AOSIS

The performativity of 'defining' asides in the Fourth Gospel: A speech act perspective

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The article investigates the performative nature of asides that aim to define or specify something in the Fourth Gospel. Despite scholars exploring the prevalence and significance of asides in this Gospel, there has been limited attention given to studying or demonstrating the pragmatic and/or performative nature of these literary devices. The assertion is that asides are not mere literary embellishments, but carry a substantial performative role for the reader. This article seeks to address this gap in the study of Johannine asides. Employing a speech act interpretive approach, the article examines the nature and potential effects (i.e., the illocutionary and perlocutionary force) of these specific asides on the reader in the Fourth Gospel. While there is a general consensus that asides are not events and therefore do not advance the plot of the story, this contribution contends that asides play a crucial role in guiding the reader towards embracing or acting on the implied author's propositions as they engage with the narrative. The Fourth Gospel serves as an apt text to illustrate this literary phenomenon and is believed to be consistent with the Gospel's purpose as stated in 20:31.

Contribution: The article contributes to Johannine literary research by exploring and demonstrating how the implied author of the Fourth Gospel intentionally utilises various types of asides (in this case, asides that function to define or specify something) to invite the reader's participation as they read the Gospel.

Keywords: Fourth Gospel; asides; performative; speech act theory; literary analysis; pragmatics.

Introduction

The Gospel of John, also known as the Fourth Gospel, is notably explicit in stating its purpose compared to the other Gospels in the New Testament canonical writings. In 20:31, the implied author explicitly mentions that this Gospel was written so that the reader[1] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by/through believing they may have life in his name. Based on this stated purpose, the Gospel has been described as performative in nature *and intent* (Van der Watt 2007:10; cf. Hobyane 2023:7–8). The essence of its performativity lies in the fact that the implied author crafted the text with the aim of inviting the reader's participation. This article explores how this Gospel has been written so that it achieves its purpose in the life of the reader. It hypothesises, based on the reading of the text, that the implied author of the Fourth Gospel employs various literary devices, such as asides, to engage the reader's participation as they read it. While Johannine scholars have previously examined the existence, significance, and role of asides as literary devices in the Fourth Gospel, offering valuable insights (cf. Tilborg 1989:29), to my knowledge, no scholar has approached the literary devices of the Fourth Gospel from a speech act interpretive angle to explore their performativity.

This article contributes to the researcher's broader project, which seeks to explore the performative nature of various types of asides in the Fourth Gospel. It offers a focused literary analysis of the 'asides that function to define or explain something' within the context of the Fourth Gospel. The primary goal is to explore and/or demonstrate the performative nature and/or function of these specific asides[2] for the reader. In his effort to delineate asides, Thatcher (1994:430) asserts that 'an aside is a direct statement that tells the reader something' about the subject the narrator is addressing in the narrative. Expanding on this, Thatcher (1994) advances that:

1. In this article, the term 'reader' exclusively refers to the 'implied reader'. Consequently, the study will refrain from repeating the adjective 'implied' each time it alludes to the reader. According to Van der Watt (2009:88; cf. Jeong 2018:18–19), an implied reader can be defined as the inner-textual (personified) construction that systematically discovers what the implied author presents as the story unfolds to the end.

2. Thatcher (1994) lists four types of asides identified in the Fourth Gospel, namely, asides that function to stage the event, asides that function to define or specify something, asides that function to explain discourse, and asides that function to explain action.

Asides are never observable events, but are interpretive commentary on observable events, commentary that reveals information 'below the surface' of the action. Consequently, it can be posited that asides serve a specific rhetorical purpose in the narrative. (p. 430)

Rather than focusing solely on the occurrence and classification of this literary device (cf. Tenney 1960:351), the article seeks to move beyond these aspects and address a broader question: How do asides, employed to define or explain elements in the Fourth Gospel, fulfil their performative role?

The central concern here is to demonstrate how the narrator of the Fourth Gospel effectively engages, guides, and persuades the reader to adopt the author's perspective or theological stance through the use of asides. The article posits that the level of engagement created by the asides compels the reader to seriously contemplate the narrator's propositions (as presented by the implied author) while reading the text. The article notes that this is precisely the author's intention with the Gospel, as mentioned in 20:30–31.

