia persisted into the late third century CE and, in some communities, as late as the fifth or sixth century (Keener, 2013: 2152). In the sixth century, Stephanus of Byzantium corroborated the Acts 14

description of the use of Lycaonian, recording that even though Lystra was a Roman colony, it had retained its native language (Hemer, 1989: 110). This demonstrates a high level of language vitality beyond the time of Paul's initial visit to the city. There is evidence of two monasteries founded in the sixth century in Constantinople using the Lycaonian language for liturgy (Arnold, 2002: 349; Mitchell, 1993: 173). This is a highly significant data point beyond the Acts 14 text. This indicates that believers saw the importance of the Lycaonian language for spiritual purposes well after the first century. The Lycaonian language continued for common and ecclesiastical use for centuries beyond the Acts 14 events.

This begins to provide a more nuanced view of the language ecology of first century Lystra where Greek and Latin were spoken in the high domains of government, education, and at least partially for trade, and Lycaonian persisted in the relationally focused, low domains of use (see Table 1 below). This is not particularly debated, however, many Western commentators (Bock, 2007; Cheng and Stutzman, 2017; Flemming, 2005; Keener, 2013; Witherington, 1998) tend to assume that Greek dominated the domain of religion and that the misunderstanding recorded in Acts 14 was unidirectional, that is that the Lystrans could understand Paul and Barnabas' Greek exposition quite well, and it was simply that the apostles could not understand Lycaonian. A sociolinguistic reading of the text suggests that Lycaonian was used at least partially, perhaps exclusively for the religious domain. This is supported by external evidence showing Lycaonian being used in the domain of religion centuries after the events described in this account. The persistence of the Lycaonian language in the religious domain is also salient from a missiological perspective. It is instructive to understand how limited Paul and Barnabas' Gospel communication was within that linguistically complicated context. In other words, the Lystrans misunderstanding of their message was linguistic as well as cultural.

Table 1. Languages used for various domains in Lystra.

Language(s)	Sociolinguistic Domains
Greek or Latin only	Government, education
Greek / Lycaonian	Trade
Lycaonian only	Home, social interactions, religion

A reading of Acts 14:8-20 through the lens of diglossia

There are three strong textual indicators that the Lystrans significantly misunderstood Paul and Barnabas' sermon. First, when Paul preached Christ, they interpreted the message to be about Zeus and Hermes. Even considering the mythological background,[3] this is a bewildering misunderstanding. Paul preached monotheism, and they heard polytheism. That level of misunderstanding suggests at least some linguistic confusion. Second, the Lystrans discussed the religious domain largely in Lycaonian as will be elaborated further below. Third, Paul and Barnabas desperately insisted that

they were not gods, "but even with these words," they "scarcely restrained the people from sacrificing to them" (Acts 14:18). This final comment suggests an ongoing misunderstanding. Paul protested with an important example of natural theology describing the One true God, but they were still convinced of a polytheistic explanation of the miracle they had witnessed.

Keener (2013: 2155) notes that if Paul and Barnabas were speaking without an interpreter,[4] misunderstanding was likely. Barrett (1994: 676) observed that if the Lystrans had understood the evangelists' language better, they would not have mistaken them for gods. In what he calls the "linguistic confusion" during the event, Gempf (1995: 64) emphasized the people's misunderstanding of Barnabas and Paul's language:

> The report that (a) the people reverted to their native Lycaonian when excited, and (b) that their ensuing actions are difficult to reconcile with a properly understood message from Paul leads to the obvious conclusion that *Luke intends us to doubt their fluency in Greek*. (emphasis added)

Reading the text through the lenses of sociolinguistics and diglossia may serve to clarify what likely occurred during this interaction between the apostles and a pagan audience.

A sociolinguistic interpretation

When the crowd saw the miracle, they immediately reacted in the Lycaonian language. This language choice was significant. Paul and Barnabas' religious discourse up to that moment had been occurring exclusively in Greek, but when the Lystrans themselves began to describe and categorize the miracle, they did not do so in Greek; they switched languages. This example of code switching indicates multiple things. First, their reaction was highly enthusiastic. They had just seen a supernatural event, they responded emotionally, and the language in which they expressed high emotion was Lycaonian. Second, they did not simply add in a few words from their native language; they switched entirely to Lycaonian after seeing the miracle.

