

THE FUNCTION OF DE IN THE NARRATIVE OF MARK 14:1-16:8¹
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The average Bible translator, faced with the presence of the particle de in a passage of Scripture, may be hard put to apply the definitions of the function of this particle in any concrete way. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich's definition, for instance, is that de is "used to connect one clause with another when it is felt that there is some contrast between them, though the contrast is often scarcely discernible" (1968:170). With his training in relationships between propositions, the translator who reads this definition may too readily label a relationship "contrast", at times with disastrous consequences (e.g. "(Judas) fervently kissed Him (Jesus). They de (but?) laid their hands on Him and Seized Him." Mark 14:45f)! More likely, however, the translator may decide to ignore the particle, hoping that the context, the commentaries, and his instinct together will clarify the relationship being expressed (which, of course, they often do).

In this paper, an in-depth study has been made of the last three chapters of Mark to discover the functions of de in its various contexts. In view of recent studies on the function of de and oun in John 11 by Nate Waltz (1976) and John Werner (1976), this chapter is also considered briefly. Because of the limited scope of this study, it is possible that the results may apply only to Mark's Gospel.

In the narrative portions of Mark 14-16, two functions of de are clearly distinguishable. De's connection with the development of the nucleus of the story which is typically presented in the aorist tense is explained in section 1. Section 2 covers the use of de in connection with secondary information presented in the imperfect or pluperfect. A third function, covered in section 3, typical of nonnarrative material but clearly connected with the first, concerns the development of the theme of the unit.

1. De in connection with the development of the nucleus of a narrative

The function of de, used in connection with the main events of a narrative in Mark, has to elements to it:

- i. The event it introduces is in response to the immediately preceding main event.
- ii. This event represents some new development within the nucleus of the narrative.

These two elements are considered in detail in section 1.1, and the need to assert both is demonstrated by contrasting examples in which kai appears. The function of de following the presentation of events of a secondary nature is discussed in section 1.2, and a comparison made with the functions of oun and de in John 11 in section 1.3.

1.0. De with forefronted subjects

First, however, we need to discuss the purpose of forefronting an element in Mark, since the vast majority of examples of de in connection with the development of a narrative occur with forefronted subjects.

In Greek, "unmarked" word order places the verb ahead of its object and subject, so that the presence of any element preceding the verb indicates that that element is forefronted for prominence. This forefronting appears almost invariably to be connected with thematization (thematic prominence). In Mark 14:13, 14, for instance, the link between the two clauses is through the locative adverbial:

- i. "Follow him,
- ii. kai wherever he enters, tell the house-owner..."

In Mark 14:7, the two clauses are linked at two points of contrast, both of them forefronted:

- i. "Always for the poor you have..."
- ii. Me de not always you have."

When the subject is forefronted in the narrative of Mark, this indicates generally that the next action of the story is performed by a different participant. In addition, this new participant is understood to be already on stage, at least implicitly. (When a participant is to be introduced formally on stage, this occurs with a verb of arrival or existence, and the reference is then postverbal—cf. also section 2.1.)

This is seen clearly in Peter's denial scene (Mark 14:66-72).

- 66a "being Peter below in the court" (postverbal reference—Peter is reintroduced on stage, as he was not in the last scene upstairs)
 66b "comes one of the maidservants of the high priest" (again a postverbal reference—introduces a new participant to the scene)
 (67—what she does and says)
 68 "he de denied..." (forefronted—switch to Peter as agent)
 69 "kai the maidservant seeing him..." (forefronted—switch)
 70a "he de again denied..." (forefronted—switch)
 70b "kai after-a-little again² the bystanders said..." (forefronted—switch)

In each case above, the new subject is forefronted to indicate that the development of the narrative will proceed through the action/s performed by this participant.

1.1. The basic ingredients of de in connection with the main events of a narrative

1.1.1. The event introduced by de is in response to the immediately preceding main event

Notice that de does not convey what sort of response this may be. In the above example, Peter's response in vv. 68, 70a was to disagree with the statements of the maidservant. However, in vv. 45f, when the crowd lays hands on Jesus in response to Judas' kissing Him, they are performing no more than the next prearranged step of the capture (cf. v. 44); the story developed through their action (fronted subject) in response to Judas' action (de), but there was no other element of contrast or change of direction involved.

