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Caesarea Philippi and Mark 8:27–35 as a Turning Point in the Discovery and Revelation of the Identity of Jesus Christ: Historical Linguistics Analysis

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Abstract

The focus of the Gospel of Mark is the unveiling of the identity of Jesus Christ through reported events, space, people, and discourses which allow readers to discover his comprehensive identity. Mark 8:27–35 exemplifies this unveiling, as Mark guides his readers to the discovery of the identity of Christ. The question that guides this study is the following: why is the revelation of Jesus as Christ in the Gospel of Mark situated in his journey towards the landscape of Caesarea Philippi rather than in the landscape of his hometown of Nazareth, or along the Jordan River where he was baptised, or by the Sea of Galilee where he called his first disciples, or on the mountainside where he appointed the twelve? The hypothesis of this study is that Mark sets the revelation of the comprehensive identity of Jesus within an elastic narrative of Jesus' journey through the Caesarea Philippi landscape where shifts in features of language, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial scope shape the narrative about the revelation of the identity of Jesus as Christ. Campbell's historical linguistic model serves as the main method to explore the narrative about the revelation of the identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35 because his methodology

provides three significant nuances, the manner, place, and flow (or journey) of linguistic identity, which this study draws on to discuss the unfolding identity that Mark ascribes to Jesus in the landscape of Caesarea Philippi. These three nuances of method are significant through the lens of Caesarea Philippi's threefold identity shift: linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial. Campbell's (2013) historical linguistic method, enhanced by theoretical perspectives in van den Heever's (2010) social space, in Moxnes' (2010) landscape, and in Rose's (1996) genealogy of subjectification, underpins the analysis of Mark 8:27–35 to examine the process of discovering the comprehensive identity of Jesus Christ in Mark 8:27–35. This study argues that Caesarea Philippi serves as the turning point of an elastic narrative of three shifts – in linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial dimensions – in the revelation of the identity of Jesus as Christ. This study has two objectives. First, it hopes to contribute the theory and the methodology of historical linguistics to hermeneutics in biblical studies of Mark 8:27-35. Second, it strives to present nuance, to provide additional scope for understanding the identity that Mark ascribes to Jesus Christ in his gospel.

Introduction

This study examines the revelation of Jesus' identity in Mark 8:27–35 as an elastic narrative, a turning point, and a convergence moment in the Gospel of Mark where transformations in language, journey, landscape, and social space intersect. It has two main objectives: first, it contributes the historical linguistic method to biblical hermeneutics in interpreting this passage; and second, it offers new perspectives for understanding the identity Mark ascribes to Jesus. The study holds that the linguistic system through which Mark constructs his narrative plays a critical role in revealing three interrelated shifts: manner, place, and flow of Jesus' identity. Drawing on the theoretical framework of identity in Lyle Campbell's historical linguistics (2013), alongside Gerhard van den Heever's (2010) concept of social space, Halvor Moxnes' (2010) interpretation of landscape, and Nikolas Rose's (1996) genealogy of subjectification, this study situates the Marcan narrative within the evolving identity of Caesarea Philippi. It explores how language, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial scope converge in the gospel to shape Mark's

Christological portrait. The central research question guiding this project is: why does Mark situate the revelation of Jesus as Christ on the road to Caesarea Philippi, rather than in other meaningful locations such as his hometown of Nazareth, along the Jordan River where he was baptised, by the Sea of Galilee where he called his first disciples, or on the mountainside where he appointed the twelve? This study hypothesises that Mark reveals Jesus' comprehensive identity through an elastic narrative that unfolds in the landscape of Caesarea Philippi, where language, geography, and social meanings intersect. The term *elastic narrative* refers to the unfolding and adaptive portrayal of Jesus' identity through linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial shifts, particularly as Mark positions Jesus in Caesarea Philippi, the site where the disciples first recognise him as Christ.

Campbell's historical linguistic model provides the primary methodological framework for analysing this narrative. His approach emphasises three central aspects of the linguistic unit: (1) manner, (2) place, (3) flow. These three dimensions parallel the threefold transformation of Caesarea Philippi's identity as marked by linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial shifts. This method thus illustrates an elastic narrative movement in Mark 8:27-35. In this study, the *manner of articulation* refers to the linguistic units Mark uses, such as titles (e.g., 'son of man'), epithets (e.g., 'prophet'), nominal phrase (e.g., 'one of the prophets'), verbs (e.g., 'walking'), and qualifiers (e.g., 'of Nazareth'), to articulate Jesus' identity. *Place of articulation* refers to the physical landscape, such as road, region, village, mountain, sea, or desert, that Mark aligns with these linguistic features to construct his elastic narrative about Jesus. *Flow* denotes the socio-spatial categories such as roles, perceptions, functions, status, knowledge, interactions (e.g., with crowds, disciples, Pharisees), and mission that guide Mark's elastic narrative about unveiling Jesus' comprehensive identity in Mark 8:27–35. Within the scope of this study, *identity change* refers to any shift in feature, function, knowledge, or perception of a person, place, or linguistic unit. These shifts are not merely descriptive but significant for understanding the comprehensive identity of Jesus. Particular attention is paid to how Caesarea Philippi's evolving classificatory identity in religious, political, and linguistic terms becomes a hermeneutical key to understanding the Christological turning point in Mark's narrative. The following linguistic concepts are applied in this study as well:

- *Phoneme*: the smallest contrastive sound unit in a language
- *Morpheme*: the smallest dependent or independent unit of meaning in a word
- *Word*: a single and autonomous meaningful element of language
- *Noun phrase*: a structured phrase with a head noun and modifiers
- *Language contact*: the influence of one language on another through interaction

These linguistic categories offer insight to examine the identity shifts in Mark 8:27–35, particularly in the context of Caesarea Philippi.