Second, the Lystrans' switch from Greek to Lycaonian in Acts 14:11 strongly suggests that Lycaonian was the language they typically used for religion. This conclusion is supported by the later development of the Christian liturgy into Lycaonian which was used for several centuries. This shows the continued use of Lycaonian in the domain of religion long after the Acts narrative. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the switch argues that the Lystrans did not have adequate vocabulary in Greek to discuss what was occurring. When they discussed topics within the religious domain, they had no choice but to default to the language they typically used to do so. In Lycaonian, they had all the vocabulary needed to analyze and discuss this event. This is similar to the sociolinguistic choices made by adherents of folk religions in multilingual societies today. People may attend a church or a mosque in a regional, national or international language, but they frequently offer sacrifices, burn incense, honor

ancestors, and perform spells in their vernacular language because it contains the critical lexical items necessary to operate successfully within the domain of folk religious practice. Also, each language grows out of a particular worldview. That worldview is encoded into the language in subtle and not so subtle ways. This is more than unique vocabularies within each language, it represents a mismatch of cognitive categories observed through language choice.

Studies of diglossia and language domains show the challenges of communicating in a domain using the wrong language. Westerners sometimes wrongly presume that if a person is adequately bilingual in one domain, business for example, that they are fluent in many or all others. It is assumed that if Lystrans could conduct business in the market in Greek, then they would also have been able to completely understand an evangelistic discourse in Greek.

It is likely that the Lystran audience would not have been able to make total sense of the novel theological ideas that Paul was introducing in Greek. Technical language within a domain is always the most difficult to master. The Lystrans' default to Lycaonian to discuss religious matters shows that they had not mastered all religious vocabulary in Greek. They may have understood a high percentage of everyday words but would have largely missed the critical theological ideas contained in Paul's Greek theological vocabulary, terminology like faith, forgiveness, grace, salvation, sin, and others. With such misunderstanding it is natural for people to fill in the blanks with content from within their own worldview.

Multilingual inconsistency in Lystra

The presence of multilingualism in any society guarantees inconsistency in levels of comprehension from group to group and from individual to individual. Men who were well-educated or part of the government would have known Greek better. Businessmen who traded with travelers at the market or perhaps traveled themselves would almost certainly have had higher proficiency in business Greek. However, the less educated, those who were in a lower socio-economic stratum, women, agriculturalists, children, and perhaps the elderly, would have all had less proficiency in Greek and could quite conceivably have not known any at all (see Table 2 below). Multilingual proficiency is also inconsistent from person to person. The vocabulary that you know in a second language is not the same as the vocabulary of your bilingual neighbor. These realities contradict the tendency of monolinguals to think of multilinguals as equally fluent in every language they know.

The Lystra narrative serves an important missiological function. First century readers would have easily recognized the multilingual challenges described here. The Lystran's language choice would have told them quickly that some Lystrans were partially or fully monolingual in Lycaonian. Some would be multilingual at different levels in Lycaonian, Greek, and perhaps Latin with a functional distribution of each language. Their proficiency was limited depending on the language domain. A few would have been mostly monolingual in Greek.

Table 2. Languages used by various members of society.

Language(s)	Social Position
Greek or Latin only	Immigrants, retired Roman soldiers, Hellenes
Greek / Lycaonian	Employees of government, some traders
Lycaonian only	Some traders, farmers, elderly, women, children

Missiological implications

This record of the expansion of the Gospel into a frontier context provides an important missiological insight. The possibility of using Greek as a gateway language had limitations. Greek could not be used exclusively to evangelize the previously unengaged Lystrans. The narrative reveals the importance of vernacular language ministry strategies in monolingual and multilingual contexts.

The modern missions movement has had a variety of attitudes and practices toward languages. While many missionaries, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, emphasized the learning of local languages, such practices were uneven across mission agencies and regions. Current church language policies globally tend strongly toward the use of regional, national, and international languages even when congregants have low understandings of these LWCs (Hill, 2006; Kenmogne, 2021; McKinney, 1990; Smalley, 1991). While languages of wider communication have proven efficient and effective in some contexts; just as often, missionaries have ignored the linguistic complexities of their contexts in ways that have been detrimental to the comprehensibility of the Gospel.

McKinney (1990) conducted research among the Bajju people of Northern Nigeria. The church had been planted among the Bajju three generations earlier using the trade language, Hausa, as a lingua franca to engage multiple tribes in the area. McKinney asked a simple question of regular church attenders, "Who is Jesus?" She willingly accepted any answer that was close – God, Son of God, savior, Messiah, etc. Twenty percent of regular church attenders could not successfully answer the question. One elderly woman responded, "I don't know, but I would like to know more about him. The preacher mentions him often." Earlier generations of missionaries in Northern Nigeria assumed that if some people were able to converse in Hausa in the market that it could be used without problems in any other domain, including church. McKinney's data proves otherwise.

