

Introduction

On the spectrum of the quality of the Koine of the New Testament, Mark falls toward the vernacular end; only Revelation is less sophisticated in its Greek. Mark's language has been called "conversational" Koine, because it resembles the spoken Greek of an educated common person of the period.¹ Several features of this style can be seen in Mark 6:45-52, the pericope under consideration here. The passage is characterized by parataxis, the stringing of sentences together with *kai* rather than using subordinate clauses (vs. 45-48, 51; five clauses begin with *kai*). This tendency causes some difficulty for English translators, as notes 43 and 49 in the NET Bible indicate (see appendix). Mark's preference for *eujuul'* is evident;² he uses the word twice in this pericope. Also, the historical present, which is a prominent feature in Mark, appears here. The passage is thoroughly Markan in style.

The content also shows Petrine influence which is attributable to Markan authorship (understanding Mark to be the disciple of that apostle, in accord with tradition).

The old suggestion in accordance with Eus.[ebius] *H.E.* 3.39.15, transposing the third person plural to the first person plural takes us back to Peter's reminiscences works especially well in this story. Nevertheless, Mark's habit of inserting *gar*-clauses should exempt vv 50a, 52 from this suggestion, to say nothing of other Markan touches.³

In summary, the pericope is very vivid because of Mark's use of the present, *eujuul'*, and direct discourse, and gives the reader a feeling of participation in the story.

Kai; eujuul' / eujuul' (45, 50)

Most translations (all major translations consulted; see appendix) and commentators (Gundry) woodenly translate this as "immediately" in every context in which it appears.

However, as Decker has shown, *kai; eujuul'* and *eujuul'* can be used variously, and ought not

¹Plummer is helpful here. Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge Greek Testament, 1914; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), xxxv.

² *Eujuul'* is used 51 times in the narrative section of the NT, and 41 of these instances are in Mark. Rodney J. Decker, "The Use of *Eujuul'* ("Immediately") in Mark," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* (Spring 1997), 91.

³ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 338; cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Cambridge Greek Testament, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 224.

immediately be assumed to be a adverb of rapidity.⁴ The word at times functions as a conjunction in Mark, with no more force than *kai*. The first usage of *eujuu'* (actually *kai; eujuu'*; v. 45) might be taken in this conjunctive sense, implying no sense of immediacy (“and then He urged his disciples to get into a boat...”). In this case, *kai; eujuu'* would be strictly transitional. However, Decker understands the *kai; eujuu'* in verse 45 as an adverb of rapidity.⁵ This conclusion is perhaps supported by the urgency inherent in the word *hjnagkasen* (“he urged” or “compelled”) which follows.⁶ Yet this is not conclusive, and it is still possible that *kai; eujuu'* here functions conjunctively. Even if the construction here does denote rapidity, the English gloss “immediately” may be too strong, as *eujuu'* may express either rapidity or the sense that no intervening events take place, although the action may not necessarily be rapid.⁷ The second connotation fits better here: the next event after the feeding of the five thousand is Jesus’ command to cross the lake.

The second use of *eujuu'* occurs in verse 50. Here the sense is clearly adverbial, and denotes immediacy (“but immediately he spoke with them...”).⁸ Jesus immediately speaks to his disciples to comfort them and assure them that he is not a ghost.

***hjnagkasen* (45)**

The verb can be quite strong (i.e. “to compel”), and even here where the force seems a bit weakened, most commentators note that *hjnagkasen* and *eujuu'* suggests urgency. Cranfield and others⁹ look to the Johannine account (John 6:16-21) for a reason for this strange rapidity, where it is recorded that Jesus perceived that the people were about to come and crown him king by force. “So from early times (e.g. Origen) people have sought to explain Mark’s *hjnagkasen* by

⁴Decker, “*Eujuu'*.”

⁵Decker, “*Eujuu'*,” 111.

⁶Guelich says, “‘Immediately urged’ (*eujuu'* *hjnagkasen*) closely ties this story with the previous one and expresses a sense of urgency;” Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1—8:6*, Word Biblical Commentary, 34a (Dallas: Word, 1989), 347.

⁷Decker, “*Eujuu'*,” 104.

⁸So Decker, “*Eujuu'*,” 109.