Through an interdisciplinary method grounded in Campbell’s (2013) model of linguistic identity transformation, van den Heever’s (2010) social space theory, Moxnes’ (2010) landscape theory, and Rose’s (1996) concept of subjectification, this study supports the argument that Mark employs shifts in the manner, place, and flow of his elastic narrative to reveal new Christological dimensions of Jesus’ identity in Mark 8:27–35. The remainder of the study is structured as follows: section one reviews selected and relevant literature; section two outlines the conceptual framework; section three presents the analytical scope; section four discusses the socio-spatial and historical context of Caesarea Philippi; section five explores the linguistic implications of the narrative; and section six examines the psycholinguistic dimensions of the identity shift in Mark 8:27–35.

Literature Review

Previous research has examined identity shifts concerning Caesarea Philippi from archaeological, theological, and biblical hermeneutical perspectives. However, few studies have focused on how linguistic taxonomy and functional shifts in the identity of Caesarea Philippi serve as a hermeneutical lens for understanding the revelation of Jesus’ identity in Mark 8:27–35. This study addresses that gap by situating the unfolding identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35 within the theoretical frameworks of historical linguistics (Campbell 2013),

social space (van den Heever 2010), geographical landscape (Moxnes 2010), and the genealogy of subjectification (Rose 1996). Some scholars have examined the political, historical, and archaeological contexts of Caesarea Philippi without linking their findings directly to the Gospel of Mark (Friedland 2012; Ma'oz 2009; Wilson 2004). More recent studies have connected these contexts to Mark's gospel (Evans 2001; Lampe 2020; Leander 2013). From a hermeneutical perspective, Leander (2013) explores how Mark integrates various layers of Roman imperial identity into his narrative. Using a Christological approach, Marcus (2009) emphasises the tension between Jesus' divine identity and the messianic secret in Mark but does not address how this secret serves as a discourse technique to narrate identity shifts in Jesus' roles, functions, and perceptions. Lampe (2020) examines the implications of Peter's confession within the geographical context of Caesarea Philippi. Using a socio-rhetorical approach, Witherington identifies Mark 8:27–30 as one of five Christological disclosure moments in the gospel (2001:47). Edwards argues that Peter's confession in Mark 8:27–30 reveals that the gospel was written for a Gentile audience and emphasises the thematic role of the 'journey' motif in Mark's narrative from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem (2002:18–21). France describes Mark 8:27–33 as the watershed moment of Jesus' messianic mission (2002:326–327). Based on discourse forms of both intratextuality and intertextuality, Donahue and Harrington discuss the names and titles that Mark attributes to Jesus. They note that Mark prefers the Greek lexicon 'christos' (anointed) to 'masiah' (the anointed one). They affirm that 'masiah' occurs in the Old Testament in reference to the anointing of priests, prophets, and kings, but, in New Testament times, the reference depends on context and probably on socio-spatial, geographical landscape, and linguistic forms (Donahue and Harrington 2002:25). Telford discusses the theological significance of Jesus' identity in Mark and shows how the gospel draws on both Jewish and Gentile traditions through various epithets and titles (1999:30).

In archaeological scholarship, Ma'oz (2009), as well as Erlich and Lavi (2024), provides detailed accounts of identity shifts in Caesarea Philippi in relation to architecture, social functions, leadership, and public perception. Wilson (2004) discusses how the lexicons associated with Caesarea Philippi's name evolved from the name of the Greek god Paneas. Wilson and Tzaferis (2008) provide archaeological evidence of embedded identity artefacts and corresponding shifts in roles, functions, and statuses in the region of Caesarea Philippi.

Friedland (2012) illustrates the transformations of material culture around Caesarea Philippi, particularly the shift from stone to marble, from one altar to multiple altars, and from simple shrine to complex buildings. These studies illuminate the geographical and socio-spatial resources that Mark draws on in his elastic narrative to present the revelation of Jesus' comprehensive identity at Caesarea Philippi.

Conceptual Perspectives

Campbell's (2013) framework in historical linguistics provides a methodological tool for tracing how shifts in naming and classification emerge through changes in the manner of articulation, place of articulation, and airflow of phonemes. For example, in English phonology, the airflow (air journey) generates categories such as plosives (stops), fricatives, affricates, nasals, liquids, and glides. The place of articulation in English phonology classifies phonemes as bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, alveopalatal, palatal, velar, or glottal. The manner of vibration of vocal cords during articulation further distinguishes sounds either as voiced or voiceless. Any change in these three categories (airflow, place, and manner) results in a new phonemic identity. The dimensions of manner, place, and flow together constitute the consonant system in English.

Campbell emphasises that linguistic systems undergo systematic identity shifts in sound, meaning, and form (2013:5). These shifts in phonology, semantics, and morphology constitute what he identifies as the taxonomic reclassification within historical linguistics. This study draws analogies from these shifts to explore identity change in Mark 8:27–35. Specifically, the elements of phonological identity (such as place and manner of articulation, as well as airflow) are conceptually mapped onto narrative features in Mark: the place of revelation, the manner of narrative expression, and the flow of Jesus' journey. Campbell's historical linguistic model thus offers a framework to analyse the elastic narrative in which the identity of Jesus is progressively revealed in relation to the shifting identity of Caesarea Philippi. In addition to Campbell, this study draws on Gerhard van den Heever's (2010) spatial theory, which argues that biblical narratives and rhetorical constructions of space create opportunities for new discourses, communal imaginations, and identity formations. According to van den Heever, these discursive transformations

occur when narrative units acquire new associations, functions, and symbolic meanings through their recontextualisation in space (2010:207–210). In his view, spaces traditionally marked as private, Judaic, or local in biblical texts are often reinscribed with imperial or public features, reshaping their identities within broader socio-spatial contexts. Moxnes (2010) similarly contends that individual and collective identities are closely tied to the local landscapes with which people are spatially and socially connected. In his landscape theory, a ‘landscape’ represents not only the physical environment but also a socio-symbolic domain of perception, experience, and meaning (2010:92). For him, during the time of Jesus, identity and place of origin were perceived as inseparable; one’s character and status were often inferred from their geographic and social roots (2010:90–93). Citing the Lucan narrative as an example, Moxnes shows that Jesus’ identity is conveyed through journeys across specific landscapes, emphasising how geographical features inform theology and community formation in the New Testament (2010:98).

