Mark 12:41–44 as a Script for Persuasive Speaking in Lovangai Church Congregations

Lesley Fast

Lesley Fast worked with SIL International and the Lovangai church in Papua New Guinea from 1986 to 2000 on a translation project. He also worked as consultant and as tutor in translation training courses. Currently he is a translation consultant with Romani projects in Europe and teaches translation at the Centre for Linguistics, Translation and Literacy, Redcliffe College (formerly ETP, UK). He has an M.A. degree in New Testament Studies from McGill University.

Abstract

This article links the oratorical application of the original Gospel of Mark in Græco-Roman society with a parallel oratorical application of Mark in contemporary Melanesian church congregations in northeast Papua New Guinea. It is based on the thesis that the original text of Mark was designed to be delivered orally to mostly preliterate groupings of Jesus followers in the Græco-Roman world. Individual Lovangai church congregations are likewise practicing a similar rhetorical delivery as a useful and practical translational activity that addresses practical concerns relevant to the Lovangai society. This article discusses the characteristics of text as script in relation to Græco-Roman rhetorical practise and interacts with selected scholarly works that treat the identity of the Gospel audiences. Effect in translation is connected with the phenomenon of speaking, integrated with practical life experience. This view is presented as an alternative to models that would have effect primarily taking place in the domain of cognition. Insights from anthropological studies into how humans pass on cultural knowledge are applied to an understanding of persuasive speaking, and we maintain that this can be seen as directing group members toward a desired change of practise. To illustrate translational activity for Mark 12:41–44, one Lovangai church member is followed as she speaks from her own interpretation of the script to a matter of import in the social setting of one church congregation.

1. Introduction

This article[1] proposes a way of understanding the Gospel of Mark as a source text for translational activity—a script from which to speak persuasively. We suggest that the original, Græco-Roman text of Mark was used by trained speakers as a text-script, a tool to address the matters of import suggested by the text, and with intent to persuade select audience groupings regarding those matters. Similarly, the Lovangai church congregational situation[2] lends itself to such a text-script application. This design is being experimentally adopted by Lovangai reader-speakers, who interpret the text-script in order to orally address matters that the local congregations consider important.

1.1. Translation and effect

Bible translators have always been concerned that translations have an effect on readers. Effect is a broad concept, and it has rarely been asked what effect exactly a translation should have. Theorists have made claims that success in translation has to do with equivalence of effect. Nida and Taber (1969) famously claimed that equivalence has to do with "the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to [the translation] in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source

[1] This article is an adaptation and expansion of a presentation given by the author to a group of translation, linguistics and anthropology consultants in a professional development seminar at Horsleys Green, U.K. in June, 2011. The author wishes to express his appreciation for that opportunity. He also thanks the editor and anonymous reviewers of this journal for helpful, critical comments given on an earlier draft.

[2] The Lovangai area lies in northeast Papua New Guinea (PNG), comprising Lovangai Island and its northern and western outlying islands. This article draws in part upon research carried out with three church congregations in 2008. See also Fast (2010).

language....[There] should be a high degree of equivalence of *response*, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose" (24 [emphasis added]).

Smalley (1991) more recently qualified this claim: "[When] Jesus'...words made opponents angry, the translation should not therefore make modern readers angry. Rather, they should be able to sense the reason for the anger in the language of the translation" (111). Applying this to Mark, we are to assume that there was an effect on the face-to-face addressees of Jesus in the narrative. This is far removed, however, from the projected audience of the text of Mark; that is, how was a Greek literary construct to have effect on groupings of Jesus devotees in the Mediterranean region far from the time and place of the scenes depicted by the narrative?

The Gospel of Mark is often viewed as a narrative *par excellence* intended to inform readers about Jesus' ministry. At the same time, there has typically been a heavy focus on information processing, both for identifying "implied information" (see Deibler, 1993), as well as "cultural information," needed to correctly interpret texts and utterances.[3] Notwithstanding the hope for "equivalence of response," effect tends to be viewed as cognitive and informational. From Smalley's explanation, however, it would seem that readers of translations of Mark are not to be affected themselves so much as that they are to comprehend that people in the world of the story were affected.[4]

1.2. Speaking to persuade

One of the persistent challenges of viewing communication primarily as a matter of information processing is how to relate this to an understanding of speaking as practise in real-life social settings. Living in social groupings entails much more than computing informational content. We are profoundly affected by aspects of our social setting such as particular human relationships, and aesthetic and emotional realities, but also by our physical surroundings and non-human actors. Influencing others through the action of speaking happens within these dimensions of living in this-world environments.[5] It proves problematic, therefore, to link persuasive efforts in a straightforward way to cognition because being persuaded depends on many of these dimensions as much as, if not more than, on reasoned argument or the propositional content of speech.