⁹ Lane says, “The abruptness with which Jesus constrained the disciples to return to their boat...suggests a crisis which is unexplained in the Marcan material,” and then continues to ascribe this reason to that given in John’s account; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 234.

reference to this dangerous situation indicated in Jn vi.14f. Thus Latham wrote: ‘He hurried the disciples on board that they might not catch the contagion of the idea.’”¹⁰ Others, however, see this urgency contextually within Mark’s narrative scheme. Guelich charges these commentators as reading too much of John into Mark, but cannot explain the urgency of this passage.¹¹ Gundry also objects to the importation of Johannine background into Jesus’ command in Mark: “perhaps so at the historical level; but since Mark does not suggest a messianic uprising, or even messianic excitement, he aims in a different direction.”¹² Gundry understands the strong verb and the use of *εἰς* as emphasizing the separation of the disciples from Jesus; the disciples would have resisted sailing without Jesus,¹³ but he intended to set up the situation for his glory, knowing the events that would follow. This explanation is quite convincing, and separation is a theme that can be seen in Mark (4:35ff; 9:14ff).

It is interesting that Matthew (14:22) retains the exact wording of Mark except for the substitution of *εἰς* for *εἰς*, the addition of “him” after “to go before,” the omission of *προ;* *Βηθσαιδαν*, and changes in the tense of *ἀπολῦει* and the case of *τον ὄχλον*.¹⁴

εἰς to; *peran* *προ;* *Βηθσαιδαν* (45)

In chapter 5, Jesus and his disciples have crossed the Sea of Galilee to the east side (5:21), where the feeding of the five thousand (6:30-44) seems to take place.¹⁵ This creates an apparent geographical problem with the pericope of 6:45-52, because Bethsaida is on the northeastern shore of the lake rather than “on the other side” (v. 45). Some commentators and the NIV (see appendix) prefer to omit *προ;* *Βηθσαιδαν* with *ⲓ*^{45vid}, W, and a few minuscules;¹⁶ Matthew also omits the phrase in 14:22 in a strange departure from an almost verbatim adherence to Mark in

¹⁰ Cranfield, *ibid.* Cf. Lane, 234-35.

¹¹ Guelich, 347-8.

¹² Gundry, 339. He notes that John is the only Gospel that records this messianic excitement in this story.

¹³ Hence NRSV, NASB, NET, and NIV “Jesus *made* his disciples.” See appendix.

¹⁴ See the student’s synoptic comparison on this website.

¹⁵ Gundry argues for a western feeding; hence, the crossing “to the other side to Bethsaida” is an actual crossing from the western to the eastern side of the lake; Gundry, 338-9.

¹⁶ As Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York, 1966; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 327.

this verse. However, if εἰς τὸ περὶ ἄνδρα and πρὸς ἄνδρα are understood differently, the difficulty is solved. “Then εἰς τὸ περὶ ἄνδρα does not mean across the Lake, but across a bay which separates the scene of the Feeding from Bethsaida Julias.”¹⁷ With this understanding, πρὸς Βηθσαῖδα means “toward Bethsaida” rather than “to Bethsaida,” denoting a northeastern direction.

εἰς ἄνδρα ἀπολυεῖ τὸν ὄψλον (46)

Mark uses the present indicative of the verb ἀπολυεῖ here, while Matthew prefers the aorist subjunctive ἀπολυήτω (Mt. 14:22). The non-standard use of the present here has caused some scribes (e.g., ⁴⁵ A W *et al*) to emend the text to ἀπολυήτω, but this is a common occurrence in the Synoptics; Mark prefers the “historic present,” using it 152 times, in contrast to the other Synoptic writers (Matthew 78 times, Luke 4 or 6; John uses the historic present 162 times).¹⁸ Enos states that the historical present “is a feature of distinctively *Markan* style, and was consciously selected by Mark in service of his specific and distinctive theological goals in writing.”¹⁹ The common understanding of the historical present is that the construction is used for vividness. However, Fanning has suggested Mark uses the historical present (with the exception of ἐγώ) rather in “drawing attention to crucial events or highlighting new scenes or actors in the narrative,”²⁰ and one subset of this usage may attempt to move the actors to a new location in the paragraph.²¹ This appears to be the function of the historic present ἀπολυεῖ; it moves the principal actor, Jesus, to a new location in the narrative—the mountain—from which he will see

¹⁷ Plummer, 175; cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1927), 136 (who attributes this interpretation to Bede); and Guelich, 348.

¹⁸ Plummer, xxxvi.

¹⁹ Quoted in Rodney J. Decker, “Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect” (Ph.D. diss., Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), 224. Enos hypothesizes that Mark uses the historic present frequently in an attempt to “‘infect’ the reader with the sense that the past events he narrated were of profound present-day importance,” but Decker disagrees with this conclusion because it is using the debunked time-laden view of tense.

²⁰ Quoted in Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 225.

²¹ Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 226.

the disciples and walk on the lake to them. Further, with this present the crowds are moved off the scene; the relocation of the disciples to the Sea of Galilee is related to the verb as well.

The NASB here translates εἰς αὐτοὺς ἀπολύει τὸν ὄχλον “while He Himself was sending the multitude away.” This translation is good in that it captures the emphasis of the “superfluous” αὐτοῖς, but faulty in its attempt to retain the sense of the present; the historic present should be translated as an English past tense (as the other translations). The KJV chooses “people” here rather than “crowds,” the better translation.

