BILINGUALISM AND THE GREEK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:

SEMITIC INTERFERENCE IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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ABSTRACT

This essay concerns bilingualism and Semitic interference in the Greek of New Testament writings. A general survey is given of associated problems regarding the nature of New Testament Greek, and special attention is given to Semitic interference in the Gospel of Mark. It is argued that the cause of such interference should be explained in terms of bilingualism and not in terms of the use of sources or translation.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is an accepted fact that most of the writings in the New Testament originated in bilingual or multilingual communities, and that the native language of their authors was Aramaic, not Greek. In spite of differences of opinion concerning the original version of some of these writings, and the specific nature of 'New Testament Greek', there is good reason to argue that they were written in Koine (κοινή) Greek. There is, furthermore, general agreement that there are signs of Semitic interference in many of these documents. My contention is that the problem of Semitic interference in New Testament Greek should be re-examined, and that special attention should be paid to the phenomenon of bilingualism and the making of New Testament documents.

In spite of the complexities in terminology (see Abudarham 1987:2ff), Semitic interference and bilingualism will be used in this essay to refer to the phenomena of deviation from the norms of Greek in the New Testament, and New Testament writers' familiarity with more than one language (see Weinreich 1963:1; also Adler 1977:15ff). The term Semitic interference refers to the rearrangement of patterns of Greek which resulted from the introduction of Semitic elements into the phonetic, syntactic and semantic systems of Greek because of the contact between Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek-speaking Jews and Christians in the first century CE (see Weinreich 1963:1).

There is good reason to question some of the general presuppositions which prevail in New Testament scholarship, both with regard to the nature of 'New Testament Greek' and with regard to the making of New Testament documents. Since each of these problems can be treated on its own in a separate book, I will have to limit my discussion to aspects which are essential to my argument. In addition to a few observations concerning bilingualism and the use of Greek by Jews and Christians in the first century, I will also address the nature of New Testament Greek from the perspective of Semitic interference, and then discuss Semitic interference in the Gospel of Mark. I will argue that Mark's Gospel was written by a bilingual author whose native language was probably Aramaic and his second
language Greek. Semitic interference can therefore be ascribed to Mark's use of Greek and not to translation into Greek or the use of Aramaic or other sources.

2 SEMITIC INTERFERENCE, BILINGUALISM AND THE USE OF GREEK BY JEWS AND EARLY CHRISTIANS

A variety of explanations have been offered for Semitic interference in New Testament Greek over the years. Martin (1987:1) mentions the following: a. the use of Semitic sources; b. translation of entire documents originally written in a Semitic language; c. thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic, either because one of these languages was the vernacular or the author was under the influence of the Greek Old Testament; d. the imitation of the language and style of the Greek translations of the Old Testament. Little attention has, however, been paid to the fact that most of the writings in the New Testament originated from communities which were bilingual or multilingual.

Vergote (1938:cols 1366-1367), in his oft-quoted article, maintains that most peculiarities in New Testament Greek are Semitisms, resulting from the use of Greek by bilingual authors. The topic of bilingualism and the character of Palestinian Greek has also been dealt with in an article by Silva (1980; see also Brown 1989:133-134; and Mussies 1971), but it has not been taken seriously by New Testament scholars in general as a possible explanation for Semitic interference in New Testament Greek. There is good reason to do so, however.

Bilingualism is a very complex phenomenon which can be studied from different perspectives. It relates to many aspects of the use of two languages by individuals, as well as to the use of different languages by communities. That is why the phenomenon is studied by linguists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and geographers. From the point of view of New Testament studies, the sociolinguistic and ecological or (geographical) perspectives are perhaps the most important. Let us consider a few aspects of bilingualism with respect to the use of Greek in Palestine in the first century. Since it is possible that Mark's Gospel originated in Galilee, it is necessary to look at bilingualism from the perspective of Greek as a second language in Palestine.