1.3. Organization of the article

Section 2 discusses the constitution of earliest intended hearers of Mark and what people in the Græco-Roman rhetorical milieu were expected to do with texts. We then briefly address what the important matters are that the text of Mark suggests, and what are its persuasive goals. Section 3 considers a model of imparting knowledge (Ingold 2001) as an alternative to a model that sees communication as the transfer of thoughts from one mind to another. We then link this to material, gathered in participatory research carried out by the author along with Lovangai church members, which illustrates their way of attempting to influence others. In section 4, we present and discuss one church member's interpretive approach to speaking from the episode in Mark 12:41–44. Gertruth uses the text as script, which informs her how to speak to her own congregation regarding the matter she discerns to be at stake. Section 5 closes with a few reflections on the similarities between Græco-Roman and Lovangai social groupings.

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[3] Hill (2006) gives the most advanced effort in identifying "cultural" information in application to exegesis and desired communicative effect.

[4] The approach used in this article is to only briefly note certain assumptions and claims that would need critical consideration and further examination. Such a critique could be worked into an eventual, more complete study.

[5] Insights from studies in several disciplines may help us to see that speaking/writing is not easily separable from other activities and practises. Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1969) argues that some speech is performative, that it makes something happen in the hearer that creates an effect—more than a simple reception of information. Speaking that marries sentences or dedicates, for example, is actually the performance of these events. Actor Network Theory (Latour 2005) has shed light on the interactive way that all "actors"—human and non-human—affect relationships. Integrational linguistics (Harris 1998) clarifies the strong tendency that linguistics as a science has had in forcefully separating language from other practises. In a similar vein, anthropologist Tim Ingold helps us look at human life as continually in negotiation with its surroundings; that body, mind and "nature" are not separable (see Ingold 1993, 2001, and 2011).

2. Mark in its Græco-Roman Setting: Audience, Reader-Speaker, Persuasive Design

Contrary to what has often been assumed about Mark, we begin with an understanding that the text was not formulated and designed in a particular author-audience communication situation; rather, its projected audience was the groupings of the Jesus movement in the Mediterranean region of the first century C.E., in which any and every willing hearer was to be influenced. Secondly, because Mark is a Græco-Roman literary construct, its design and purpose should be seen as rhetorical. "Rhetorical" here refers, not to formal linguistic features of speech or text—at the level of word, phrase or larger structural forms—rather, as a practise in society, doing something persuasive with a text in groupings of people. The default was oratory, speaking to groups regarding matters of import, convincing people of something. Thirdly, there is a persuasive design suggested by the text that is apparent in a study of the episodes, many of which depict Jesus speaking to his group of chosen disciples.[6] These episodes, though narrative in literary form, are to be used by reader-speakers to speak persuasively to groupings of Jesus followers with the persuasion directed at both leaders and those of low status. The persuasive goals are about power difference, responsibility to others and devotion to Jesus.

2.1. Audience: the concept of a particular Markan "community"

There is no historical record indicating who the earliest audience was for Mark, and Mark has no addressees named in the text. Nor do we know much about people of the era who were a potential audience.[7] In spite of this absence, appeal is regularly made in Bible translation circles to the category of "original audience," and it is held that Mark has a "message" that must have been directed at a particular group of people. The redaction-critical model of Gospel communities[8] may have been influential in the formation of such assumptions. Richard Bauckham (1998a) in particular has argued that it is reasonable to assume that the Gospels were intended as open texts—that is, to be heard by any and all willing listeners.[9] As Ian Henderson (2009) explains:

> Redaction-criticism of the Gospels…tended to treat each Gospel as [an] intentional [and] normative expression of the distinctive theological and ideological commitments of an almost confessionally self-conscious community. [Following] Bauckham's initiative [Gospel criticism has been challenged to consider the] intended catholicity of each Gospel, [in which model] each gospel-writer designed a text which could be read before almost any imaginable audience of Jesus-devotees. (6–7)

In this article I suggest that the original audience for Mark was not a specific group of people; rather that it was a network of many early Christian groupings. These groups lived mainly in urban centers (Meeks 1983) and were heterogeneous. That is, these groups were made up of people from a variety of socio-religious backgrounds, differing from one another in social status, language competence and life experience. The level of commitment to a group would also vary from person to person, and groupings would have porous borders.[10] Such groupings of people were removed in time, space and practises from the world that is depicted by the narrative of Mark, and they are heterogeneous in regards to what they knew and to what degree they were committed to listening. We can also assume that the knowledge they had of Jesus, Judaism and Palestine varied greatly. Many could have been quite ignorant of the Roman province of *IVDÆA* and even may have found the episodes of Mark rather exotic.