The importance of the element of response to the immediately previous main action, in the action introduced in connection with de, is seen in the next few verses of chapter 14.

- 46 "They de laid their hands on Him and seized Him."
 47 "One de a certain of those standing by...cut off the high priest's servant's ear."
 48 "kai answering Jesus, said..."
 50 "kai leaving Him, they fled..."

Peter's action (v. 47) was in response (de) to the crowd's action of seizing Jesus. Jesus' speech of vv. 48f, however, was not in response to Peter's action. It was in response to His capture, as the quote margin "answering" indicates, but the use of kai³ rather than de in v. 48 excludes the idea of response to the immediately preceding main event. In the same way, the presence of kai rather than de in v. 50 indicates that the disciples did not flee as a direct response to Jesus' speech, even though their flight presumably did stem from His capture and lack of resistance.

1.1.2. The event introduced by de represents some new development within the nucleus of the narrative

In each of the examples quoted above, the narrative was advanced by the event introduced by de. There was genuine progression⁴ along the theme or story line.

This element in the meaning of de must be recognized because in Greek, as in many other languages, if the response to a speech does no more than perform the action expected from the speech, then no development of the story is considered to have taken place (cf., for instance, the absence of the progression marker ca in Inga (Quechuan) "Speech-Action"

couplets—Levinsohn, 1977). So, in Mark 14:16, because the disciples do no more than that which Jesus sent them to do (vv. 14f), kai is used to introduce their action. Even though it was the direct response to His speech, no development of the story took place.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter in Mark 14:27-31 illustrates this also. In both v. 29 and v. 31, when Peter responds to Jesus, disagreeing with Him, and hence developing the theme line of the story, de is used. However, in v. 30, Jesus' reply is introduced with kai, indicating that, rather than responding to Peter's statement and developing it (disagreeing with it), Jesus simply makes a new assertion, tailored to Peter's words, true, but basically reiterating in specific detail how Peter would "take offence at Me".

In striking contrast to the above passage is the exchange between Pilate and the crowd in Mark 15:9-15. The series of de's, each introducing a response built on and developing the last action or speech of the other participant, shows that Pilate had lost control of the situation; he simply responded and reacted to each demand!

1.2. De following the presentation of events of a secondary nature

In the last section, we saw that the event introduced by de is in response to the immediately previous main event. De is also used in Mark, following the presentation of events of a secondary nature, to take up the story at a previous main event and develop it from there.

In Mark 15:34-37, for instance, following Jesus' cry at the ninth hour (v. 34), two events involving the bystanders are described, both employing the imperfect tense⁵ (vv. 35f). The use of de to introduce Jesus' last cry (v. 37) indicates a return to the main event line.

This same feature is seen in Mark 14:53-55. Following the gathering together of the Sanhedrin (v. 53), Peter's arrival at the courtyard is described, and his action of sitting warming himself is presented in the imperfect (v. 54). The reference to the chief priests seeking testimony against Jesus in v. 55, in connection with de indicates that the main event line again is being developed.

In Mark 15:37-39, the intermediate action (the rending of the veil) takes place away from the scene of the crucifixion. In this case, Mark considers it necessary, in using de to introduce the centurion's response to Jesus' death, to state explicitly what was the point of reference for de, since "was rent" (v. 38) is also in the aorist tense. (The rending of the veil is therefore secondary, only because it took place away from the scene of the main actions.)

1.3. A comparison with de and oun in John 11

The reader familiar with Nate Waltz' article on the function of oun in John 11 will immediately recognize the similarity between the use of oun in that passage to signal a return to the nuclear events of the narrative, and the use of de with a similar function in Mark 14-16 (but cf. section 2 below).

More subtle, however, is the parallelism between the function of de in connection with the main events of the narrative in Mark and the comparable functions of de and oun in John 11.⁶ De is found in John 11 with the function of "direct response" in vv. 4, 29, and 41. In every case, the basic topic under consideration has not changed, and a new speaker responds directly to a previous event or speech connected with that topic.