Silva (1980:207) draws attention to the fact that the native language of a bilingual is not affected in the same way as his or her second language. This was also true of Aramaic and Hebrew as the mother tongue of Jews and Christians in the first century CE. Loan words and Greek semantic effects do exist in Aramaic, as Schüren (1979:52ff) and others have indicated. As far as syntax is concerned, however, there is undoubtedly no comparison between the amount of Semitic influence on Greek as a second language, and that of Greek on Aramaic or Hebrew as native languages in Palestine of the first century.

Bilingualism is furthermore influenced by sociological milieus (Silva 1980:207). The linguistic behaviour of the dominant group is different from that of the subordinate group. This is of special importance in the case of the Jews both in Palestine and elsewhere who, under the influence of Hellenism, had to acquire a knowledge of Greek to participate in trade and commerce, and communicate with the inhabitants of Hellenistic towns who did not speak Aramaic, as well as with the rulers and their agents in
Palestine and the Diaspora. According to Josephus (Ant 20:264), the Jews did not favour polyglots, but this does not mean that they did not learn Greek. He tells us:

I have also laboured strenuously to partake of the realm of Greek prose and poetry, after having gained a knowledge of Greek grammar, although the habitual use of my native tongue has prevented my attaining precision in pronunciation (Loeb translation by L H Feldman).

We also know that Jerusalem was a centre for the learning of Greek. It is even possible that Paul received his training in Greek during his youth in Jerusalem (see Mussies 1976:1054). It was nevertheless not the native language of the Jews. They were a marginal group in their own country and in the Diaspora with regard to the use of language, and the same also applies to the early Christians. The language of the dominant group had to be learned. How much Greek the Jews (and early Christians) knew, is however another matter (see Sevenster 1968).

It is difficult to determine the exact level of bilingualism of Jews and Christians in the first century. While Paul might have been thoroughly bilingual, Peter probably would have been able to speak, but not necessarily write Greek, if we take seriously the remark of Papias that John Mark was the ἐρμηνευτής of Peter (see Mussies 1976:1056). Depending on language competence and the level of bilingualism, the use of two languages by different individuals is not similar. A person who was thoroughly bilingual might, for instance, have used Aramaic and Greek words as compound signs and not as two signs with the same signifieds (see Weinreich 1963:9). Since ὁ λαός acquired the meaning of 'lake' (Sea of Galilee) in Palestine, a Jew such as Josephus might have regarded ἓλαζασσα and ἡ λαί as a compound sign with the same signified, and not as two signs. This would not have been the case with somebody who only had a speaking knowledge of the language. Josephus and Paul were probably exceptions in this regard:

Bilingualism plays an important part in the socialisation and assimilation of people. It can be seen in the language behaviour of children (see Adler 1977:3), but also in that of adults who are members of bilingual societies. This aspect of bilingualism was very important with regard to the spread of Christianity.

It is likely that the native language of Jesus and his disciples was Aramaic, and that they also spoke Greek. Jesus probably spoke to the centurion (Mt 8:5), to the Garasenes and the people of the Decapolis (Mk 3:8), the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:26), and Pilate in Greek. This would also probably have been the case with Peter and Cornelius (Ac 10), Paul's relative and the officer (Ac 23) and others such as the Hellenists who probably were Greek-speaking Jews (see Sevenster 1968:147-148). By speaking to people in their own language it was possible for Jesus and others to communicate their views and associate with people who did not speak Aramaic.

Although Greek remained their second language, it is probable that it was much more widespread among Jews and early Christians than 'the mere presence of some Greek schools and synagogues in Jerusalem might suggest' (Mussies 1976:1058). Schürer (1979:74) is probably wrong in asserting that 'it should not be proposed that the Greek language was itself current
among the common people of Palestine'. Palestine was far more Hellenised than Schürer seems to think. It was a fragmentised country in the first century, with many Hellenised towns and cities where the Jews did not form the majority and of necessity had to speak Greek. The 'Hellenistic' area included:

...the entire coastal strip from Raphia to Ptolemais, plus the land of the Decapolis, including the towns of Gédara (the 'Assyrian Athens'); Pella, Scythopolis, Gerasa...and Philadelphia. Moreover, number of Hellenistic towns were scattered over the remaining territory: Phasael, in Judea; Sepphoris and Tiberias, in Galilee; Caesarea-Phillipi and Bethsaida-Julias, in Batanea; Hesbon and a second Julias in Perea.