Our understanding of the Markan audience differs significantly from the common interpretation in Bible translation circles of a particular, homogeneous community or church, with whom the writer was familiar and shared full cultural information.

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[6] Fast (2002) examines the four longest speeches of Jesus in Mark with the view of explaining their persuasive intent.
[7] See, however, Bolt (2003) who looks at some evidence of social conditions and relates these to the prominence of suppliants' needs in Mark.
[8] See Kee (1977), Weeden (1971, 2000) and Horsley (1989) for examples of Markan community studies, and Telford (1999:15–17), for a brief overview and critical questions.
[9] See Bauckham (1998b) for a set of studies. See also Klink (2010) for a summary of Bauckham's argument and essays of further nuance or critique.
[10] See Harland's (2003) study of Jewish, Christian and other Græco-Roman groupings.

2.2. Readers-speakers, hearers and the text as script

Assuming the audience constitution and the persuasive design suggested above, here we briefly consider the text as a script, and the person who was to use it, the reader-speaker.[11] The term *reader-speaker* underlines the fact that Græco-Roman texts were not expected to be read *silently* by individuals in order to mentally comprehend information. This is commonly assumed when the term *original reader(s)* is used in Bible translation literature. Rather, the text of Mark was to be read by a trained person with the rhetorical training to decipher a handwritten manuscript and read it interpretively to a listening audience. The term *ho anaginōskōn* (Mark 13:14) refers to such a reader-speaker.

Beavis (1989) understands the author of Mark to have been "a Christian scholar (scribe) and missionary...with some training in Greek...who transmitted Jesus tradition, ethical teaching, and so on, to missionaries and...potential converts. [The text of Mark] formed part of the teaching material that Christian teachers and missionaries used" (170).

If we take Beavis' notion of "teaching" as not restricted to the passing on of information or simply telling the story, we can imagine such an author and rhetorically-trained emissaries, motivated to speak to audience groupings with the text as tool for doing that. In order to gain control of the script text, the reader-speaker had to exert considerable effort, perhaps almost to the point of memorizing the script, to enable him to speak well and convincingly to a given group.

This view of the text, with both the reader-speaker and the social phenomenon of the target group involved, suggests as problematic the notion that an original communication situation consisted in a message from a particular author to a particular Markan home church. We might rather say that the text is designed to become meaningful as reader-speakers and local groupings uniquely engage its persuasive goals.

2.3. The text and persuasive goals

The episodes of Mark present the twelve disciples as a unique group who alone are called to accompany Jesus.[12] These disciples are repeatedly shown in a negative light against suppliants and low-status people. One clear example of this is the way Jesus scolds his elite companions for preventing children from coming to him (Mark 10:13–16). Another example, prominent in the whole of Mark because of Jesus' extraordinarily strong language to the twelve, is the episode in Mark 9:38–50. This discourse of Jesus is addressed to the twelve disciples and contrasts them with low-status people, warning them severely against mistreating outsiders and children. A reader-speaker, speaking persuasively from these and other episodes in Mark, was able to critique bad leadership practises in target audience groupings on the one hand, and endorse low-status people in the same grouping based on their exemplary devotion to Jesus.[13]

In other words, the text-script of Mark can be seen as a tool for a reader-speaker persuasive discourse aimed at stratified audience groups. The official disciples are given special status in the narrative and at the same time shown to be defective in their understanding, devotion and leadership style and treatment of lower-status people. On the contrary, minor figures are shown as exemplary in their devotion to Jesus.[14] To the extent that the reader-speaker points the attention of the target group to a direct link between the official disciples and minor characters on the one hand, and the group members of the local audience on the other hand, the text-script helps him to make "a primary argument in favor of sacrificial/servile leadership

[11] Maxey's (2009a) work and that of a few other Bible translation scholars (see the recent collection of articles in Maxey and Wendland 2012) have been turning to performance studies, pointing us to the group phenomenon of ancient text reception, and to the source text as script for performance. (See the recent overview and critical questions in de Regt 2013). Certain performance scholars, notably David Rhoads (see references in Maxey 2012:2–4), have been influential in these (especially Maxey's) studies (see Maxey 2009 a, b, and c). A focus on performing the story of Mark as a dramatic event, however, tends to neglect the matters of import that the text suggests, as well as their relation to local topics and issues of audience groups. See especially Maxey (2009a), who treats the general issue of a literacy bias in a West African post-colonial setting.

[12] It is worth noting, perhaps, that this is a Markan phenomenon. There is not space here to discuss how the synoptics vary in their understandings of *mathētēs* (disciple). See Trebilco (2012:208–246).

[13] See Henderson (2000) for a rhetorical critical study of this episode.

[14] See Henderson (2009) for a discussion of several crucial episodes that suggest this duality in the projected audience.