Finally, this study draws on Nikolas Rose’s (1996) theory of genealogical subjectification, which conceptualises identity as an ongoing and discursively mediated process rather than a fixed psychological essence. Rose argues that subjectification is historically and socially constructed across different times and spaces (1996:128–129). Applied to Mark’s gospel, this perspective reveals how Jesus’ identity unfolds in relation to shifting public perceptions, naming practices, roles, and geographic contexts. It also parallels the evolving identity of Caesarea Philippi, thereby reinforcing the interplay between narrative subjectification and socio-spatial transformation.

Analytic Perspective

This section outlines the analytical method employed in this study. The study adopts a cross-disciplinary framework grounded primarily in the historical linguistics of Campbell (2013), complemented by conceptual elements of social space from van den Heever (2010), the landscape theory of Moxnes (2010), and the genealogy of subjectification notions of Rose (1996). This framework traces how Mark constructs an elastic narrative that reveals Jesus’ comprehensive identity in Mark 8:27–35 through three interwoven axes of transformation: linguistic, socio-spatial, and landscape. Drawing on Campbell (2013), this paper affirms that the taxonomy and nomenclature used to

describe features, names, places, and functions in the Gospel of Mark carried significant interpretive weight during the time of Jesus, and particularly during the time Mark wrote his gospel. Caesarea Philippi, like other territorial sites, experienced considerable identity shifts in its taxonomy classification over time. Contemporary archaeological research by Erlich and Lavi (2024) supports this understanding of Caesarea Philippi's evolving identity. These authors observe:

The shift in plan from the first phase is not substantial, but the long span of use suggests changes in use, supported by three elements: the archaeological finds, the historical sources, and parallels. (Erlich and Lavi 2024:231)

These structural and functional shifts in Caesarea Philippi's sacred architecture are not merely material; they provide a contextual background that informs the narrative logic of Mark 8:27–35. The classificatory transformation of Caesarea Philippi and its reclassification as a religious, political, and cultural space parallel the unfolding identity of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. This study interprets such shifts as the integration of linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial features into the evolving taxonomic reclassification and reassignments of meaning and functions of a person, a place, a perception, etc. This is the case in Mark's elastic narrative about the revelation of the comprehensive identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35.

These taxonomic changes constitute the analytic framework of this study. The variables deployed to measure identity shift include features, roles, functions, statuses, public or private perceptions, and ideals. In this context, *linguistics* refers to phonemes (sound), lexicon (word), and semantics (meaning); *geographical landscape* refers to geographical elements such as rivers, valleys, mountains, roads, ways, and built environments; and *socio-spatial scope* encompasses human habitations, cities, homes, marketplaces, temples, and synagogues.

This study argues that the evolving identity of Caesarea Philippi across linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial domains provides an interpretive lens through which Mark stages a pivotal moment of Christological revelation of a new epithet in the comprehensive identity of Jesus. Mark 8:27–

35 thus serves as a watershed and a turning point in the elastic narrative about Jesus' identity regarding the shifts in taxonomy about the landscape, socio-spatial, and linguistic features of Caesarea Philippi, where Mark locates the revelation of Jesus as Christ. The next section details the data and findings of this analysis.

Data and Context of Caesarea Philippi

This section examines the diachronic changes in the names, functions, roles, modelling, and symbolic attributes of Caesarea Philippi. Drawing on archaeological research, Erlich and Lavi (2024) describe a shifting relationship between sacred space and architectural transformation in the region of Caesarea Philippi:

The Paneas cave witnessed changes in function and its modeling, from the cultic to the royal and back to cultic, and from a wild place to a built complex. (Erlich and Lavi 2024:234)

This study analyses these changes within the context of Mark 8:27–35 through the conceptual frameworks of Campbell (2013), van den Heever (2010), Moxnes (2010), and Rose (1996), arguing that the narrative setting of Mark 8:27–35 is informed by Caesarea Philippi's evolving identity. The gradual reconfiguration of this region's naming conventions, architectural functions, and socio-political roles parallels the progressive disclosure of Jesus' messianic identity in the Marcan gospel. In this way, the textual narrative of Mark 8:27–35 is both shaped by and reflective of Caesarea Philippi's shifting linguistic taxonomy of classification and reclassification. The next subsections present examples of the shifts in Caesarea Philippi's linguistic taxonomy to offer the analytic background for interpreting the shifting identity that Mark ascribes to Jesus in Mark 8:27–35 within the geographical landscape of Caesarea Philippi.

Shift in the Identity of the Phoneme: from /p/ to/ b/

Erlich and Lavi (2024) note that the territory of Caesarea Philippi was originally named Paneas, derived from the name of the god Pan: 'The site is mentioned in ancient sources as Paneion or Paneas, a cult place for the god Pan'

(2024:207; see also Polybius 2010). Regarding the original name of the territory of Caesarea Philippi, Erlich and Lavi further note the following:

The Pan cave, cliff, terrace, and springs formed an imposing setting for human activity in antiquity. The earliest evidence of the Pan cult is from the Hellenistic period when the place was named after the Greek god Paneas. (Erlich and Lavi 2024:234)

Ma'oz (2009) confirms that there are lexical variants in written documents about Paneas or Banias. Erlich and Lavi contend that there is a phonetic shift in the name Paneas, which became Banias, because of language contact between Greek and Arabic speakers (2024:207; see also Eusebius 2019). This new pronunciation gained currency both in spoken language and in written documents before the era of King Herod the Great, when the Paneas area was just a rural community. The two phonemes /p/ and /b/ share two phonemic features: they are plosives (stops), referring to airflow when they are articulated in the mouth (i.e., flow or air journey), and both are bilabials because they are articulated between closed lips (i.e., place of articulation). The only difference between the two is the manner of vibration of vocal cords during articulation, making /b/ voiced and /p/ unvoiced (i.e., manner of articulation).