(Mussies 1976:1058)

Jesus was raised in Nazareth, which was close to Sepphoris, one of the major Greek-speaking cities of the period. His ministry was mainly in this Hellenised area, from which one can gather that he and his followers often had to communicate with people who did not speak Aramaic.

No less a scholar than Gustaf Dalman (1965:56-57), the well-known authority on the language situation in Palestine during the time of Jesus, maintains that the primitive church in Jerusalem was bilingual from the very start, and that the gospel sources could have been written in Greek from the beginning. This presupposes a situation where the man in the street could read and understand Greek. Sevenster (1968:190) has convincingly indicated that a knowledge of Greek was not restricted to the upper classes.

This point of view is corroborated by extant writings, including inscriptions on stone and graffiti, numismatic inscriptions, papyri, ostraca and parchments, books written in Hebrew or Aramaic and then translated into Greek, or works originally written in Greek which were probably written by bilingual Jews (see Mussies 1976:1042-1050). This does not deny the fact that the native language of the majority of the Jews in Palestine in the first century was Aramaic (see Fitzmyer 1970).

Since Christianity was originally a Jewish sect which had started in Palestine, the use of Semiticised Greek by early Christians is directly related to the use of Greek as a second language by Jews in the first century, and to the dispersion of the Jews. It is also related to the role of the synagogue in the spread of Christianity in the first century. In most of the larger cities such as Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome (to mention but a few), where the Christian message was initially spread, it was done among local Jews and through the synagogues.

Bilingualism is a phenomenon which has to be taken into account in any discussion of the use of Greek in the New Testament, because it was written by authors whose mother tongue could have been Aramaic or Hebrew. In the next section attention will be given to the nature of New Testament Greek.

3 THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK

The term 'New Testament Greek' is used in this essay to refer to the Greek we find in the writings of the New Testament. The Greek of the New Testament should not be seen as a dialect, nor as a special kind of Greek. As
a matter of fact, the type of Greek that we find in the New Testament is also the type of Greek that may be found in other documents of the day. It can therefore be characterised as Koine, that is the common language which developed when Greek became the lingua franca. Such a description is obviously too vague and has to be expanded upon.

One of the main problems in describing the nature and characteristics of 'New Testament Greek' is the fact that it has been compared to the Greek of a variety of Greek texts from different periods of time. Insights gained since Deissmann discovered agreements between the Greek in New Testament documents and the Greek in Egyptian papyri have taught us that it is necessary to compare the Greek of the New Testament with contemporary, comparable literature and not with other Greek texts of earlier or later periods (see Rydbeck 1967). If this is not done, unreliable evaluations are made.

The history of research into the nature of New Testament Greek is greatly burdened by prejudice, dogmatic beliefs and unattested assumptions (see the surveys of Friedrich 1974 and Meijer 1976). For some, the New Testament is written in pure classical Greek, while others believe that there was a Jewish Greek dialect and that the authors of New Testament documents wrote their works in Jewish Greek. Others, again, assert that the Greek of the New Testament has a unique character and even that it was written in 'Holy Ghost' Greek. The influence of the Septuagint on the Greek of the New Testament remains an open question, and so does the influence of Aramaic and Hebrew. Many of the discussions are blurred by the mixing of theological and linguistic arguments. We already find this in the remarks of Origen (Cels 1,62), according to whom some higher authority behind the words impressed the authors with what they had to say. And Photius (MPG 10,577-592) believed that God gave the authors the correct words, and that this changed fishermen and toll collectors into teachers who could be equated with philosophers. This obviously gave rise to the idea of a God-inspired language.