Approach of analysis

Given that the article aims to explore the performative and/ or pragmatic nature of a literary device, the speech act interpretive angle will be the primary analytical framework. Tovey (1997:70) says:

Speech act theory is the name given to a type of inquiry brought into focus by the work of J.L. Austin in his 1975 William James lectures at Harvard, and later published as *How to do things with words*. (cf. Hobyane 2024:109)

The rationale behind this methodological choice is to demonstrate that traditional exegetical methods can be complemented by modern critical literary approaches to expound the meaning of the text. Botha (2009:486) defines speech act theory as 'a theory of language use and its impact on the reader' (cf. Adams 2006:18–22). Elaborating on this, Botha (2009:486) emphasises that:

[S]peech act theory developed and found its niche in the field of pragmatics; and biblical scholars, looking at a variety of literary theories to supplement their exegetical programmes, turned their attention to speech act theory as well. In the arena of pragmatics, speech act theory is a very useful tool to enable interpreters to focus on the performative aspects of a language. (cf. Briggs 2001:3; Van der Watt 2010:145)

It is precisely from this assertion that this article discerns an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the study of the performative nature of this particular aside in the Fourth Gospel. Thus, employing this methodology appears fitting for exploring the potential pragmatic effects of asides that delineate or specify elements within the Fourth Gospel.

For the sake of clarity, the exploration of the text and the use of the speech act theory is limited to analysing utterances (asides) and their possible pragmatic effects on the reader.

The analysis is conducted on two levels. Firstly, the focus is on exploring the *illocutionary acts*, such as informatives, directives, expressives, assertives, commissives, and so forth (cf. Searle 1979:1, 8–9, 12–16). On this level, the probable intention of the narrator's speech act is considered. Secondly, the article proceeds to investigate the *perlocutionary acts* of a speech act (cf. Searle & Vanderveken 1985:11–12). This stage of exploration entails examining the pragmatic effects of an illocutionary force on the reader (Austin [1962] 1975:108; cf. Botha 2009:487–488; Hobyane 2023:8–13; Pratt 1977:80–88; Thiselton 1992:298; Tovey 1997:72).

The outlined analytical framework is intended to guide this article towards achieving its set goal, which is to demonstrate the pragmatic and/or performative function of asides that define or specify something in the Fourth Gospel. This article acknowledges the fact that there are many occurrences of these types of asides in the Fourth Gospel. Therefore, for practical purposes, the current exploration will be demonstrated using examples from 19:13 and 17 (defining asides), 5:5 and 9:1 (preliminary character labels), 7:50, 19:39; 19:38 and 6:71 (first alluded to in 6:64), 12:4, and 13:2 (reminiscent character labels).

Analysis of defining asides in 19:13

In the broader structure of the Fourth Gospel, the aside under investigation here falls within the narration of Jesus' death (preceded by his trial), resurrection, and appearance (chapters 18–20). Thatcher (1994:432) insightfully observes that such asides within this category may involve translations from Aramaic to Greek or vice versa. He further suggests that many of these asides clarify the Greek interpretation of Hebrew (Aramaic) terms, while a few move from Greek to Hebrew (as seen in 19:13 and 17).

This article notes that the primary purpose of these asides is to indicate the narrator's awareness that the reader may not comprehend the utterance or the meaning of a particular word, thus necessitating the inclusion of translations. Illustrative instances of such asides include 19:13. The text reports this aside as follows:

ὁ οὖν Πιλᾶτος ἀκούσας τῶν λόγων τούτων ἤγαγεν ἔξω τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐπὶ βήματος εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Λιθόστρωτον, Ἑβραϊστὶ δὲ Γαββαθα [*When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgement seat in a place called the Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha*].

As highlighted earlier in the text, the context in which this aside is uttered is during Jesus' trial before Pilate. After enduring intense pressure from the Jewish religious leaders, Pilate ultimately relinquishes Jesus to be crucified. This decision is made while Pilate is seated on a judgement seat at a location referred to as the 'Stone Pavement', known in Aramaic as *Gabbatha*.

The utterance is primarily the narrator's report about Pilate's decision to hand Jesus over to the Jewish opponents during the trial. In this sense, the narrator provides information

about Pilate's final actions and/or decision during the trial. Therefore, the utterance can be classified under informative speech acts. The narrator's clear intention is to inform and enlighten the reader, ensuring comprehension despite potential language barriers. In this instance, the narrator offers an alternative means for the reader to comprehend what was mentioned at the Stone Pavement. It is presumed that the first readers of the Gospel were familiar with the alternative language, namely Aramaic. While acknowledging the Greco-Roman setting of these writings where Greek was predominant, it is important to note that Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin were also languages in use among certain individuals in that cultural milieu.