Erlich and Lavi highlight the evolving ritualistic and symbolic importance of Paneas, especially in relation to cultic and prophetic traditions that predate Christianity:

Ma'oz (2009: 10–11) brings Eusebius, as well as a rabbinic source telling that the messiah will come when the water in the Paneas cave turns to blood (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a–98b), as testimony of hydromantic rituals. Indeed, water was related to an oracle, as in the Apollo Thyrxeus cult in Lycia, mentioned by Pausanias (VII.xxi.13). Thus, the cave and courtyard at Paneas probably served several cults. First and foremost, it was dedicated to Pan; and second, a hydromantic cult that took place on certain festivals (perhaps once a year?). (Erlich and Lavi 2024:233; see also Wilson and Tzaferis 2008:200)

Ma'oz (2009) specifies that the phonemic shift from *Paneas* to *Banias* produces other orthographic variants of *Banias* such as the written variant *Baniyas* in the literature about *Paneas*. This written variant of *Banias* does not constitute a phonemic shift because the vowel [i] in *Banias* is replaced by the vowel [y] in *Baniyas*. This variant at best constitutes only a phonetic shift in pronunciation.

The phonemic shift from voiceless /p/ in *Paneas* to voiced /b/ in *Banias* or *Baniyas* is evidence of a shift in phonemic identity or feature of the phoneme /p/. This shift illustrates that there is a competing identity or feature of the Arab phonemic system during the language contact of this latter with the phonemic system of the Canaanite. During this language contact the feature or function of the Canaanite phoneme /p/ adopts the phonemic system of the Arabic phoneme system by becoming the voiced phoneme /b/ in *Banias* or *Baniyas*. This shows that identity shift in the lexicon of *Paneas* occurs in the context of competing identities during which one linguistic identity prevails. Thus, the renaming of *Paneas* to *Banias* is more than a sound change. It is an early sign of identity shift that anticipates the theological reidentification of the region. Table 1 presents this *Paneas* phonemic shift.

Table 1. *Paneas* Phonemic Shift

Plosive (manner of air flow)	<u>Taxonomy</u>	<u>Bilabial (place of articulation)</u>	<u>Vocal cord vibration</u>
	Paneas	/p/	Voiced
	Banias	/b/	Voiceless

This phonemic shift is not just a linguistic detail but serves as a precursor to broader identity shifts in Caesarea Philippi. Ma'oz (2009) notes that the taxonomy shift from *Paneas* to *Baniyas* (*Banias*) coincides with architectural changes and functions of temples for Zeus and Pan. This shift brings about the construction of new temples and structural architecture for entities such as Nemesis, nymphs, courtyards, tomb-temples, streets, channels, and coins. This shift from a singular temple devoted to Pan towards a pluralised sacred

landscape reflects a broader pattern of competing religious and political identities. These transformations provide a platform for layered claims to power and identity within the region – claims that are highly relevant to the setting of Mark 8:27–35, where Jesus’ identity is revealed. It introduces the first in a series of transformations that culminate in the identity revelation scene in Mark 8:27–35.

Shift in Morphology: From *Banias* to *Augusteum*

Following the phonemic shift from /b/ to /p/ regarding the word *Paneas*, another shift emerged in the linguistic taxonomy of Caesarea Philippi. This shift occurred during King Herod the Great’s era (37–4 BC). He built a new temple near Banias dedicated to Emperor Caesar Augustus. He named it Augusteum (Erlich and Lavi 2024:209, 222, 233; Ma’oz 2009:40–60). In the aftermath of this, some people referred to the area as Banias, while others referred to it as Augusteum (Erlich and Lavi 2024:211).

This morphological shift from the temple name *Banias* to *Augusteum* produces shifts in the function of the temples as well as the linguistic taxonomy for Banias. These shifts in functions are threefold: (1) there is a shift from the location of the rock for the temple of Pan to the location of the rock for the Augusteum temple; (2) there is a shift from a rural cult solely for Pan to gradually urbanised cults for both Pan and Zeus; (3) there is a shift from ancient Canaanite architecture to Roman architecture. These three shifts in function attest that the morphological shifts occur within a context of competing identities associated with Banias and the identities attributed to Augustus Caesar whose temple bears the eponym *Augusteum*. Slowly, there emerge multiple cults, cultures, identities, functions, temples, powers, persons, perceptions, statuses, and eponyms. This ongoing shift in linguistic, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial fabric of Caesarea Philippi serves as the locus for Mark’s narrative about the revelation of the comprehensive identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35.

Lexical shift: From *Augusteum* to *Caesarea*

A significant lexical shift occurred around 2 BC, when Philip the Tetrarch, son of Herod the Great, renamed the territory of Paneas as Caesarea, in honour of

Caesar Augustus. This renaming is more than a political gesture; it represents a taxonomic reclassification of place identity. The new toponym 'Caesarea' introduces an imperial semantic layer that frames the narrative backdrop of Mark 8:27–35, where a new lexicon – 'the Christ' in Greek or 'Messiah' in Hebrew – emerges to signify Jesus' new identity. This shift in nomenclature catalysed broader changes in Caesarea Philippi's socio-political and architectural status. The site transitioned from a rural locality to an urban administrative centre as Philip established his capital there, constructing a palace complex and associated civic infrastructure. This constitutes also a shift from the name *Augusteum*, which designates one temple, to the name *Caesarea*, which designates an entire city.

Roman architectural forms and imperial symbols of identity began to coexist with pre-existing Canaanite cultic structures, particularly those related to the god Pan. Consequently, the region became a convergence point for diverse identities, deities, religious rituals, political authorities, perceptions, statuses, persons, people, questions, journeys, and material cultures. The layering of these socio-spatial, physical landscape, and linguistic elements forms the watershed or turning point on which Mark constructs his additional scope of Christological narrative in Mark 8:27–35.