During the Renaissance and the Reformation there was renewed interest in the language of the New Testament. The 'Purists' believed that the Greek of the New Testament was pure classical Greek — despite the studies of the Humanists, who drew attention to Semitic interference. The Hebrewists, on the other hand, believed that the Greek of the New Testament was enriched with Hebrew elements by the Holy Spirit (see Meijer 1976:6). To some extent the 'Purist' and the 'Hebraist' views still dominate scholars' thinking today.

In the eighteenth century J G Hamman tried to indicate that the New Testament was written in the Greek of the man in the street (see Friedrich 1974:27). It was, however, the insights of Deissmann that really triggered off an intensive interest in the problems of New Testament Greek in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Deissmann was of the opinion that the Greek of the New Testament should be compared to the nonliterary sources of Egyptian papyri, ostraca and inscriptions. He furthermore believed that there were signs of Semitic interference in the Greek of the New Testament because the Greek which the Jews spoke was coloured by Semitic influences. He, however, rejected the idea that a special 'Bible Greek' or a 'Jewish Greek' dialect existed and maintained that the Greek of the New Testament belonged to the Koine (see Deissmann 1965). In this approach he was fol-
followed by scholars such as A Thumb and J H Moulton. Although the impact of Deissmann and those who held the same views decreased after their deaths, there are still scholars who defend the viewpoint that the Greek of the New Testament should be explained in the light of contemporary Greek texts, and not primarily in terms of the Semitic influence (see, e.g., Rydbeck 1967 and Reiser 1984).

On the other hand there are those who maintain that the Greek of the New Testament should first and foremost be described in terms of its Semitic background and characteristics. In the seventeenth century Kasper Wyss in his *Dialectologia Sacra*, and Johann Vorst in his *Hebraismis Novi Testamenti Commentarius*, drew attention to Semitic features in the Greek of the New Testament. It is, however, the influence of the works of scholars such as J Wellhausen, G Dalman and M Black which dominates research into Semitic interference in New Testament Greek today. Assumptions concerning the influence of the language of Jesus, the use of Aramaic sources, translations of sources or complete documents, the influence of the Septuagint and the existence of a special Jewish Greek dialect, all influence scholars in this regard.

In spite of differences of opinion, it is generally accepted that there is Semitic interference in the Greek of some of the writings of the New Testament — for example, in the teaching of Jesus.

It is accepted that the native language of Jesus was either Aramaic or Hebrew (see Barr 1970) and that his logia had to be translated into Greek for the sake of those who did not speak or understand Aramaic or Hebrew. In this manner Semitic elements, it is argued, were incorporated into the Jesus tradition.

It is, however, a mistake to view the logia of Jesus in terms of translation Greek similar to the Greek translations of the writings of the Old Testament. The logia of Jesus were translated into Greek and then transmitted orally in Greek. These Greek logia were included in writings which were written in Greek, and not in writings which had been translated from Semitic sources (see Barr 1969:127).

Another aspect of possible Semitic interference which needs to receive our attention here, is the so-called influence of the Septuagint on the Greek of the New Testament. Jellicoe (1969:199) asserts: 'He who would read the New Testament must know Koine; but he who would understand the New Testament must know the Septuagint.' When it comes to influence, however, one should be very careful not to oversimplify the matter.

In the first instance it is clear that there is no such thing as the Septuagint. The term refers to Greek translations of Old Testament writings which are anything but one translation by a single person. The translations of the different documents are quite diverse in character. Different techniques were applied, which resulted in translations that range from literal to free renderings. Interpretative comments are not absent and the quality is not consistent. A good example would be the Greek of Genesis, the Book of Ruth, and Jeremiah 25 and its following chapters.

Semitic interference in the Greek of the LXX is obvious and was caused by the translation of Hebrew and Aramaic into Greek. In other words, Semitic thoughts were translated into Greek. That explains the interference with regard to the semantics of words. The meaning of Greek words was in some cases extended, because they were used to convey Hebrew and Aramaic
meanings (see Silva 1983:53-73). But there are also clear indications of Semitic interference with respect to syntax (see Tabachovitz 1956).