(addressed to group elites)" and "an argument in favor of personal devotion to Jesus (addressed to 'little people')" (Henderson 2009:9).

If we can reasonably assume that the projected hearers of Mark were typical social groupings whose members were ethno-religiously diverse and had varying social and economic status, we can see the text of Mark with its suggestion of stratification as being addressed to such groupings. The text-script thus shows the reader-speaker how to point the attention of the stratified group to leadership tensions and to urge them to take for themselves the persuasive point. Consequently, as hearers are willing to recognize that the disciples and "little ones" in the episodes are parabolically pointing to themselves, they become implicated in the speaking of the reader and are potentially affected by his persuasive efforts.

2.4. Discussion

The scope of this article does not allow for an examination of the Markan episodes to identify more particularly which issues are suggested. For the purposes of this article, we have provided an alternative understanding of Mark as a text for persuasive speaking to groups of Jesus devotees, and we have pointed briefly at the areas of leadership and devotion as matters to which the text points.

We should understand Mark, then, as a text meant to serve reader-speakers as a script. In this view, the design of Mark, in resonance with basic Græco-Roman rhetorical sensibilities, was that specialist reader-speakers learn and interpret that script, working out, by its guidance, ways of speaking to local groupings, pointing their attention to matters the reader-speaker considered important.

Mark's audience likely consisted of groupings of Christian listeners who were socially heterogeneous. Like social groupings in general, early Christian groupings grappled with a range of topics and crucial matters important in their social relationships. Reader-speaker emissaries, rhetorically trained and commissioned to speak in these groupings, were to point attention to the arguments of the voices of Mark's narrator—and especially—of Mark's Jesus.

Study of the text-script reveals that basic persuasive points were aimed at both leaders and at people of low status. Target social groupings typically have at least some degree of stratification. In the Græco-Roman rhetorical milieu, a widely diverse audience social range was considered a given, and both upper and lower strata would typically hear the speaker simultaneously. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that in hearings of Mark, group members would be listening to the persuasive points—addressed to both the leaders and the low-status people—in each others' presence. The reader-speaker identifies these matters both from a study of the script as well as from a study of—or knowledge of—a given local group.

3. Pointing Attention to Desired Practise—Speaking for Persuasive Effect

The notion that communication consists in the transfer of mental representations from one mind to another (Sperber and Wilson 1986) has been influential in Bible translation, having been applied to exegesis and to translation reception theory (for example, Gutt 2006 and Hill 2006). Information processing has been named as the "core" of translation (Gutt 2005). Some scholars, however, urge us to think of language as a practise thoroughly integrated with non-verbal, physical behaviour and, indeed, shaped within our social setting. Thus Harris (2010) understands that the "ubiquitous prelinguistic substrate of behaviour is a prerequisite for the emergence and maintenance of verbal communication in all its forms." Anthropologist Tim Ingold's work cautions against an understanding of the human organism's life that sees the mind somehow separated from the body and "nature" or the social setting.[15]

[15] In a passage of his essay entitled "Stories against classification: transport, wayfaring and the integration of knowledge," Ingold (2011) discusses how we come to have the knowledge we have in relation to the previous generation and says: "[Because] knowledge...merges into life in an active process of remembering rather than being set aside as a passive object of memory, *it is not transmitted*.... We cannot regard knowledge...as a kind of heritable property.... To be sure, the expert is more knowledgeable than the novice. What distinguishes them, however, is not a greater accumulation of mental content—as though with every increment of learning yet more representations were packed inside the head—but a greater sensitivity to cues in the social setting and a greater capacity to respond to those cues with judgment and precision" (161 [emphasis original]).

Having suggested a model of earliest Markan reception that integrates text-script, physical activity of a reader-speaker and local groupings of people, in this section we examine briefly how we might view the effect of translational activity as being contingent upon speaking in local social settings. We refer to unique speaking-hearing events in given local groupings where not only thought but also all of the natural world and human practical life experience and memory is involved. Thus, as an alternative to the notion of a shared *cognitive* environment that is considerably abstracted from local experience, we wish to entertain the idea that the text-script of Mark is applied uniquely in local speaking-hearing events. And not only is its application unique, but the rhetorical text design of Mark, projected for use in a network of groupings of people is what causes it to be so. In what follows, we consider speaking as a practise that is integrated with practical life experience in local social settings (Pennycook 2010). In particular, we focus on how speaking might be seen as a way of pointing attention to desired practise.