Shift in the Nominal Phrase: From *Caesarea* to *Caesarea Philippi*

Another notable shift in the linguistic taxonomy of Paneas likely occurred during the reign of either Agrippa I (the nephew of Philip the Tetrarch) or Agrippa II (the son of Agrippa I). During this period, the region came to be designated as Caesarea of Philip (*Caesarea Philippi* in Latin), evolving from a single lexical unit (*Paneas*) into a nominal phrase that incorporated imperial and dynastic associations. This lexical transformation was accompanied by architectural and functional changes, particularly within the sacred landscape of the original Paneas temple complex.

According to Erlich and Lavi, the cave at the centre of the cultic site underwent key modifications:

[T]he cave [...] was still full of water, with the rock that protruded from the water like a small island. This rock might have carried a Pan statue, similar to the depiction of Pan in a grotto on some of the Roman coins of Caesarea Philippi. (2024:231)

Erlich and Lavi further argue that Agrippa II oversaw extensive renovations of both the temple and palace structures, formally designating Caesarea Philippi the capital of his dynasty. In other words, Paneas as a site for rural cultic functions becomes Caesarea Philippi, a capital for multiple functions including cultic, administrative, infrastructural, and layered identities. As part of this transformation, the naturally occurring cave was reconceptualised and restructured as a Romanised sacred space, incorporating architectural motifs and ideological functions consistent with imperial identity.

These lexical, architectural, and functional reclassifications contribute to the evolving socio-linguistic, geographical-landscape, and socio-spatial backdrop of the shifting identity of Caesarea Philippi. Within this layered landscape, the identity question Jesus asks his disciples in Mark 8:27–35 gains added interpretive resonance. This background may shed light partly on the reasons why Mark probably situates the revelation of the comprehensive identity of Jesus in his journey in the landscape of Caesarea Philippi, rather than in the landscape of his hometown of Nazareth, or along the Jordan River where he was baptised, or by the Sea of Galilee where he called his first disciples, or on the mountainside where he appointed the twelve. Indeed, as Jesus and his followers approach the region, the narrative implicitly engages with the symbolic weight of a space marked by historical shifts in naming, function, and cultural authority embodied in Caesarea Philippi. Table 2 (below) outlines the progressive taxonomic changes in the designation of Paneas and their significance for understanding the setting of Mark 8:27–35.

Table 2. Shift of Classificatory Names of the Paneas Territory

<u>Type</u>	<u>Taxonomy</u>	<u>Era</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Date</u>

Morphemic	Banias	Before Herod the Great	Hellenistic	200–198 BC
Morphological	Augusteum	Under Herod the Great	Roman	37–4BC
Lexical	Caesarea	Philip the Tetrarch	Roman	2 BC
Nominal phrase	Caesarea Philippi	Agrippa I & II	Roman	1 st century AD

Linguistic Implications of a Shift in the Identity of Jesus Christ

This section examines the linguistic implications of the lexical shifts in the comprehensive identity of Jesus by following the scope of Campbell's historical linguistics (2013), alongside van den Heever's (2010) concept of social space, Moxnes' (2010) interpretation of landscape, and Rose's (1996) genealogy of subjectification. Although Mark introduces Jesus to his readers in the very first clause of his gospel by specifying that his narrative concerns the 'Christ, the Son of God' (1:1), this aspect of Jesus' identity remains veiled throughout the early chapters of the gospel until Mark 8:27–35. Mark uses the Greek form 'Christos' rather than the Hebrew form 'Masiah' to designate the 'Anointed One'. This revelation remains concealed from key religious and political figures, including the teachers of the law, Pharisees, Herodians, King Herod, Pilate, priests, elders, and scribes. The only exception is the impure spirits who try to reveal Jesus' full identity in public in Mark 1:24¹ with two epithets ('Jesus

¹ Direct Bible quotations are from Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1996, *The Holy Bible: New international version, containing the Old Testament and the New Testament*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI. This Bible version is compared with

of Nazareth' and 'Holy One of God') and Mark 5:7 with one epithet ('Jesus, Son of the Most High God').

The revelation and discovery of a comprehensive identity of Jesus involves a shift or a change comparable to the linguistic shift in the identity of Caesarea Philippi, as explicitly seen in Mark 8:27–35, in which Peter declares that Jesus is Christ. Between Mark 1 and Mark 8:26, the vocabularies that Mark employs to describe the identity of Jesus includes the following: 'my Son' (Mark 1:11, 3:11), 'Jesus of Nazareth' (Mark 1:24), 'fellow' (Mark 2:7), 'Son of Man' (Mark 2:10, 27), 'Son of God' (Mark 3:11), 'Teacher' (Mark 4:38; Mark 5:35), 'Lord' (Mark 5:19, Mark 7:28), 'Carpenter' (Mark 6:3), 'John the Baptist' raised from the dead (Mark 6:14, 16), 'Elijah' (Mark 6:15), and 'Prophet' (Mark 6:15). These titles or epithets attest to a gradual shift in the revelation of the identity of Jesus to his audiences and interlocutors. Mark 8:27–35, situated in Caesarea Philippi, marks a pivotal moment in this progression, where Jesus' identity is most explicitly affirmed. Caesarea Philippi is an appropriate setting for this, as it has undergone its own linguistic shifts concerning its identity, taxonomy, and function, as with the shift from Jesus of Nazareth to Jesus, the Christ (Messiah). This linguistic shift, within the integrated conceptual scope of Campbell (2013), van den Heever (2010), Moxnes (2010), and Rose (1996), implies a new phase of understanding, function, responsibility, and commitment for Jesus, his audience, and even the author, Mark.