Missiological application: Leveraging multilingualism for mission effectiveness

Multilingualism is not an impediment; it is a tremendous resource for effective mission engagement. The significant communication benefits created in multilingual environments are often overlooked by missionaries and agencies from predominantly monolingual contexts. Being raised in a largely monolingual society, my default is to

conceptualize multilingualism through the lens of monolingualism rather than viewing multilingualism from an emic perspective. Researcher Pattanayak (1981, xiv), herself a multilingual, observes,

> . . .the economics of monolingualism is such that two languages are a nuisance, three languages are uneconomic, and many languages are absurd. But where many languages are a fact of life and a condition of existence, restriction on the choice of languages is a nuisance and one language is not only uneconomic, but absurd.

Grassroots multilinguals – those who have lived in multilingual societies their whole lives – recognize the communicative power of using all of the languages spoken within a community. Using local languages communicates spiritual truth clearly to the monolingual speakers of local languages like women, the elderly, the poor, and young children. The use of multiple languages communicates clearly to multilinguals, using their full linguistic repertoire (their range of vocabulary across all the languages they speak). Multilingual ministry methods are not difficult or inconvenient though they are often characterized as such. There are a range of methods for leveraging multilingualism within communities.

Strategies for leveraging multilingualism

If you want to know how much people need to speak their local language in church, discover in which languages the announcements are given. When the church needs clear understanding for pragmatic reasons, they use the language(s) that are most communicative. When they need to know who is bringing what food to the potluck dinner, they choose the language that will communicate most clearly. Interestingly, this does not typically generalize into the use of communicative language choice in other parts of the church service because of tradition, pastors being from other language groups, or the perceived prestige of using a language of wider communication. While all of these motivations for language choice are legitimate, it is critical to communicate the Gospel in an understandable fashion. Thus, it is essential to explore effective multilingual solutions for churches in multilinguals communities.

Multilingual Bible readings

One of the simplest but least used means of leveraging multilingualism is to read Bible passages from every language represented in a congregation or other ministry context. Because Bible translations have been completed in most languages with work beginning in the remaining languages soon,[5] it is quite practical to use this approach. Bibles are available in most languages freely on Find.Bible or ScriptureEarth.org. It is most common in the Global South for interpreters trying to translate Bible passages improvisationally during the sermon. This frequently results in errors in interpretation because of the complexity of impromptu Bible translation during a performance. In such social contexts, the speed of verbal delivery is valued above accuracy, and there are almost

always mistakes. Having interpreters read from the Bible in the local language (either in print or on a mobile phone) is critical for accurate communication of Gospel content. Where audio-only Bible translations are available without print versions, readers can listen to and internalize the text before the sermon and recount it from memory during the church service.

Practical improvements for interpreters

Live interpretation of the rest of the sermon is a critical tool for practically addressing multilingual ministry settings. Interpretation researcher Downie (2024) does an excellent job reviewing the various approaches to interpreting that are commonly used in his book, *The Multilingual Church*. He helpfully details the benefits and challenges of each approach and recommends a context specific approach based on the needs, resources, and missiological vision of particular churches. It is critical to provide non-professional interpreters with practical training in order for them to perform effectively.[6]

Language specific Bible studies and audio listening groups

In sub-Saharan Africa, it is not uncommon to find churches with three to five languages represented. Churches could not possibly provide live interpretation for every language in such a context. Pastors are also constantly concerned about the very real issue of unity – to provide interpretation into one tribal language is to preference that ethnic group above others. This quandary can be resolved by the formation and encouragement of language-specific Bible studies and/or audio Scripture listening groups. Local pastors are sometimes concerned that such groups can themselves exacerbate already-present ethnic tensions between groups. Other pastors have found that church members discover greater love and unity with others after hearing and understanding I Corinthians 13, Matthew 5, Matthew 18, and Genesis 50. In addition to accommodating multiple languages, audio listening groups also leverage oral learning preferences.

Blended language Bible studies

Some multilinguals prefer to use a lively blend of both the LWC and their mother tongue(s). This phenomenon goes by several names – code mixing, translanguaging, heteroglossia – but the functions are similar. Motivated by goals such as clear understanding and expressing identity, many multilinguals like to blend languages together conversationally in community. Well-known examples of this include Spanglish, Chinglish, Hinglish, and others. Blended language Bible studies or translanguaging Bible studies (Hatcher and Son, 2022) give people the freedom to engage with the Bible in a way that mirrors their preferred communication patterns. These groups are made up of people who speak both languages well but prefer to converse using

vocabulary from both. In such groups, Bible passages can be read or listened to in both the LWC and vernacular language(s). Then group members are free to discuss the passage in whichever language or mix of languages they prefer. Of course, this can be done via any medium including text, audio, or oral Bible storying.