3.1. Learning and being persuaded

Knowledge and behaviour are learned, not by proceeding from inherited or acquired mental representations, but by following the actions of others.[16] As human beings we learn by being shown what is necessary for living. Thus it is that elders demonstrate skills, practises and behaviour for novices. Demonstration includes showing, and often speaking. Nuvat, a skilled Lovangai horticulturist, recalled as follows his earliest memories of taro gardening:

> Papa was always *akalit* 'demonstrating' to all of us [siblings]. Many times he would go with us to the garden plot and he would stand with the *asu* 'digging implement', and he showed us: "The way to *ngal* 'plant and tend taro' is like this...like this the taro will grow happily; and later on, when you have practised *ngal* well, taro will appear and grow well; it will be food for you to eat, or to take and do other things with."

To use terminology that Ingold (2001) borrows from Gibson (1979), we "educate the attention" of novices and peers to the skills they are to practise in resonance with the activity which we demonstrate. This is how people come to know how to walk, handle objects and tools, carve canoes, fell trees, prepare meals, make garden plots and enact church services.

As actors in our social settings we know experientially that other actors—both human and non-human—affect that environment. As social beings other people are probably the most significant part of our social setting. Speaking is a way of acting within that social setting, and through speaking, along with other actions, we seek to affect that social setting. Experienced educators of young children may identify with the scenario of a boisterous pupil disrupting classroom activity. A teacher or camp staff personnel may successfully get such a child to return to her seat by speaking in measured tones, and simultaneously directing her physically to walk back. And once there, to sit quietly, by firmly pressing her into a sitting position. Although cognition is involved in all of this, we can hardly limit communication to the thought world. What we communicate and the new things we learn are grounded in practical life experience in our social setting.

What Ingold says about imparting knowledge and learning help us better understand the question of effect. Persuasive activity cannot be reduced to comprehending semantic propositions or to drawing logical conclusions. As humans we are thoroughly interwoven with our local social setting, in which we continually relate to people and to other elements of our physical surroundings. When we speak we are affecting a local social setting. Thus, within a social framework where body, mind and social setting are integrated, we might understand persuasive speaking as a means of performing an activity that focuses attention on practise which can be observed and that may be adopted and practised by group members.

This can be illustrated by a particular social activity performed by the Lovangai extended family, the multifaceted operation of taro horticulture. The Lovangai family head leads this project which extends in time over months and includes cutting, clearing, plot preparation, planting, tending and harvesting. Very

[16] This is Ingold's (2001) basic argument. Ingold actually maintains that Sperber's (1985, 1996) theory of the epidemiology of representations is untenable. We do not engage with the details of that argument but do mention it in light of the appeals made to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986). For my purposes Ingold's argument helps explain how public speaking is part of attempting to persuade.

young members of the group require spoken instructions and demonstrations in order for them to practise and become more adept at these tasks. Older, experienced family members do not. All group members, however, need at least some persuasion for the project to go well and for the group to remain united and happy in the work. The family head speaks regularly to the group regarding the performance of the various tasks and regarding their unity and support of good social group interaction.

This very brief description of persuasive speech in a local social group setting illustrates that the audience of the persuasive speaking is heterogeneous in more ways than one, that speaking and demonstrating go together, and that speaking and being persuaded take place over a period of time. Much of persuasive communication is not best explained as informational or as being primarily in the thought world; rather, speaking is closely linked to practical life experience, pointing to skills that have been learned and practised. It is also significant that a Lovangai leader of a project will not expect unity and diligence if he does not actually lead the work by demonstration.[17]

3.2. Examples of speaking to effect change of practise

During several weeks of participatory research with Lovangai church members of three congregations, we invited participants to describe what social groupings were like, and what topics were important to these groupings. All of them readily identified matters that they considered to be important. They also easily identified groups to which they had spoken, or were planning to speak, persuasively on some of these matters. These research participants were reader-speakers in that they had a measure of competence in interpreting and speaking from other people's words and deeds. They could interpret with authority. They were also held in esteem by the congregation as competent to speak in appropriate group settings.[18] One participant, for example, spoke about her attempts to get an older kin relation of hers to send his young children to school. She directed his attention to his neglect of his children due to lethargy, and she showed him ways in which they would benefit from attending school.

In Lovangai communities the topic of supporting education is well-known, and various people address it in a variety of local social settings. The respected elder ToVoivoi was known in his lifetime as a man vitally concerned for the education in the local school and for the way he consistently pointed people's attention to the value of maintaining this great good in the home place. Having raised children, several of whom were educated beyond secondary school, and having been chosen at various times to serve on the Parents and Citizens committee, he was a convinced leader himself. He repeatedly broached the topic in various formal gatherings of church and home place. He would, for example, often focus on parents' duties and privileges attached to maintaining the facilities for the well-being of their children's education. He argued that good facilities should be built and maintained for teachers who were not from the immediate area so they would feel at home and thus their teaching would be good.

3.3. Discussion

As observed in the ToVoivoi example, relevant persuasion among the Lovangai occurs in situations that form a significant part of their social context and which directly affects them as people. This persuasion involves cognitive transfer through speech, but even more, communication through modeling and personal emotional force. Normally it also involves multiple communication situations rather than one simple exchange, and diverse audience responses may be expected.