The subordinating conjunction εἰς in Mark always refers to a period of time during which an action occurs. With an imperfective verb (ἀπολύει), εἰς should be translated “while.”²²

Gundry notes that αὐτοῖς is emphatic, once again emphasizing the separation of the disciples and Jesus (while they left, *he himself* was sending the crowds away). “This multiple emphasis on separation will enhance the reunion to follow.”²³ Gundry develops the contrasts throughout the passage rather interestingly, largely focusing on geography.

καὶ οὖν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκεῖνῳ ἐβρισκόντο αὐτοὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης (47)

The participial phrase is a genitive absolute, a fairly common construction in Mark. The genitive absolute always carries a temporal connotation in Mark (“at this time, _____ happened”).²⁴ The sense then is that as it became late, the disciples found themselves in the middle of the lake.

ἔτι ὡς ἔρανον ἐβίβανον (47)

This phrase ἐτι ὡς ἔρανον may also have a temporal connotation, as Turner suggests.²⁵ ἔτι is often used to express time with the dative,²⁶ and the infinitive may express *relative* time. Therefore, the construction here means to denote time (“*while they were rowing*”), rather than as

²² Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 178.

²³ Gundry, 335.

²⁴ Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 267.

²⁵ Cited in Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 172.

²⁶ Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 170.

a verbal noun (“in the [act of] rowing”).²⁷ Although the infinitive certainly explains *why* they were straining (they were rowing), it also may express contemporaneous time (they were straining while they were rowing).²⁸ In Matthew, the participle *basanizomenon* is in the passive, referring to the boat (i.e., the boat was buffeted), while in Mark the similar participle is middle, referring to the disciples (i.e., the disciples were straining). Matthew omits the infinitive phrase altogether (14:24).

hn gar ol aḡemo" eḡantio" aujtoi" (48)

This appears to be one of Mark’s frequent parenthetical explanations, and appears to explain why the disciples were “struggling as they were rowing.” Matthew retains the phrase (14:24). The NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) transforms this subordinate clause into a preposition phrase—“against an adverse wind” (see appendix).

tetarthn fulakhn th" nukto;" (48)

The phrase *tetarthn fulakhn th" nukto;* in both Mark and Matthew (14:25, omitting *th" nukto;*) uses the Roman designation of separating the night into four periods. The Jewish system, followed by Luke’s gospel (although not here—Luke omits this pericope), was divided into three watches.²⁹ It is tempting to see the Roman provenance for Mark’s gospel from this data, but Matthew’s use of this Roman system and John’s use of the measure *stadia* must temper this conclusion.

The issue for modern translators is whether this archaic time system should be retained for the modern reader. The NRSV and NET Bible choose not to do so (NRSV “early in the morning;” NET Bible “As the night was ending”), but the latter explains that the Greek “about the fourth watch of the night is between 3 and 6 a.m. (see appendix). The other major English versions retain the literal reading.

eḡcetai pro;" aujto;" peripatwḡn epi; th" qalassh" (48)

²⁷ As Taylor, 329; and KJV. The modern English versions have “at the oars” for this infinitive (NASB, NIV, NET, NRSV). See appendix.

²⁸Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 254-6.

²⁹Taylor, 329.

The historic present εἵρεται is here used again to move the participants of the narrative to a new scene;³⁰ in this case, it introduces Jesus to the lake scene from his prior position on the mountain.

Ἐπι + the genitive may mean “by,” but here it is clear that Mark means “on,” because the parallel between ἐπι; τῆς γῆς (“on the land,” 47) and ἐπι; τῆς θαλάσσης (“on the sea,” 48) is unmistakable. Jesus did not walk “beside” the lake, but “on” the lake.

καὶ ἠῆλεν παρελθεῖν αὐτοῦ (48)

This phrase is unusual, and “throws the whole verse into confusion” as it appears to be “uncharacteristically callous” of Jesus.³¹ There are several interpretations:

1. The impression of the disciples. “Perhaps the words are to be explained as recording the impression that the disciples had at the time: the impression they got was that he intended to pass by them.”³²
2. ἠῆλεν as an auxiliary verb akin to μέλλω (“he was about to pass by them”).³³
3. Purpose. The καὶ is epexegetic: “for he intended to pass them by.”³⁴ This interpretation does not make sense unless Christ intended this as a test of the disciples.
4. Theophanic reference. Mark here uses the language of the LXX (Ex. 33:19, 22; I Kings 19:11). It is possible that he is coloring this incident as a theophanic appearance of Christ. Gundry defends this view well.³⁵

Matthew (14:25) does not record the phrase, and John says that Jesus came “near the boat” (6:19).