So in John 11:4, to the news of Lazarus' illness, Jesus responds with a comment about that illness. In v. 29, Mary responds directly to Martha's words about the arrival of Jesus. In v. 41, Jesus' prayer to the Father is viewed as the direct response to the moving of the stone, which He Himself had previously requested.

In contrast, oun is used when the response to the previous action or speech does not

correspond exactly to that event. This is found in John 11:12, 16, 33, 36.

In v. 12, in response to Jesus' words about going to wake Lazarus, the disciples take up the subject of his sleeping (the first main verb) rather than that of the final sentence of Jesus' speech ("go to waken him"). In v. 16, Thomas' comment to the disciples, though in response to Jesus' words, is concerned still with the danger of their going, rather than with the content of Jesus' speech. In v. 33, Jesus does not respond directly to Mary's words, but rather to the general state she and the Jews with her were in. In v. 36, the Jews' comments to each other about Jesus' weeping were not addressed to Jesus (and possibly were a total misinterpretation of why He wept).

The key factor in the distinction between de and oun in connection with the main events of John 11 is therefore whether the response to the previous main event is considered to develop the same topic further (de), or to move to a (slightly) different tack (oun), hence, the appropriateness of using oun in John 11 to signal a return to the main events of the story.

There is therefore no exact one-to-one correspondence between the use of de (and kai) in Mark and the use of de and oun in John 11. Rather, some of the functions of de in Mark are handled by de in John 11, and others by oun, while oun itself in John 11 covers not only some of the functions of de in Mark, but also would be used in many places where Mark employs kai (cf. section 2.2).

2. De in connection with secondary material

In Mark's Gospel, when de is used in connection with a verb in the imperfect (usually the verb "to be") or the pluperfect, the material so introduced is of a secondary nature. This secondary material may involve the introduction of a participant (section 2.1) or the presentation of parenthetical material (section 2.2).

2.1. De in connection with the introduction of participants

In section 1.0, we saw that the use of a forefronted subject in the narrative of Mark's Gospel not only established that the participant so named was performing the next main event of the story, but also indicated that that participant was already on stage, even if (in the case of minor participants) his presence was only implicit up to that point. Participants who have a significant role to play in the unit of the story being considered, however, are formally introduced on stage, either by the use of a verb of arrival or by a verb of existence.

Participants, whose overall role in the unit being considered is of a secondary nature, are introduced typically by de in connection with the verb "to be". This accounts for the use of de in John 11:1:

"There was de a certain man ailing, Lazarus from Bethany."

(The subsequent story primarily involves first Jesus and His disciples, then Jesus and the two sisters of Lazarus.)

Examples in Mark include:

Barrabas (15:7): "There was de the one named Barrabas with the rebels having been bound"

(Barrabas' role in the following scene is of a totally secondary nature—he was not even present; he was only talked about!)

the women (15:40): "There were de also women from afar beholding..."

(The women continue to occupy the role of observers, as Jesus is buried (v. 47); they only assume a primary role in the next section (16:1).

Mark 14:4 is a beautiful illustration of this way of treating participants as occupying a secondary role. Following the anointing of Jesus (v. 3):

"There were de some being angry...."

Reference to these people by means of a forefronted subject would have classified them as minor participants since they had not been formally introduced previously and therefore their presence was only implicit up to that point. However, because Judas was among their number, this would have been inappropriate. Nor are they treated as major participants, as their introduction by "kai + there were" would have implied (cf. Mark 1:23). Rather, their presence is recognized as being of secondary importance in comparison with the major roles occupied by the woman and by Jesus.

2.2. De in connection with parenthetical material

As in John 11 (cf. Nate Waltz' article), de is used in connection with the introduction of parenthetical material, this material being introduced with a verb in the imperfect (usually the verb "to be") or the pluperfect tense. However, resumption of the main event line in Mark is not achieved by the use of oun (contrast John 11); rather, the conjunction kai appears at the beginning of the relevant sentence.