ToVoivoi's audiences differed in regards to the degree of support and loyalty for education—and for him as a person. Some people did not accept the prevailing belief that education is good for children or for family life. Further, the speaking that ToVoivoi did in an attempt to persuade people was done at many

[17] One Lovangai respondent put it this way: *Ku mengen ta sa numai kupo abis ia na kulapo tak vanang a ri vap…. Man ku antok ta ri vap kian ngaut kupo igenen aino luai si kam an ngaut*. 'You can only talk about what you yourself demonstrate; it is in that way that you will influence people. If you tell people they are to clear grass, you have to be the first one out there clearing grass'.

[18] The research participants, women and men, ranged in age from young people to senior adults. It was clear that the participants thought carefully about whether their speaking was respectful; young people, for instance, do not assume they can address elders in the same way they address their peers.

times and places—all unique social settings—over a long period of time. In addition, persuasion on behalf of education was not exclusive to ToVoivoi's influence; other leaders of various social groupings supported and detracted from the speaking that ToVoivoi did; and audience response was diverse, varying in their degree of willingness to follow ToVoivoi.

It is problematic to apply simple, cognitive-inferential communication models to an analysis of how persuasion works (or does not work). It seems more helpful in the Lovangai context to understand persuasive communication as elders and peers modeling a desired way of acting and behaviour. Persuasive attempts and their effect take place over time, with differing results for different hearers, grounded in local experience. It seems inadequate to analyze the attempts at persuasion by ToVoivoi and the effects they have on his congregation and wider community as consisting most basically in the transmission of information and comprehension of mental representations. It is of further interest to note that ToVoivoi exerted personal emotional force—not simply in one discourse or speech act but with his life as a congregation member of the church, and as a citizen. He acted as a person about whom others have feelings regarding responsibility, authority, and respect. Thus his life continually drew listeners' attention to himself as a model. It is rarely noted in Bible translation literature that these pragmatic factors are significant in persuasive communication.

It proves difficult, therefore, to explain ToVoivoi's persuasive communication in terms of individual speech acts or as giving a specific message to a particular audience. The speaking that ToVoivoi did always occurred within a wide field of practises and speaking events. People who listened to him speaking on this topic at any given time were in a real sense part of the speaking-action, in that they had in the past responded concretely in one way or another to this promotion of education.

4. Speaking from a Script of Mark 12:41–44

In the previous sections of this article we have introduced the Gospel of Mark as having been originally designed to serve as a tool—a script from which reader-speakers were to address issues current in Græco-Roman groupings of Jesus devotees. We have also considered briefly how Lovangais speak to matters of import in social groupings, educating their social group audience members to desirable practise. At the same time we have expressed caution about communication analysis that limits communication to a mental transfer of information and that appeals heavily to the notion of a specific audience for the Markan text. We turn now to a case study in which one episode of Mark is in focus and is used as a script by a Lovangai church member to address an issue.

4.1. The speaker, the social group and the script

Gertruth is a middle-aged woman, a wife and mother, who participates actively in her church congregation at Umbukul.[19] She is a leader in her own right, influencing and taking leading roles in her community, in women's groups, and in her nuclear and extended family. She was one of the thirty church members invited to participate in a series of seminars in which together we researched questions about social groupings, matters of import and how episodes of Mark could be engaged as scripts for speaking to these groups, addressing the matters that the script suggested.

Each research participant was given one episode on which to work. The activity that was assigned can be seen as an experiment in translational activity where the objective was not to achieve equivalence of meaning between an original and a source; rather, the objective was to use the script for speaking to a chosen social grouping in which it was felt that an important matter needed addressing. For the participants there were two phases of this translational activity: (1) they heard (rather than read)[20] the script and

[19] Seminars for carrying out part of the research were held in three separate congregations in the west Lovangai area. These were in Baungung, Umbukul and Angat.

[20] The seminar participants were given the script orally for two reasons: first, so that all members of the group would be on the same footing, regardless of their literacy proficiency; and secondly, because the common way for Lovangai church members to engage with matters of import is by talking about them, not by exchange of written texts—though this is also done in appropriate contexts.

reflected upon the matters it suggested to them in light of a specific social grouping; then, (2) they planned, prepared and delivered a discourse to their target group.

In practise sessions the discourses were delivered convincingly in the style of an encounter with the target group, but the participants were conscious of the social makeup of the seminar group. The fact that these discourses were composed and delivered by the research participants based on hearing and reflecting upon an episode means that their speaking is interpretive. That is, in composing and delivering her speech Gertruth makes an interpretive link between the episode and an actual, relevant issue within her target group. Gertruth was assigned Mark 12:41–44.