Hence, to ensure comprehension among the original readers and contemporary readers, the narrator takes the step of translating the word. Such translations underscore the inclusive and educative intent on the part of the narrator, aiming to guarantee that everyone in the narrative world understands the conveyed meaning. As for the reader, these translations offer information and clarification in a simplified manner, providing broader accessibility to understand the text. Regarding the translation of the term 'Judgement seat', rendered as 'Gabbatha', Keener (1993:311; cf. Barrett 1978:544; Jamieson, Fausset and Brown 1997:165; Lindars 1972:570) adds that:

> Some commentators have thought that the 'Stone Pavement' is the pavement in the fortress Antonia on the temple mount, but that pavement seems to date from a later period. Instead, the text undoubtedly refers to the raised, outdoor paved area near Herod's palace, where the governor resided. Both Pilate and a later governor are known to have addressed audiences from this platform. Evidence suggests that the governor had to pronounce death sentences from the judgment seat. (see comment on Rm 14:10–12)

It is evident that the narrator's aim is to ensure that the reader fully grasps the significance of the location mentioned in the story. Although the narrator may have provided a translation or explanation of the term 'Gabbatha' to the original readers, this word remains unfamiliar to individuals who do not speak Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, including contemporary readers of the Fourth Gospel. In this instance, the informative speech act (noted as an aside) does not directly offer a definitive meaning and significance of the location. However, the perlocutionary force of the established informative speech act has the potential to challenge and compel the reader to seek the meaning elsewhere. In this way, this aside can be considered performative as it prompts the reader to consult additional sources in order to acquire further information that will aid in their understanding of the text and its potential implications.

Through further reading or research on the meaning of the word, the reader will discover that the Stone Pavement is associated with a place of judgement and the pronouncement of death sentences. Notably, this is the exact situation Jesus is facing in that moment. On the one hand, the irony created by this aside surrounding the Stone Pavement is too significant to overlook. Pilate, who sits on the Stone Pavement and passes judgement, is not the true Judge and should actually be judged for not believing in the Son of God. On the other hand, Jesus, the one being judged, should be the one sitting on the Stone Pavement and passing judgement upon those who accused, rejected, and killed the innocent Son of God. The irony persuades the reader to view Jesus as the real judge instead of Pilate.

Analysis of defining asides in 19:17

Similar to the previously discussed aside, the utterance under examination occurs within the narrative of Jesus' death, resurrection, and appearances (chapters 18–20). The narrator presents it as follows:

> καὶ βαστάζων ἑαυτῷ τὸν σταυρὸν ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον Κρανίου Τόπον, ὃ λέγεται Ἑβραϊστὶ Γολγοθα [*and he went out, bearing the cross for himself, unto the place called The place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha*].

This utterance serves as information provided to the reader by the narrator, reporting on Jesus' crucifixion. Crucial for this exploration is the narrator's description of the place of crucifixion, referred to as the place of the skull, known as Golgotha in Hebrew. As the narrator is merely imparting information to the reader, the utterance can be categorised as an informative speech act. As noted, the utterance is a means of sharing information, with the narrator's intention being to enlighten the reader regarding the place of Jesus' crucifixion. While the primary intention is information-sharing, the perlocutionary force of the speech act extends beyond mere dissemination of facts.

Despite the narrator's effort to provide additional information or define the place of crucifixion, it is observed that the informative speech act does not fully resolve the issue in terms of the meaning and significance of the place described. Consequently, the speech act is deemed to have the potential to create suspense for the reader, prompting them not only to pause and reflect on the current text, but also to seek additional sources for its meaning and significance (cf. Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:169). Through further research, the reader will discover that this particular place is associated with pain[3] and death, as Jesus is brought there to be crucified. Thus, it can be argued that the defining aside in this case is formulated and presented in such a way as to invite the reader's engagement with the text. It challenges the reader to seek greater clarity, information, and significance regarding the 'place of Skull, called Golgotha'.