Multilingual communities themselves have pioneered these kinds of approaches (Jackson, 2014; Trudell, 2004: 136) and described the functioning of a blended language Bible study. In one example in Cameroon, the group leader asked someone to read the selected passage in English, and then the leader would read the same passage from the mother tongue New Testament. Everyone then closed their Bibles and recounted the passage in their own words. The Bible study leader primarily gave instructions in Lamnso', and group members replied mostly in Lamnso', although a few answered in English. During the group discussions, members were free to use English, Lamnso', or a mix of the two. This example shows the dynamic ways people reconceptualize language and creatively use it to suit their own situations. Blended language Bible studies are a way of following these existing language use patterns in a way that expresses linguistic hospitality toward the community.

Multilingualism in Bible schools

Perhaps no other context is more challenging in accommodating vernacular languages than the Bible school setting. It is not uncommon for Bible school professors to teach a classroom with a dozen minority languages represented. Bible school instructors cannot possibly learn all of these languages, nor can the Bible school provide vernacular language textbooks or other instructional materials. Fortunately, multilingual educators around the world have pioneered excellent methodologies that significantly enhance student learning with little or no cost or inconvenience to instructors or institutions. The simplest strategy is to create discussion and study groups according to languages or related languages. This allows students to negotiate complex ideas in their own languages. A second approach is to require multilingual students to read every Bible passage from their mother tongue Bible translation as well as the language of wider communication Bible. To keep it fair, monolingual students would be required to read the passages in two LWC translations. A third approach is to assign students to create bilingual dictionaries of theological terms in their mother tongue (Boakye and Mbirimi, 2015). This is a productive study activity that also provides an ongoing tool for students for their ministries (see Hatcher, 2022, for elaboration of these and other approaches).

Conclusion

Multilingualism is a resource for effective Gospel communication, not an impediment. The Acts 14:8-20 account demonstrates the risks involved with relying too heavily on gateway languages as a medium for ministry. The potential for catastrophic miscommunication like what was seen in Lystra is significant. Conversely, when missionaries

and local church leaders begin to view multiple languages as an asset rather than as an inconvenience, there is great potential for the creative deployment of vernacular language Scripture resources and the strategic use of multilingual methodologies.

Notes

1. Languages of wider communication include international, national, regional, and trade languages (Lewis and Simons 2010).
2. This linguistic investigation of the Lystra narrative conducted by Porter (2008) is one of the most important. In it, he examines what is known about the Lycaonian language. There are a few preserved inscriptions but no extant texts. Porter concluded that Lycaonian was an Anatolian language, part of the larger Indo-European language family, and was probably related to the Hittite languages. Porter suggests that amidst the mix of languages in Anatolia at that time, Lycaonian was probably a variety of or descended from Luwian (Porter, 2008: 146–147).
3. There is textual and contextual information that the Lystrans misunderstood Paul. The evangelists were preaching about Jesus but by the end of the sermon, the people were convinced that Paul and Barnabas were Hermes and Zeus respectively. Most commentators recognize the cultural and mythical precedent of their reaction. Ovid recalled a myth in this area of two poorly dressed vagabonds who requested hospitality but were turned down by the wary locals. Finally, one older couple offered them lodging. In Ovid's account, the two travelers were Zeus and Hermes in disguise. They blessed the older couple and visited calamity on the rest of the population. It is likely that these were Hellenized names for the local deities Tarchunt and Runt (or Pappas and Men) (Cadbury, 2004; 23; Schnabel 2012, 608; Williams, 1976; 170), and Keener highlights a comparable practice of assigning Greek and Roman names to Syrian deities (Keener, 2013; 2152). Lystrans' mythologically informed understanding overrode the specific words that Paul had been saying.
   From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the explanation that their mythology overrode the apostles' sermon rings true. People interpret new input through the grid of their pre-existing cognitive categories. The events fit a set of schemas (Strauss and Quinn, 1998) that already existed. Paul and Barnabas were speaking about religion, and they seemed to have supernatural powers. These elements appeared to fit their mythology. The mythological connection does not contradict a sociolinguistic interpretation. A sociolinguistic interpretation suggests that they lacked essential linguistic content necessary to contradict or redefine their existing cognitive categories. A lack of clear communication linguistically left them to interpret the event through their worldview as best they could.
4. There is no textual evidence of an interpreter being present, particularly in light of the apostles' slow response to the sacrifice attempted in their honor.
5. For up-do-date statistics on Bible translation progress, visit progress.bible and/or https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics/

6. Valuable resources designed to empower multilingual churches make decisions can be found in *Translating the Bible into Action* (Hill and Hill 2022).

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