The episode in Mark 12:41–44 illustrates clearly the sharp distinction between the elite group of Jesus' companions and a poor woman, neither named nor addressed by Jesus. She is contrasted with the disciples in that she intuitively knows what true devotion is. Jesus in this episode directs the attention of the disciples to this example. The implication for them, in light of the way Jesus has repeatedly reprimanded them for being hard of learning, is that their devotion is being questioned. For the Græco-Roman reader-speaker, this episode was directed to the attention of (would be) leaders in the early Jesus movement, challenging them to recognize low-status people, and showing them that their focus on status was a deterrent to true devotion if they did not take a stance of service.

This interpretation of the text-script is not meant in any strict sense to be this author's understanding of the meaning of this passage. In the seminar no meaning was discussed with Gertruth. Rather, she was invited to interpret the script on her own, with the objective of finding how to speak to her target group. The reader of this article will perhaps be tempted to critique Gertruth's interpretation (below, in section 4.2) as to whether it matches the "intended authorial meaning" of the passage. We find it interesting that in our own interpretation we see the call of Jesus to the disciples to pay special attention to the widow as important ("He called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you…'" v. 43a), but Gertruth does not make any significant connection in her discourse to the disciples.

The target social group for Gertruth's discourse was to be her church congregation. Notwithstanding, Gertruth addressed her remarks ostensibly to one particular woman, a *tasi* of hers.[21] This *tasi* is on the fringes of the congregation and her nuclear community. She is economically destitute; her garden plots suffer from lack of strong male and female kin who can assist her. An important matter for this particular woman is that she compares herself with the congregation as one who is insignificant, of little value. She is ashamed that she does not have money to put into offering bowls on Sundays or to give at church fundraising events.

That the congregation is to have their attention directed toward the problem of poor members is evident from the fact that Gertruth chooses this topic to address in a mixed seminar group. If this really were a private matter, Gertruth would not choose to talk about it in a seminar setting in which other church members were fully participating. The matters surrounding poverty are very well known, and the identity of the woman is obvious to the rest of the seminar participants. Gertruth chooses to explicitly address only the low-status person and to leave any other persuasive goal implicit. Gertruth speaks to encourage her *tasi* to think of herself as the woman in the episode and to revel in Jesus' presence with her and approval of her.

4.2. The discourse

After her planning and preparation, Gertruth spoke to the seminar group, first formulating her motivation for speaking as follows:

> I am preparing myself to address a discourse to a *tasi* of mine, and I will take my speaking from the story of Jesus sitting watching the people arriving to come and give. I will address this discourse to a person whose life is like that woman. She is very poor and, even more fundamentally, she is ashamed about her giving because she views herself as insignificant.

[21] The term *tasi* names the kin relationship sibling of the same sex. The appellation is valid for extended family members where the parent of the *tasi* is a same-sex sibling (a *tasi*) of your parent; for example, the daughter of Gertruth's mother's sister is her *tasi*, as is the daughter of her father's brother.

Gertruth planned to point her *tasi*'s attention to the event of Jesus, the disciples and the woman. In the seminar it was not clear whether this was the beginning of her planned discourse. In any case, she described the event as follows:

> The story goes like this. Jesus is sitting watching the people arriving to come and give. And in the midst of his looking he sees with two kinds of seeing. He is seeing rich people and a poor woman. And so he is able to talk to his disciples about the difference between the gifts. These rich people are not giving in a good way at all because they are taking the first part from their large possession, from their wealth, and they do not give everything. And when he sees the poor woman he sees that from her lack she takes everything that she has in order to give.

Gertruth then pointed her *tasi*'s attention to what she considers to be the crucial matter:

> My *tasi*, you seem to consider yourself to be like this woman who is very poor. And this is causing you to be ashamed about giving because you are worried about what you can give.

She then pointed her attention to the condition of the woman's heart and to Jesus' recognition of that genuine devotion:

> Right here and now, Jesus is speaking. He is speaking to his disciples that this woman gave and she gave everything. But perhaps if you look carefully at this story you can recognize that Jesus is able to see that the heart of this woman was straight, it was good inside to the point that she would give everything with deep devotion; she did not hold back anything. And so Jesus is able to consider her to have given very much more than the others, those many rich people.

Gertruth continued by pointing her *tasi*'s attention to the strong implication that Jesus is present with her right at this moment of speaking:

> To help you as you also consider this matter of giving, do not think yourself insignificant. Because Jesus himself now is sitting here and he is looking. And he is able to recognize your heart—that you are giving everything with your heart when you have nothing, yet still you give.