The shift toward recognising Jesus' full identity unfolds gradually. Jesus himself was surprised by his disciples' lack of understanding of his identity, first in the parables of his teaching (Mark 4:13), second with respect to food purity and hygiene (Mark 7:18), third concerning the yeast of the Pharisee and that of Herod (Mark 8:17), and fourth regarding the multiplication of the loaves (Mark 6:52). Jesus sometimes guides his apostles through their process of understanding his identity through his teaching (Mark 4:33–35). In other instances, Jesus asks a crowd of his listeners to understand the difference between the word of God and human traditions (Mark 7:14–15). On some occasions, there are contradictory expectations. For example, Jesus did not want his miracles to be proclaimed in public (such as in the cases of impure

the Greek version in K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, and A. Wikgren, 1975, *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, New York.

spirits in Mark 1:25 and Mark 3:12, the deaf and mute man in Mark 7:36, and the *Talitha kum* incident in Mark 5:43), but he also tells a demon-possessed man to go home and proclaim his healing (Mark 5:19). These narrative tensions underscore that the recognition of Jesus' identity unfolded gradually, carrying implications for how Jesus and his followers were to understand their roles and commitments in new ways in his journey along the linguistic system, geographical landscape, and socio-spatial scope. This gradual process involved a trajectory of revelation and discovery of a comprehensive identity of Jesus from Mark 1 to Mark 8:27: a movement from ambiguity to clarity, from miracles to parables and back again to miraculous acts, culminating in the recognition of Jesus as the Christ. The following discussion focuses on the details of four lexical shifts in the name of the identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35 alone.

Shift from *Jesus* to *John the Baptist*

In Mark 8:28, it is presumed that both the disciples and the audience already recognise Jesus by name, a basic element of his identity, as was the practice at the time of the Marcan community. As they journey toward Caesarea Philippi, Jesus enquires about how he is publicly perceived. The disciples report that some people, including King Herod, identify him as John the Baptist, echoing earlier references in Mark 6:14 and 6:16. This moment constitutes the first instance of lexical substitution in the unfolding discourse of Jesus' identity in Mark 27–35. In fact, Herod and others replace Jesus' name with that of John the Baptist, a rhetorical manoeuvre that parallels the reclassification of *Paneas* through a process whereby three titles, namely *Augusteum*, *Caesarea*, and *Philippi*, became substitute names for the village and region of Paneas/Banias.

John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Jesus, holds a preparatory role in the Marcan gospel narrative. The substitution of his name for that of Jesus suggests that the crowd assigns to John the Baptist an elevated status that surpasses ordinary human identification. Thus, Herod's assertion in Mark 6:16 that Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead attributes to Jesus a form of resurrected identity, even supernatural power. In this perspective, by assigning the qualities of John the Baptist to Jesus, the crowd ascribes to Jesus new status, new function, new perception, and new power. This interpretive gesture ascribes to Jesus a celestial identity, resonating with the broader

semantic and cultural contestations surrounding identity and authorities embodied in the linguistic taxonomy of Caesarea Philippi and its surrounding regions.

Shift from *Jesus* to *Elijah*

In Mark 8:28, a second lexical substitution occurs when the crowd identifies Jesus with the prophet Elijah. This attribute suggests that Jesus is associated with the prophetic functions and miraculous works traditionally ascribed to Elijah. Given that Caesarea Philippi was already a contested locus of divine identities, including Baal the Canaanite fertility god, Pan the Greek river god, and Zeus the chief Greek god, the positioning of the narrative of the new identity of Jesus at the landscape of Caesarea Philippi echoes how Elijah triumphed in cultic offering over other gods represented by Baal in 1 Kings 18:20–40. To equate Jesus with Elijah is to recognise him within a similar spiritual hierarchy and symbolic stature as Pan and Zeus, thereby situating him among the competing sacred identities of deities associated with the region.

This substitution also implies that the crowd perceives Jesus' identity as transcending ordinary human categories, extending across both earthly and celestial realms. Mark 9:4 later reinforces this transcendental characterisation, as Elijah and Moses appear in conversation with Jesus during the transfiguration. Moreover, in Mark 9:11–13, Jesus himself affirms Elijah's eschatological role as a forerunner to the suffering son of man, thereby integrating Elijah's narrative into his own messianic trajectory. Thus, this lexical shift from Jesus to qualities of Elijah assign to Jesus new functions in Mark 8:27–35 at the landscape of Caesarea Philippi, shaping the unfolding revelation of Jesus' comprehensive identity in a landscape saturated with socio-spatial statuses and linguistic meanings.

Shift from *Jesus* to *One of the Prophets*

In Mark 8:28, a third lexical shift occurs through the substitution of Jesus' name with a nominal phrase: 'one of the prophets'. Unlike the previous substitutions involving specific prophetic figures such as John the Baptist or Elijah, this instance replaces Jesus' identity with a generic prophetic category. This broader substitution implies that some in the crowd perceive Jesus as fulfilling

a prophetic function, but without the clarity or consensus to associate him with any specific figure from Israel's prophetic tradition. Such a generic attribution reflects the complex matrix of competing identities present in Caesarea Philippi, a region layered with Canaanite, Greek, and Roman religious significance. Within this context, the crowd's use of a vague prophetic category may reflect socio-spatial ambiguity or cautious anticipation. It is possible that the crowd is deferring to Jesus himself to clarify his position within the contested socio-spatial and geographical landscape for precise linguistic taxonomy of identity. After all, the people at the time of Jesus and during the redaction of Mark's gospel opt for clarity by leaning their knowledge and perception on the things, places, persons, traditions, landscape with which they are familiar. This interpretive possibility aligns with Jesus' own self-understanding and perception in Mark 6:4, where he identifies with the prophetic tradition, acknowledging the rejection prophets face in familiar settings. Therefore, this third lexical shift, moving from specific prophetic figures to a general prophetic role, underscores the narrative tension between public speculation (perception) and the yet-to-be-revealed messianic identity of Jesus. It sets the stage for the climactic moment in Mark 8:29, where Peter moves beyond public conjecture to make a definitive Christological claim.