εἶπὸν ὅτι φάντασμα ἐστὶν (49)

Here again Mark uses a present tense where an imperfect might be expected. This may be a form of direct discourse using a verb of thinking rather than one of speaking. “They thought, ‘It is a ghost.’”

³⁰Strangely, Decker does not categorize this occurrence. Decker, “Temporal Deixis,” 226.

³¹Guelich, 350.

³²Cranfield, 226. The NET Bible study note here mentions this possibility. See appendix.

³³Taylor, 329; NIV (“He was about to pass by them...”). See appendix.

³⁴Lane, 236; NRSV; NASB; NET (cf. n. 47). The NRSV’s translation makes Jesus seem especially callous—“He intended to pass them by.” See appendix.

³⁵Gundry, 336-7; cf. Lane, 236-237; NET Bible n. 47 (see appendix). The themes here that are common with the OT are interesting: the mountain (46), passing by (49), “take courage” (50), “I am” (50), bread and doubt (52).

ol de; euju;" eil a\hsen met! aujtwñ kai; legei aujtoi" (50)

On euju;" , see comments on kai; euju\'/euju\'' at verse 45.

Mark here doubles his verbs of speaking (lalew and legw)³⁶ and adds the prepositional phrase met! aujtwñ.³⁷ This appears to be designed to emphasize Jesus' speaking to comfort and calm the disciples (with the sense of immediacy lent by euju\'' [see above]): "Mark may wish to anticipate and emphasize that tone by his choice of the preposition that indicates fellowship."³⁸

The historic present with legw³⁹ is exceptional, and is difficult to assess.⁴⁰

qarsei'te, ejuw eimi:mh; fobei'sqe (50)

Mark favors direct discourse in his gospel, and the verbs are often in the present tense, as is the case here. The phrase ejuw eimi, retained in Matthew (14:27) and recorded in John (6:20), is interesting because the personal pronoun ejuw is unnecessary and most likely therefore emphatic. Furthermore, the similarity of the phrase with the Hebrew YHWH ("I am") is suggestive, especially if Gundry and Lane's view that "he intended to pass by" is theophanic in nature.

kai; ajnebh pro;" aujtou;" eij" to; ploion (51)

Mark's usual word for getting into a boat is ejnbainw (see v. 45), but here he uses ajnabainw. Swete suggests that this depicts climbing from a hollow of a wave on turbulent seas into the boat,⁴¹ but Gundry notes that this is "because the center of gravity has shifted from the boat to the disciples: Jesus goes up *to them* into the boat, but they merely embarked into an *empty* boat."⁴² Matthew follows Mark in using ajnabainw (14:32).

³⁶Only here in Mark. Gundry, 336.

³⁷Only here does Mark use met j aujtwñ with a verb of speaking. Gundry, 336.

³⁸Gundry, 337. Hence, the KJV and NASB's "with them" is superior to NRSV, NET, and NIV's "to them" (yet see n. 50 in NET Bible). See appendix.

³⁹This is marked in NASB with an asterisk, which indicates "verbs that are historical presents in Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage" ("Explanation of General Format" in NASB). See appendix.

⁴⁰Fanning in Decker, "Temporal Deixis," 225.

⁴¹Swete, 139. KJV translates "he went up unto them." NET Bible translates "went up with them." NIV renders "climbed into the boat with them." See appendix.

⁴²Gundry, 342.

ouj gar sunhkan epi; toi" a]rtoi", a]l ! ! hh au]twn h] kardia pepwrwmenh (52)

This is another typically Markan parenthesis, which explains the disciples astonishment.⁴³ Matthew paints the disciples in a better light, saying that they worshiped Christ as the son of God, but Mark tells the reader that they were astonished “*because* they did not understand concerning⁴⁴ the loaves,” a clear reference to the feeding immediately preceding (6:30-44).

In the second clause, Mark uses a periphrastic (hh...pepwrwmenh = “were hard”), another construction he favors. The participle pepwrwmenh is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the disciples’ state of being “dull” or “hard.”⁴⁵ If Porter’s ideas regarding discourse analysis and verbal aspect are correct, this phrase may be the “point” of the pericope; Porter says that the evangelists often “mark” the thrust of the passage with a perfect. This would accord with the theme of the disciples’ lack of understanding/faith in Mark. This matter will be explored more in the next project on verbal aspect. The NASB’s is a novel translation: “for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of* the loaves.”

It is interesting that “their heart” (au]twn h] kardia) is singular. The importance of this is unclear.

⁴³“...another of his characteristic gar-explanatory sentences;” Guelich, 352.

⁴⁴“In the matter of,” or “in reference to;” Swete, 140.

⁴⁵Understanding the perfect as stative (Porter).