The imagined action that the *tasi* has not yet done is held up to her as the desired action; that is, to be aware of Jesus' presence and support, and to give. Then Gertruth spoke directly to the practical problem of what her gifts should actually be, with a frank recognition of her lack of money:

> Money is not something you are able to give. There are some other things around with which God has made this world wealthy. You are able to give a bunch of betel or you could give sweet potato. Those are the kinds of gifts you are able to give. And so you must not focus on the fact that your condition is very bad, but recognize the things with which God has made this world wealthy. [Then you can give and be recognized] like Jesus is able to recognize [the genuine giving of] this poor woman.

4.3. Discussion

We have suggested that Gertruth's discourse be heard as implicitly addressing the whole congregation. Speaking in Gertruth's social context is rarely completely private. Though explicitly this discourse is directed to one person, what she says is likely to become known to others. We have noted that Gertruth does not make an explicit connection between the disciples in the script and any actual people in the congregation like she does with the poor widow. Earlier we noted also that speaking in groups entails negotiating what is appropriate respect in any given social setting. We want to suggest, therefore, that Gertruth composed and spoke this planned discourse to the seminar group with the congregation in mind. The public nature of speaking into a recording device and the fact that other seminar members are older church members and kin relations makes it inappropriate for Gertruth to explicate all that she interprets from the script. The disciples, presumably noticed by her as prominent in the episode, are not given explicit attention in her discourse.

If the woman in the script implies to her a poor, fringe congregation member, we may well ask who the disciples suggest to her. As a conscientious leader in her home place and congregation, Gertruth refrains from speaking to certain crucial matters that are sensitive. She cannot assume that her audience are not elders and senior church members or people who are known to be critical of poor people. She safely addresses her discourse, therefore, to a person of low status. In other words, the topics of gardening, giving

and receiving gifts, poverty and helping poorer people are all embedded in her remarks, known by experience to the potential church member who hears (or hears about) her speaking, but she leaves the implications of her discourse for the "elite" church members non-explicit. It is up to them to apply the persuasive force that there might be for them.

It is common among well-to-do people in this community to disparage people who are, in their estimation, not diligent in gardening. Stealthy garden thieving is a common topic of general public attention, but it is less common for those who denounce thievery to acknowledge how tempting theft is for people like Gertruth's *tasi*. There is a sad irony in this, since the shame of a poor, low-status person is made worse by the fact that her or his lack of real money to give at public giving times is also despised by those who give much. In this light, it appears that Gertruth may be probing deeper than the overt urging of her *tasi* to be encouraged by Jesus' support of her devotion to him; she may also tacitly be criticizing the wealthy, the "big ones," in the congregation who, by their attitude and treatment, make it doubly hard for people like this poor woman.

In her discourse, Gertruth directs her *tasi*'s attention to Jesus' basic, strong support of her in her position of poverty lived at the edge of the large group. Her speaking, if heard also by the other stratum of the congregation—as is typical in Lovangai group settings at the church congregation level—is also educating their attention to a desired change in attitude and action towards those who are "barely noticed here and there on the fringe."[22]

5. Conclusion

In this article we have considered the translational activity revolving around a passage of Mark as consisting both in the creation of a script and in the discourse that is the script's interpretation. The objective of composing and treating Mark 12:41–44 as a Lovangai script is not to effect comprehension of a message from a particular source. Rather, its design originates in the recognition of it being a literary construct for use by speakers who speak to the affairs and issues of social groupings. These groupings are typically heterogeneous as to membership and usually are found to be grappling with tensions between low-status people and (aspiring) leaders.

By identifying such a function, we are suggesting that there is a coherence created between Mark as originally designed, and translational activity carried out in local, Lovangai social settings. We are saying that the Græco-Roman social settings (plural!) and Lovangai social settings are more similar than is typically allowed. We would like to see Gertruth's initial attempt at reader-speaking from her script as being on a continuum with the speaking of our imagined Græco-Roman reader-speakers. Groupings of earliest hearers were not fully competent in cultural information. This is the same today in Lovangai social settings. Both are removed in time, space and culture from the speaking of Jesus as depicted in the narrative. There is now, as then, no original communication situation that is being replayed or represented. In both cases speakers are working with a script that constitutes a directive as to how to speak for effect in regards to matters that are considered important to the target social group. The success of the script, now, as then, lies in whether the interpreter-speaker knows what to do with it, and in whether there are listeners willing to participate and have their attention redirected, and thus (begin) to practise the action that the reader-speaker holds up to their attention. It may be time to reconsider the standard ideas that effect happens primarily in the realm of cognition and that reception happens best when a target text is processed as a representation of an informational exchange between an author and a particular audience.

[22] In another speech in the seminar, based on Mark 9:38–50, a reader-speaker described lower-status people like this *tasi* of Gertruth's as "*Ki po ago e ngising pulakai"* (They live barely noticed here and there on the fringe).

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