Analysis of preliminary character labelling asides

This section, as highlighted in the introduction, focuses on discussing the performative nature of preliminary character

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3.Jamieson et al. (1997:165) point out that 'On arriving at the place, 'they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall [*wine mingled with myrrh, Mk 15:23*], and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink' (Mt 27:34). He further indicates that this potion was stupefying, and given to criminals just before execution, to deaden the sense of pain.

labelling asides in the Fourth Gospel. Regarding these asides, Thatcher (1994) explains:

> Preliminary character labelling asides function to establish identity or personal qualities, pointing out the significance of an individual or explaining his or her behaviour in the narrative. (p. 432)

Upon examining the text of the Fourth Gospel, it becomes evident that these asides are pervasive. How do they play their performative role?

Analysis of defining asides in 5:5

Chapter 5 of the Fourth Gospel is situated within the section that recounts Jesus' public ministry in the broader structure of the book, spanning from 1:19 to 12:50 (Van der Watt 2007:12). The narrative under examination pertains to the healing at the pool of Bethesda. Attention is drawn specifically here to the description of the recipient of this healing. The text reports it as follows:

> ἦν δέ τις ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ τριάκοντα [καὶ] ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἔχων ἐν τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ αὐτοῦ [*Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years*].

The utterance is the narrator's report to the reader. It provides information about the man who has been sick for 38 years. The narrator aims to ensure that the reader is aware of the duration of the man's illness. Therefore, the utterance can be classified as an *informative* speech act, as the narrator is conveying information to the reader regarding the sick man's condition. The intention behind this *informative* speech is to specify the number of years that the man had been in this state of infirmity. Hutcheson (1972) observes that:

> [… *I*]t is not declared who *this man was*, for those whom Christ cures are best known by their misery and his mercy, nor yet what his particular disease was, though it seems it has been sore and kept him lying (italics added). (p. 74)

What could be the possible pragmatic effect of this specification on the reader? Although categorised as informative, this speech act is recognised for its non-neutral performative intent. The initial observation revolves around the prolonged duration or numerous years during which the man has endured this infirmity. This information seeks to communicate to the reader that this informative speech act is not neutral in its performative intent. Apart from potentially inviting the reader to sympathise with the sick man, the mention of the number of years here has the potential to intensify feelings of hopelessness and suspense in the reader's mind (cf. Brown 1975:207). The aside prompts the reader to wonder whether the sick man will be healed or not. Will Jesus be able to cure him after 38 years of suffering? While, on one hand, this aside specifies the duration of the man's infirmity, on the other hand, it functions to create suspense for the reader.

By introducing information about the man's prolonged illness without immediately revealing the outcome, the Gospel creates a sense of anticipation and curiosity in the reader.[4] This narrative technique compels the reader to continue reading the text and to remain focused on Jesus' upcoming actions. As the reader continues to engage with the narrative, suspense builds, and they become eager to discover the man's fate. When Jesus eventually heals the man, it not only demonstrates his power over sickness but also provides a satisfying resolution to the suspense created by the initial information. This resolution plays a significant role in solidifying or enhancing the reader's relationship with Jesus. This resolution aligns with the intended goal of the implied author of the Fourth Gospel, as indicated in 20:31.

Regarding Jesus' activity of healing the sick, Köstenberger (2013:78) highlights the fact that, 'as in the cases of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the royal official, John shows Jesus' concern for an individual' by healing this man. These acts of Jesus are narrated in such a way that they are clear and engaging to the reader, persuading them to believe in Jesus and/or strengthening their faith in him.

Analysis of defining asides in 9:1

The story of the healing of the man born blind forms part of Jesus' public ministry and is used to demonstrate the performative nature of defining asides. The utterance within which the aside is made forms part of the introductory statement to the story. The narrative begins with this report in 9:1:

> Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς [*And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth*].

The utterance primarily serves as a report given to the reader concerning Jesus' encounter with a blind man. The narrator explicitly states that this blind man had been blind from birth. In the first place, the utterance can be categorised as an informative speech act, as the narrator is simply providing information to the reader about Jesus' encounter with a man born blind. The possible intention of this speech act is to equip the reader with the necessary information to understand as the story unfolds.

It is notable that the narrator does not disclose the age of the man to the reader. However, based on the details provided about him, it can be inferred that he was of an age where he could respond independently, as indicated by the man's parents in 9:21.

In the second place, while the established speech act is informative, its perlocutionary force extends beyond mere dissemination of information. The explicit mention of the man's blindness since birth has the potential to instil a confident expectation in the reader's mind. By this point, readers of the Fourth Gospel have already witnessed miraculous signs performed by Jesus, including the recent one (in terms of the Gospel's narrative structure) at Bethesda

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4.Lindars (1972:214) points out that the circumstantial detail, which John may have found in his source, makes the subsequent healing seem more remarkable (and to modern minds less credible).