It is also important to remember that these translations were read in Greek and not against the Hebrew texts. They were Greek texts, to be understood in Greek and not in comparison with the originals (see also Barr 1968). Greek words with Hebrew meanings became part of the Greek lexicon of the users of the Septuagint and this also happened with regard to Semitic interference in Greek syntax.

The influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament should be seen in terms of convention, and not in terms of direct influence or in terms of imitation. Because the Greek translations were used frequently, features of expression also became part of Greek usage by those who heard and read these translations. Greek with a Semitic influence became part of the language of these people. Unless there are direct signs of imitation, New Testament scholars should therefore think of the influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament in terms of convention.

There is no reason to doubt the importance of the Septuagint in Jewish or Christian religious circles. Quotations and allusions to the Septuagint in the New Testament witness to the fact that the authors of New Testament writings were acquainted with the Septuagint. And so do the similarities in semantics and syntax.

It should be underscored that the New Testament, including the Gospels, was written in Greek. Their authors produced Greek texts. They did not make translations. This clearly indicates the importance of the study of language usage, and not of the history of the development of the language of a particular document. It also stresses the importance of convention in language usage, and in particular the importance of bilingualism with regard to the Greek of the New Testament.

I do not accept the existence of a separate Jewish Greek dialect (see Hill 1967 and especially Büchsel 1944). The lingua franca of the Persian Empire was Aramaic. When it changed to Greek as a result of the victories of Alexander the Great, Jews and non-Jews had to use a new language. The remains of Aramaic elements in Greek are due to bilingualism and not to the existence of a separate dialect.

The New Testament documents were written in Koine which reflects Semitic interference due to bilingualism, the influence of the Septuagint on the ground of convention, and the influence of the transmission of the translated Jesus tradition. Let us now turn to Semitic interference in the Greek of the Gospel of Mark.

4 SEMITIC INTERFERENCE IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Until recently (see Reiser 1984:163) the use of Greek by the author of the Gospel of Mark was commonly described in negative terms such as 'volkstümlich, originell und ungekünstelt, drastisch und derb, stark aramaisierend' (Wellhausen as quoted by Reiser 1984:3) and regarded as translation Greek (Wellhausen and Lagrange, see Reiser 1984:3). C H Turner even asserted that: ‘His grammar, if (as I conjecture with other scholars) he was the son of the ΟΙΚΟΔΟΣΙΟΣ of Mark XIV 14, may reflect the rough but effective Greek of the inn and the stableyard...’ (as quoted by Reiser 1984:163). More recently it has been said: ‘On the one hand, it was felt that Mark’s style is unpretentious, verging on the vernacular; on the
other, that it is rich in Aramaisms' (N Turner 1976:11).

This kind of evaluation is partly the result of the influence of well-known scholars on the history of research into the problem of style in the Gospel of Mark, and the role of presuppositions in Markan research. This is not the place to give a complete survey of opinions on Semitic interference (see Maloney 1981:7–25), but rather to draw attention to presuppositions which play a role in this regard.

The history of research into the use of Greek by the author of the Gospel of Mark has been dominated by the two schools of thought mentioned above. Scholars such as Deissmann, Moulton and Thumb argued that most of the New Testament was written in vernacular Greek, that New Testament Greek belonged to the Koine language of the period and that, wherever there was a sign of Semitic interference, it was due to the influence of the Septuagint and direct translation from Semitic sources (for a discussion of these views see Maloney 1981:7–11).

In these circles it was contended that Mark wrote his Gospel in Greek. The form and level of Greek in which he wrote, however, had to be explained. Different attempts were made to explain the language usage in the Gospel of Mark with reference to the Greek of the first century. The argument was that the Greek evidence should first be examined before attempts are made to explain the Greek of Mark in the light of Aramaic (see Maloney 1981:13–23 and Reiser 1984:1–12).