Parenthetical material differs from secondary events (section 1.2), in that the latter are events which took place at the same time and in the same general location as the main events of the narrative, but which are downgraded in importance (generally by the use of the imperfect), whereas the former is either a description of actions which did not take place at the time of the main events or a speaker comment about the state or situation at the time of the main events.

An event presented as parenthetical may be a flashback, presented in the pluperfect:

"Had given de the one betraying Him a sign..." (Mark 14:44).

It may also be a habitual action, presented in the imperfect:

"At de feast he used to release to them one prisoner..." (Mark 15:6).

Mark 15:25 provides an example of a speaker comment"

"It was de hour third and they crucified Him."

(The crucifixion of Jesus was described in v. 24. The speaker comment provides the hour of the crucifixion.)

Mark 14:1 is also a speaker comment, basically separating Jesus' discourse of chapter 13 and the chief priests' plans for the arrest of Jesus:

"It was de the Passover...after two days."

3. De in connection with the development of a theme in nonnarrative material

I do not pretend to have researched this area thoroughly, even for Mark's Gospel. Rather, it is simply the product of my private reading. However, to make this presentation of the function of de in Mark complete, I include a few observations.

The two basic elements of the function of de in connection with the development of a narrative in Mark are present also in the development of nonnarrative material. These elements may be restated as follows:

- i. The material introduced in connection with de is connected directly with the immediately preceding nuclear material.

- ii. This material represents some new development within the overall theme of the unit.

The development of a theme may be of a contrastive nature in which the speaker contrasts his new theme (forefronted) with his previous one.

So Mark 14:7:

"Always for the poor you have with you...

Me de not always you have."

Cf. also John 11:9f:

"If anyone walks in the day...

If de anyone walks in the night..."

Within the speaker comment of John 11:13, we have a contrast between subjects:

"Had spoken de Jesus concerning the death of him;

those men de thought..."

However, the development in the theme may simply be movement to a new aspect. For instance, following Jesus' interpretation of the woman's act of anointing Him (Mark 14:8), He says (v. 9):

"Truly de I tell you, wherever is proclaimed the Gospel...,
also what did this woman will be spoken..."

Cf. also Jesus' words in John 11:41f:

"Father, I thank Thee that Thou didst hear Me.
I de knew that always Me Thou hearest..."

4. Conclusion.

The function of de in Mark's Gospel may be divided into two parts, a function in connection with the nuclear material of the unit under consideration, whether narrative or nonnarrative, and a function in connection with the secondary material of the unit.

In conjunction with nuclear material, there are two elements to the function of de:

- i. The material it introduces is connected directly with the immediately preceding nuclear material.
- ii. This material represents some new development within the overall theme or event line of the unit.

In conjunction with secondary material, de introduces participants who occupy a secondary role in a narrative and also material of a parenthetical nature.

The functions of de in connection with primary and secondary material are distinguishable in narrative in that the latter is presented in the imperfect or pluperfect tense.

Although there are similarities between the function of de as described here, and the functions of de and oun in John 11 described by Nate Waltz, the correspondence is not simple, and in-depth study of the exact relationships encoded by each particle in each Gospel and how the functions differ between the Gospels is needed.

Footnotes

¹The present article was produced in conjunction with a combined linguistic and initial translation workshop held in Panama in late 1976 under the codirection of Harry McArthur (Guatemala) and myself. I wish to express my appreciation both to Harry and to Keith Forster of the Panama section for their contributions to the analysis of this particle in Mark 14ff.

²Cf. Levinsohn, forthcoming on forefronted time margins.

³Kai has a straightforward coordinating function, uniting elements of equal value (cf. Levinsohn, forthcoming).

⁴Cf. Levinsohn, 1977, on the concept of progression in a discourse.

⁵The use of the imperfect tense to describe events of a secondary nature is considered in Levinsohn, forthcoming, section 3.

⁶This section, together with section 2.1 (John 11:1) and section 3, accounts for the examples cited by John Werner (1976:21), except for one case each of de (John 11:13a) and oun (v. 14), which I consider to be accounted for by Nate Waltz' presentation.

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