(5:1–15). Jesus has unequivocally demonstrated his power to the reader, affirming his divine origin (1:3), despite persistent disbelief and persecution from Jewish opponents (5:16). However, readers perceive these asides with great encouragement and confidence in the works of Christ.

In this way, the aside actively engages the reader and persuades them to place their trust in Christ, regardless of the nature of blindness reported in the text. The aside is performative in that it can evoke confident anticipation of Jesus' healing power in the reader's mind.

Analysis of reminiscent character labelling asides

This section focuses on the analysis of reminiscent character labelling asides and their performative nature in the Fourth Gospel. Asides employing reminiscent character labelling are frequently utilised to remind the reader about a particular individual in the narrative. They reintroduce characters who have already appeared and serve to remind the reader about the person and their story that has already been told (Thatcher 1994:432). As indicated earlier, the analysis of these asides will be conducted on the characters of Nicodemus (7:50 and 19:39), Joseph of Arimathea (19:38), and Judas Iscariot (6:71).

Analysis of reminiscent character labelling asides in 7:50 and 19:39

The Fourth Gospel first introduces Nicodemus in 3:1, depicting his visit to Jesus. He is portrayed as a prominent leader among the Jews and a teacher of Israel, who approached Jesus under the cover of night (cf. Schnackenburg 1968:366). Nicodemus reappears in the Gospel in 7:50 and 19:39. On both occasions, the narrator emphasises that:

ὁ ἐλθὼν πρὸς αὐτὸν [τὸ] πρότερον, εἷς ὢν ἐξ αὐτῶν· [*the one who came to him* [*Jesus*] *by night being one of them*].

On both occasions, the utterances are the narrator's reports, firstly during the attempt to arrest Jesus and secondly during Jesus' burial. The article posits that both utterances are informative speech acts performed with the possible intention of empowering the reader with information regarding Nicodemus' presence in the mentioned two occasions. Additionally, the study notes that besides serving the purpose of specifying something or someone (informative), from a performative standpoint (perlocutionary force), the asides primarily function to jog the reader's memory about the narrative involving Nicodemus. The narrator aims to assist the reader in making the necessary connections while reading the story. In this context, the aside appeals to the reader to recall pertinent details. As the plot unfolds, the asides provide the narrator with the opportunity to guide the reader back to the beginning of the Gospel's narrative. Furthermore, through an aside, the narrator subtly suggests a potential positive development in the character of Nicodemus. In 7:51, Nicodemus defends Jesus against the Jewish opponents in broad daylight, contrary to his night

visit in Chapter 3. When commenting on Nicodemus' defence of Jesus, Bruce (1983) says:

> [T]he rule to which Nicodemus appealed is formulated thus in rabbinic literature: 'flesh and blood may pass judgement on a man if it hears his words; if it does not hear them, it cannot establish its judgement'. (p. 186)

Considering these details, the perlocutionary force of the aside and/or utterance has the potential to prompt the reader to contemplate whether Nicodemus has truly accepted Jesus, or if he is merely urging his associates to adhere to their rabbinic law. Whatever the case may be, it can be argued that the reporting technique effectively encourages the reader to recall the story of Nicodemus and all that it teaches in the Fourth Gospel.

In 19:39,[5] Nicodemus is reintroduced during Jesus' burial, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, a gesture of considerable value, and actively participating in the burial of Jesus' body. Morris (1971:826; cf. Tasker 1999:220) encapsulates his observation of Nicodemus' involvement by stating, 'these men gave Jesus [*a*] decent burial according to the Jewish custom'. He who previously approached Jesus at night out of fear, given his status as a leader of the Jews, now appears to fearlessly engage in the ministry of Jesus during the day. Moloney (2005:206; cf. Köstenberger 2013:92) reflects that:

> [H]is [*Nicodemus*] question to his colleagues suggests that no judgement can be pronounced against Jesus unless his word first be heard and his signs and works be recognized for what they are. (p. 206)

Could these asides (7:50 and 19:39) be an implicit way of letting the reader know about the possible change in the life of Nicodemus? (cf. Moloney 2005:206).

This study asserts that, either way, the asides are performative in nature, challenging the reader to fill in the gaps concerning this particular character in the story. With minimal narrative information provided, these utterances carry a perlocutionary force that can encourage readers to connect the dots and infer the development of this character throughout the story.