Exponents of the 'Aramaic school', on the other hand, maintained that, because of the alleged underlying Semitic syntax, Mark was based on Aramaic sources which were either written or oral, or that Mark initially wrote his Gospel in Aramaic and then translated it into Greek (see Reiser 1984:4 and Maloney 1981:13–25). It was to a certain extent the latter point of view which dominated research into the use of Greek by Mark.

The presuppositions which play a role in the history of research with regard to Semitic interference in Mark are clear. It is generally agreed that there are very few so-called Septuagintisms in Mark. Semitic interference in Mark can therefore only be explained in terms of the use of Aramaic sources or the translation of the whole Gospel, or parts of it, from Aramaic into Greek, on the ground of the author's Semitising Greek, or because he used Aramaic syntax and Greek vocabulary (see Turner 1963:4 for the latter). We will return to these. To develop our thesis, it is necessary to give a short survey of what may be regarded as Semitic interference in the Gospel.

What are we talking about when we use the phrase 'Semitic interference' with reference to Mark? It will be neither possible, nor necessary to give a complete list of possible Septuagintisms in the Gospel, or even to discuss them. To develop our argument we will, however, have to pay attention to a number of items that are relevant to our argument in this section.

I have said that Semitic interference is related to the phonetic, semantic and syntactic structure of the language used in the Gospel. For our purpose, the focus will fall on the semantic and syntactic systems of the Gospel of Mark.

As to the semantic system, I will first give a few examples of loanwords from Aramaic and then a few examples of words which point to semantic change in the Greek lexicon. Mark, in other words, used these words with Semitic meanings as part of his lexicon.
The following Aramaic names occur in Mark's Gospel (see Rüger 1984): برアプリ (Mk 15:7, 11, 15); بابسلاي (Mk 3:18); بابسليا (Mk 10:46); بابسلي (Mk 3:22); بابسليا (Mk 6:45; 8:22); بابسليا (Mk 3:17); بابسلي (Mk 6:53); بابسليا (Mk 15:22); بابسلي (Mk 3:18); بابسليا (Mk 1:21; 2:1; 9:33). In addition he also uses the following loan-words from Aramaic: بابسليا (Mk 14:36); بابسليا (Mk 15:34); بابسليا (Mk 7:34); بابسليا (Mk 7:11); بابسليا (Mk 14:1, 12, 14, 16); بابسليا (Mk 10:51); بابسليا (Mk 1:21; 2:2, 23, 24; 3:2, 4; 16:2) and بابسليا (Mk 5:41). What is remarkable is that our author translated most of the loan-words and expressions into Greek for the sake of his readers. The implication is that he knew the Aramaic words and their translated equivalents in Greek.

He also used Greek words with Aramaic or Hebrew meanings or, to put it more correctly, words in which semantic changes had taken place. The following examples will illustrate the point: In Mark 3:20 أَرْطْوُسُ is used for the meaning food, a meaning which is directly related to the Aramaic *חִּכָּב* or *חָלָב* (same root in Hebrew). Wensinck maintains that *נָטַע* in the phrase *נֶטֶע* בָּלֶדָה בַּעֲלֹמָה in Mark 4:32 should be translated as 'produce' on the ground of Targum Onkelos Genesis 49:15 (see Black 1967:302). Black (1967:133) furthermore suggests that the meaning of *אָרֶץ* might correspond to that of *כָּבָד* ('country') in Aramaic, and *כָּבָד* ('patch') with a meaning of a Syriac word. Lastly, words such as *טֶהֶר* (see *טֶהֶר*), *טֶהֶר* (see *טֶהֶר*), *טֶהֶר* (see *טֶהֶר*) and *טֶהֶר* (see *טֶהֶר*), are used in Mark to signify meanings which overlap with meanings for which Aramaic and Hebrew words are used. These examples illustrate Semitic interference with regard to semantics on the word level. Let us now turn to Semitic interference with regard to syntax.