Shift from *Jesus* to *Christ*

Mark 8:29 presents a fourth lexical shift, as Peter proclaims, 'You are the Christ'. This marks the first time in the Gospel of Mark that a human character, apart from the narrator, explicitly identifies Jesus using the messianic title 'Christ'. This moment constitutes a narrative and theological turning point in the gospel, as it marks the transition from public speculation to a confessional recognition of Jesus' divine mission. The term 'Christ' (Greek *Christos*, meaning 'anointed one') reframes Jesus' identity beyond prophetic or historical categories, and signals a messianic role that culminates in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (see Mark 16).

The lexical substitution of 'Jesus' with 'Christ' serves not only as a confessional act by Peter but also as a theological elevation of Jesus' role and function within the layered socio-spatial and geographical landscape of Caesarea Philippi. This identity shift repositions Jesus within a hierarchy of contested identities in the region, surpassing imperial, political, and divine figures such

as Caesar Augustus, Herod the Great, Philip the Tetrarch, Agrippa I and II, the river god Pan, and the Arab interlocutor. Each of these figures previously contributed to the phonemic and lexical configuration of the evolving identity of Caesarea Philippi territory. In contrast, Peter's declaration installs Jesus as the definitive bearer of God's redemptive mission, one whose authority transcends the temporal and spatial constraints of Caesarea Philippi. Thus, this fourth lexical shift solidifies Jesus' position as the Christ and sets in motion the narrative trajectory toward his suffering, death, and eventual glorification, redefining the spatial and theological boundaries within which his identity is recognised and proclaimed in Mark 8:27–35.

Shift from *Christ* to the *Son of Man*

Mark 8:31 introduces a fifth lexical and theological shift, as Jesus refers to himself as the 'Son of Man'. This shift redefines the function of Jesus beyond the messianic title 'Christ', moving toward a more complex self-identification grounded in the eschatological and redemptive narrative of suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 8:32). The designation 'Son of Man' invokes a rich tradition of apocalyptic literature (see Daniel 7:13–14) and emphasises not only Jesus' divine mission but also his full participation in human vulnerability and suffering. This lexical substitution from 'Christ' to 'Son of Man' represents a humane moment in the narrative structure of Mark. It marks the deepening of Jesus' identity from a triumphant messianic figure to a suffering redeemer. Theological expectations and perceptions held by the crowd, the disciples, and other stakeholders in Caesarea Philippi are thus subverted in the landscape of Caesarea Philippi. Whereas 'Christ' may have carried connotations of political deliverance or royal authority, 'Son of Man' introduces a paradoxical function: one that entails rejection, suffering, crucifixion, and eventual vindication through resurrection.

The narrative juxtaposes these tensions through a series of binaries – submission and victory, rejection and exaltation, death and resurrection – that ultimately elevate Jesus' identity above the historical, religious, and imperial referents embedded in the identity of Caesarea Philippi. This layered identity transcends the eponyms of the territory (e.g., Caesar Augustus, Pan, and Philip the Tetrarch) by situating Jesus' function within both divine will and human agency, offering a radically new framework for understanding messianic

identity within the contested popular perceptions, landscape, and socio-spatial horizon of first-century Palestine. Table 3 presents again the lexical shifts concerning the revelation and the discovery of the comprehensive identity of Jesus.

Table 3. Lexical Shifts about the Comprehensive Identity of Jesus in Mark 8:27–35

<u>Primary</u>	<u>Posterior</u>	<u>Initiator</u>	<u>Function</u>
Jesus	John the Baptist	Crowd or King Herod	Reemerge the Baptist
Jesus	Elijah	Anonymous crowd	Resurface Elijah
Jesus	One of the prophets	Anonymous crowd	Generic proclamation
Jesus	Christ	Peter	Messiah
Christ	Son of Man	Jesus	Salvation

The five lexical shifts in the revelation of Jesus’ identity in Mark 8:27–35 correspond to parallel shifts in the nomenclature and socio-linguistic taxonomy of the Paneas territory. This correlation raises a critical question: why does Jesus choose the road to Caesarea Philippi as the setting for his inquiry into his identity? Why not Nazareth, his hometown; the Jordan, where he was baptised; the Sea of Galilee, where he first called his disciples; or the mountainside, where he appointed the twelve? The most plausible explanation is that Caesarea Philippi, as a territory marked by successive renaming and layered identities, from Paneas to Augusteum to Caesarea Philippi, provides a fitting geographical and symbolic parallel to the evolving understanding of Jesus’ comprehensive identity.

The narrative structure of Mark 8:27–35 thus becomes a turning point not only in Jesus’ self-revelation but also in the disciples’ layered perception of his identity. This process unfolds in six distinct yet interconnected stages. First, the disciples report the public’s varying identifications of Jesus. Second, Peter, acting as spokesperson, declares Jesus to be the Christ. Third, Jesus attributes Peter’s confession to divine revelation (see Matthew 16:17). Fourth, Peter immediately misunderstands the implications of this identity by resisting the notion of a suffering Christ. Fifth, Jesus rebukes Peter, redirecting the disciples’ framework of perception. Sixth, Jesus unveils the function of the ‘Son of Man’, a role marked by suffering, death, resurrection, and eventual ascension. These six stages mirror the layered taxonomic shifts of Caesarea Philippi, underscoring the gospel’s rhetorical strategy of linking physical landscape with biblical revelation, socio-spatial statuses, and linguistic taxonomy. Just as Caesarea Philippi underwent renaming and architectural transformation to reflect shifting imperial and religious identities, so too does Jesus’ identity become progressively reclassified through public perception, apostolic confession, divine revelation, correction, and eschatological fulfilment. In these cases, the taxonomy is not merely semantic but ontological – disclosing deeper truths about identity, perception, function, feature, authority, and mission in a contested socio-spatial and geographical landscape.