Analysis of reminiscent character labelling asides in 19:38

This sub-section focuses on the utterance in 19:38, which introduces Joseph of Arimathea as another participant in Jesus' burial.[6] The narrator introduces him as follows:

5.Morris (1971:825) observes that 'the other Evangelists speak of Joseph's part in the burial, but they do not mention Nicodemus'.

6.Barrett (1978:559; cf. Lindars 1972:591–592) notes, 'Joseph was not previously mentioned in John', but suggests that 'John has drawn this from Mark 15:43, although Mark does not say that he was a disciple, though John may have taken him to mean this'. However, Keener (2003) adds, 'Although Brown is convinced that Jesus was buried and believes that Joseph played a role in this, he doubts that Joseph was a disciple, supposing that this is why the women did cooperate with him in the burial; but we may well question to what degree the women would have trusted a Sanhedrist they did not know at that point in any case. The preservation of his name and other details may suggest that Joseph either followed Jesus at this time (as we think more likely) or as Brown think, became a disciple later' (cf. Brown 1994:1218).

Ἰωσὴφ [ὁ] ἀπὸ Ἀριμαθαίας, ὢν μαθητὴς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεκρυμμένος διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων [*Joseph of Arimathea being the disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he feared the Jews*].

This utterance primarily serves as informative speech, providing the reader with details about Joseph of Arimathea's involvement in Jesus' burial. The narrator reports Joseph's request for Jesus' body from Pilate and mentions Joseph's status as a disciple of Jesus. The utterance is primarily an informative speech act aimed at providing the reader with information that Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. Keener (2003) accurately notes that:

> Apart from specifying his discipleship, John provides such a little introduction to Joseph of Arimathea that it sounds as if his audience is already familiar with this character, probably from the early passion traditions. (p. 1158)

A crucial aspect of this analysis is the aside added to Joseph's name, which informs the reader that he was a disciple of Jesus (a follower and/or believer in Christ, but not necessarily part of the twelve), albeit secretly, because of his fear of the Jewish opponents (cf. Hakola 2005:73; Wallace 2004:298–299). This detail reveals that the reason for the reader's previous lack of knowledge about this disciple is his fear of the Jewish opponents, thus defining his character for the reader. From a performative standpoint, upon learning about Joseph's introduction as a disciple of Jesus, especially with the aside 'διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων' [*because he feared the Jews*], the reader would be pleasantly surprised to witness Joseph now openly engaging as a follower of Jesus without fear. The narrative of him approaching Pilate to request the burial of Jesus becomes a transformative and perception-altering moment. Keener (2003) remarks:

> The narrative also presents Joseph's current act as a positive model for discipleship, for, in coming forward to seek Jesus' body, Joseph ceases to be merely a 'secret' disciple. Joseph's coming forward is significant in securing Jesus' burial. (p. 1160)

As observed, the aside has the potential to evoke courage from readers who believe in Jesus. The article praises Joseph's actions as courageous and caring. Therefore, the aside holds the potential to inspire readers to be public confessing followers of Jesus, without fear. It empowers believing readers, urging them to overcome any apprehension and boldly profess their faith in Jesus.

Analysis of reminiscent character labelling asides in 6:71

Finally, the article shifts its focus to the last character considered under this category of asides: Judas Iscariot. Lindars (1972:276; cf. Harris 2015:147) provides insight into this character in the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that:

> [… O]nly John tells us his father's name. The name Iscariot is taken by most scholars to a Hebrew phrase, 'man of Kerioth' (a place in southern Judea about 15 miles west of Masada, Jer. 48:24; Am. 2:2). The latter MSS take Iscariot with Judas (reading accusative instead of genitive). If this were right, the name could be descriptive, equivalent to *sicarius* ('assassin'), the most fanatical sect of Jewish nationalists at this time (Acts 21:38; but this view has been largely abandoned among scholars today. It is a normal style to designate a man by either his father's name or his hometown or both. (p. 276)

The narrator introduces him in 6:71 as follows,

ἔλεγεν δὲ τὸν Ἰούδαν Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου· οὗτος γὰρ ἔμελλεν παραδιδόναι αὐτόν, εἷς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα [*He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray him being one of the twelve*].