It has often been argued that Mark's syntax is affected by Semitic interference, and the following aspects have been mentioned in this respect (see Turner 1976:11-25): word order, including the position of the genitive, co-ordinating particles and the position of the verb in nominal as well as verbal sentences; parataxis; redundancy; pleonastic auxiliary; the abundance of the historic present; periphrastic tenses; the use of the article; pronouns; prepositions; the use of positive degree for the comparative and superlative and the use of the cardinal for the ordinal. It is remarkable that Semitic interference is not restricted to certain parts or particular kinds of material in Mark. It occurs in the narrative framework and elsewhere, which already suggests that it formed part of the language of the author.

One of the major problems is the difference of opinion between scholars concerning what should be regarded as Semitic interference and what not, and the presuppositions that play a role in this regard. Let us take a simple example.

Black (1967:55) argues that: 'Asyndeton is, on the whole, contrary to the spirit of Greek language'. He ascribes the many sentences or parts of sentences in Mark which are connected without conjunctions or other linking words to Semitic interference. Either Mark wrote 'Jewish Greek' or 'he is translating Aramaic sources or employing such translations' (see Black 1967:60). According to him, the four instances in Mark 13:6-9 are examples of translation Greek. The text reads as follows:
There is no doubt that there are many sentences and parts of sentences in Mark's Greek which are not linked by conjunctions (examples are listed in Maloney 1981:77) and Mark 13:6-9 is a good example. Are the asyndeta in these sentences caused by Semitic interference? And can one, in the case of Mark 13:6-9, really assert that it is due to translation Greek? With regard to the particular instance and Black's remarks about it, Reiser (1984:165) refers his readers to Herodotus Book 3:53,3, the Grammar of Kühner-Gerl, Menander and Greek novelists of the first century. He (see Reiser 1984:165-166) concludes:

Die Verwendung des Asyndetons in der Erzählung beweist geradezu, dass es sich beim Stil des Markusevangeliums um einen literarischen Stil handelt, der sich von der lebendigen, gesprochenen Sprache durchaus abhebt...

The views of Black and Reiser are not only in opposition, but contradictory. One will obviously have to take more into account than the fact that asyndeton occurs in both Semitic and Greek texts of the period in order to argue a case for or against Semitic interference in Mark 13. While Reiser argues his case on the fact that asyndeton is not unusual in Greek and that therefore there is no reason to assume Semitic interference in Mark 13, Black supposes both the use of sources and the possibility of translation Greek. The many hypotheses about the origin and growth of Mark 13 are well-known and Black might appeal to such arguments. He moreover presupposes the existence of 'Jewish Greek', something which is very doubtful. He also disregards the fact that Mark produced a Greek text. If one accepts Semitic interference in this regard, one will have to look for the cause in the use of language by Mark. Unless Mark had a copy of a text in which the sentences mentioned were joined asyndetically and he slavishly followed his Vorlage, there is no ground for Black's assertions.

Maloney's study is a thorough investigation of the syntax of Mark from the perspective of possible Semitic interference. He has convincingly argued that there are different aspects of Mark's use of Greek which seem to reflect Semitic interference. He provides a very useful summary of his results at the end of his book in the form of a list of the syntactical devices he investigated and his conclusions (see Maloney 1981:246-252). He explains his conclusions in terms of the causes of Semitic interference. In each case he indicates whether a syntactical feature is a Grecism or whether frequency is due to some sort of Semitic interference such as the Greek Old Testament, Hebraism, Aramaism, or Semitism. How the interferences came about is not explained in Maloney's book, and this is exactly the problem to be explained. How was Mark influenced in his use of Greek?