Psycholinguistic Implications of the Shift in the Identity of Jesus Christ

This section examines the psycholinguistic implications involved in the revelation and discovery of Jesus’ comprehensive identity, framed within Campbell’s (2013), van den Heever’s (2010), Moxnes’ (2010), and Rose’s (1996) integrated notions of identity shifts. It explores how cognition, language, and social dynamics shape the perception and belief regarding Jesus’ identity among his disciples and the gospel audience in Mark 8:27–35. Jesus begins by interrogating his disciples on how his identity is publicly recognised, prompting Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah). Jesus then predicts his own death and calls his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him. By initially asking ‘Who do people say that I am?’, Jesus requires his disciples to draw upon episodic and semantic memory systems to retrieve socially shared beliefs (Mahr and Csibra 2018). Moreover, this process involves theory of mind capabilities, enabling the disciples to infer others’ mental states

and beliefs (Apperly 2012). Subsequently, Jesus narrows the inquiry to a personal level, inviting his disciples to reflect on their own understanding of his identity, a process requiring self-referential cognition (Bentley, Greenaway, and Haslam 2017; Pitre and Barron 2016). Since Jesus had not yet fully disclosed his identity, Peter responds based on intuitive cognition, unconsciously linking Jesus' actions with the semantic construct of the 'Messiah' (Patterson and Eggleston 2017).

Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ entails three psycholinguistic processes: (1) lexical retrieval from verbal memory, (2) conceptual understanding of the term, and (3) contextual integration of its theological and cultural significance (Yoon and Brown-Schmidt 2019). Notably, the disciples' understanding of Jesus' identity diverges from prevailing societal views, creating a perceptual dissonance between their perspective and the broader public's perspective. Jesus neither explicitly confirms nor denies Peter's statement, thereby allowing inferential reasoning among the disciples. This enables them to integrate prior knowledge with new contextual information, progressing toward a deeper grasp of Jesus' identity (Feng et al. 2021). Jesus' questioning, therefore, is not aimed at eliciting new information but rather guiding the disciples to self-discovery, as the timing was not yet appropriate for full disclosure, as indicated by his command for secrecy until at the landscape of Caesarea Philippi in Mark 8:27–35.

In Mark 8:27–35, Jesus employs emotionally charged and candid language to teach that the Son of Man will face rejection, suffering, and death, which induces cognitive dissonance within the disciples (Cooper 2007). The prevailing expectation of a triumphant messiah clashes with Jesus' portrayal of a suffering servant. This clash disrupts the disciples' existing schema, generating internal conflict between their beliefs and the emerging reality. Peter's emotional response overrides his earlier logical identification of Jesus as Christ, leading him to reject Jesus' salvific mission of suffering. Jesus' sharp rebuke, labelling Peter 'Satan', signifies a lexical and conceptual shift in both their vocabularies and understandings. Thus, the revelation and discovery of Jesus' identity in Caesarea Philippi reframes the messianic schema, demonstrating how cognition, language, and social interaction dynamically influence identity perception and belief formation among Jesus' disciples and the narrative audience.

Conclusion

This study has examined why Jesus chooses to ask about his identity specifically in the geographical landscape of Caesarea Philippi, highlighting the significance of that setting as a narrative and symbolic space marked by both linguistic, socio-spatial, and functional shifts. Drawing on integrated theories of shifts in identity features in Campbell's (2013), van den Heever's (2010), and Moxnes' (2010) work, the analysis demonstrates how shifts in the taxonomy of Caesarea Philippi parallel the unfolding revelation of Jesus's identity in Mark 8:27–35. The diachronic changes in place names, from Paneas to Caesarea Philippi, reflect broader sociopolitical and religious redefinitions, which serve as a backdrop to the evolving designations of Jesus, from 'Teacher' and 'Son of Man' to 'Christ'. These lexical transitions mark a turning point not only in narrative structure but in the disciples' cognitive and linguistic frameworks. The parallelism between geographic renaming and the identity revelation of Jesus reveals that the setting is not incidental but essential to the moment of transformation in Mark 8:35. The convergence of psycholinguistic processing, social dynamics, and evolving lexical attribution demonstrates how identity – both territorial and messianic – is constructed through layered shifts in language, cognition, and context. Ultimately, the study concludes that the narrative placement of Mark 8:27–35 at Caesarea Philippi serves as a deliberate literary strategy to unveil Jesus' comprehensive identity at a symbolic crossroads of both geographical landscape and socio-spatial contested domain. Mark 8:27–35 is thus a watershed and a turning point of the revelation of the comprehensive yet unexpected identity of Christ as the suffering messiah to whom Mark ascribes shifting roles, functions, perceptions, missions, and narrative layers in view of both Gentile audience and Marcan community represented by the geographical landscape of Caesarea Philippi.

Furthermore, this analysis reveals that the identity of Jesus in Mark is not static but dynamically negotiated through linguistic shifts that reflect broader private (Jesus and his disciples) and collective (Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd) tensions of status, perception, and power. The disciples' gradual understanding mirrors the audience's journey from confusion to clarity, mediated by language that encodes both the historical context of tradition and emerging Christological insights of Jesus and his followers. This dynamic

process underscores the role of language as a vehicle for biblical inquiry, demonstrating how Mark's gospel engages its readers in an active process of interpretation shaped by memory, cognition, and cultural milieu. The setting of Caesarea Philippi, with its complex history of religious plurality and contested political authority, becomes a microcosm where Jesus' identity is contested, revealed, and redefined.

Finally, situating the revelation of Jesus' identity at Caesarea Philippi invites reflection on the broader implications for identity formation in biblical narratives in terms of manner, flow, and place of articulation. It illustrates how place, language, and social context coalesce to create spaces of transformation where new meanings emerge. For the early Christian community, the Marcan community, and for contemporary readers, this passage highlights the transformative potential inherent in moments of questioning and revelation. By foregrounding the linguistic, socio-spatial, and geographical landscape dimensions of identity in Mark 8:27–35, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Mark negotiates and constructs identities of Jesus that resonate across Canaanite, Hebrew, and Graeco-Roman cultures during his time of writing the gospel, inviting his readers to discover the complex person of Jesus as both human and divine, or suffering messiah and glorious messiah, within the landscape of Caesarea of Philippi.

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