The article also points out that this character was first alluded to in 6:64 and later in 12:4 and 13:2. In all these occurrences or utterances, the narrator defines him with the phrase 'παραδιδόναι' [*to betray or the one who will betray*], which literally means 'to deliver up' or 'to hand over'.

Regarding the utterance in 6:71 (the same observation applies to 6:64, 21:4, and 13:2), the study notes that the narrator is providing information to the reader about the character, Judas. Therefore, the speech act employed is primarily informative. The possible intention behind this speech act is to assist the reader in gaining a deeper understanding of Judas Iscariot's character and conduct.

It seems logical to argue that the narrator has consistently applied this label to Judas throughout the Fourth Gospel. Consequently, the narrator's report of Judas leaving the upper room (13:30), and the subsequent events of Jesus' arrest in 18:1–11 (particularly 18:2–3), do not come as a surprise to the reader. It is expected that Judas leads the detachment of troops and officers dispatched by the chief priests and Pharisees to apprehend Jesus. The narrator has taken the time to prepare the reader for Judas' actions in the story (cf. Kanagaraj 2005:227).

As the betrayal story unfolds, the informative speech act noted earlier carries a perlocutionary force that invites the reader to witness the fulfilment of Jesus' predictions about Judas without surprises. The reader has already been prepared for this revelation. What is even more encouraging for the reader is the narrator's mention that Jesus knew all things that would come upon him (18:4). Despite Judas' actions and the label of betrayal attributed to him, Jesus is portrayed as maintaining total control of the situation. This portrayal serves as reassurance to the reader. The unfolding of Judas' story as 'the betrayer' is performative in the sense that it is not solely a negative story for the reader. Instead, it serves to draw the reader closer to Jesus, who remains unshaken by the events and continues to demonstrate his power (18:6). The more the name of Judas (and what it represents) is mentioned, the more the readers may feel inclined to distance themselves from it. This vilification serves to draw the reader to Jesus and is judged as in accordance with the purpose of the Gospel as stated in 20:31.

Summary of findings and conclusion

The goal of this article was to examine the use of asides in the Fourth Gospel, which serve to define or specify something or someone. The primary focus was to illustrate the performative nature of these asides, showing how they actively engage the reader of the Gospel and ultimately influence their decisions about Christ as they read the story. The investigation revolved around three sub-categories of asides that seek to define, namely *translation asides*, *labelling asides*, and *reminiscent labelling asides*.

The first analysis focused on the asides that provide translations in 19:13 and 17. It was observed that these asides, which specify something by offering a translation, are performative in nature. They indicate that the narrator is aware of the reader and aims to provide them with relevant knowledge about what is being reported. However, it was also noted that for modern Bible readers and interpreters who do not speak Greek/Hebrew (or Aramaic), these asides can present a challenge, prompting them to seek additional information about the translated word. It is incumbent upon the reader and interpreter of the text to take it upon themselves to do so to gain a comprehensive understanding of the text.

The study examined the use of asides that specifically identify or label characters in the text (referred to as preliminary character labelling or definition). The examples selected for analysis were drawn from 5:5 and 9:1. The narratives of a man who endured infirmity for 38 years and a man who was born blind were scrutinised to glean insights into the essence of their performativity. Despite the seemingly insurmountable circumstances presented in these asides (such as enduring 38 years of infirmity or being blind from birth), the analysis revealed that readers approached these instances with great encouragement and confidence in the transformative actions of Christ. Through the healing of these individuals, the text effectively persuades the reader to place their trust in Christ. The unbelieving reader is invited to believe in Christ, while the believing reader's faith is further encouraged and strengthened.

In the category of reminiscent character labelling, the asides were characterised as performative, serving the purpose of reminding and updating the reader on the development of a character in the story, such as Nicodemus in 7:51 and 19:39. Furthermore, the examination of defining asides plays a crucial role in introducing a character with either a positive narrative (Joseph of Arimathea) in 19:38 or a negative one (Judas Iscariot) in 6:71.

While the asides with a positive narrative can be encouraging to the reader, the study observed that Johannine asides with a negative story were employed to prevent surprises. They are used to affirm the behaviour of a character in the story, as seen with Judas Iscariot, while at the same time elevating the deeds and power of Jesus Christ. This performative dynamic was viewed as consistent with the overall purpose of the Fourth Gospel, as stated in 20:31.

The study acknowledges the fact that the few occurrences of asides discussed here are just a limited selection from the Fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, they were carefully examined to effectively demonstrate the performative nature of asides that serve to specify or define something.

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