Reiser, on the other hand, attempted to show that, of the examples
given by scholars who explain the history of Mark's language from the standpoint of Semitic interference, most can also be explained in terms of the use of these features in Greek sources of the period. He made a thorough investigation of the position of the subject and predicate, parataxis with καὶ and asyndeta in Mark, and has convincingly shown that for each of these features there are parallels in contemporary Greek literature. He does not deny Semitic interference in the Gospel of Mark (see Reiser 1984:11), but maintains:

Der Eindruck des Semitischen an Syntax und Stil jedoch scheint vor allem bei jenen Forschern zu überwiegen, die sich mehr mit semitischen als mit griechischen Texten befasst haben und denen darum vieles semitisch vorkommt, was nicht semitisch zu sein braucht, und so manches als ungebräuchliches Griechisch, was dort zu allen Zeiten geläufig war.

There is general agreement concerning Semitic interference in the Greek of Mark, but it is important to note that there are great differences of opinion as to the extent and the cause of this interference.

I am of the opinion that there will not be any progress in the debate about possible Semitic interference in Mark's language if we continue the discussion in terms of either the Semitic or the Greek background of such features in semantics and syntax. What should be taken seriously, is the fact that scholars agree that there are features of Mark's Greek which reflect Semitic interference. In addition, we should start thinking in terms of the making of Mark's Gospel and not in terms of the growth of the material. Whoever the producer of the text might have been, he did not simply collect his material. He was neither a passive transmitter of tradition, nor a conservative redactor of transmitted material (see Vorster 1980). These concepts reveal the history of a century of scholarship based on a variety of presuppositions regarding the growth of material. They do not reflect any of the aspects involved in the making of a text or the positive use of language.

Our author produced a text of which the language reflects Semitic interference, and which we have to take seriously as something to be explained historically. In other words, both the making of the text and the author's use of language (as historical phenomena) have to be explained historically.

Two recent attempts at explaining the making of Mark are worth mentioning, although I do not necessarily subscribe to either. According to Mack (1988:322-323), Mark's Gospel was:

...not a pious transmission of revered tradition. It was composed at a desk in a scholar's study lined with texts and open to discourse with other intellectuals. In Mark's study were chains of miracle stories; collections of pronouncement stories...

Obviously, not many scholars trained in traditional historical criticism would agree to this. The point is, however, that Mack has taken the realities of text production in the first century seriously. Whether one agrees with the outcome of his reflection is not the point. The point is that Mack forces one to reflect on how the Gospel of Mark was made, not how it
evolved from tradition.

Botha, on the other hand, proposes that Mark was a producer of oral texts and that his Gospel reflects the end process of oral production. Mark dictated his text to somebody who wrote down his words (see Botha 1989:76–77). Again, Mark is taken seriously as the producer of a text and not as a conduit through which the stream of tradition flowed, or the (passive) exponent of a community out of which his text arose (see also Vorster 1980).

Both these proposals take seriously tradition and transmission of tradition. One need not accept the precise way in which these two authors worked out their positions. However, one has to take seriously the fact that Mark produces a text. My own viewpoint is that Mark made use of existing material which he not only arranged in the form of a story about Jesus, but also wrote down in his own words and in his own Greek.

Whether the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome (see Hengel 1984) or in Galilee (see Marxsen 1964:128), there is reason to assume that our author was bilingual. Jews in both places (see our discussion above and Lampe 1987) were bilingual (and in both places their Greek was probably influenced by their Semitic background) and so were the early Jewish Christians. We cannot say with certainty who our author was, but the fact that he was able to explain Aramaic expressions and words, and that there are signs of Semitic interference in his use of Greek, render it probable that he was a bilingual Jew who wrote to Greek-speaking readers.

Semitic interference in the Gospel of Mark was not caused by translation of original Aramaic documents, (whether his Gospel or assumed sources which our author might have used), by translation Greek or the influence of the Septuagint, or the fact that he used ‘Jewish Greek’. It was caused by the fact that our author was bilingual and that his second language was Greek. Both the fact that Greek was the second language of many early Christians, including our author, and the nature of ‘New Testament Greek’ make it necessary that we study the Greek of a document such as the Gospel of Mark from the perspective of bilingualism.

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