

2C. Early Modern English Grammatical Forms

In analyzing the earliest text of the Book of Mormon, Royal Skousen and Stan Carmack have developed a hypothesis that “the linguistic fingerprint of the Book of Mormon, in hundreds of different ways, is Early Modern English.” (“Joseph Smith Read the Words,” *Interpreter* 18 (2016:41-64). As to whether that hypothesis will become theory is a matter of debate. In other words, according to the 2010 *Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary*:

A hypothesis is a conjecture put forth as a possible explanation of phenomena or relations, which serves as a basis of argument or experimentation to reach the truth A theory in technical use is a more or less verified or established explanation accounting for known facts or phenomena.

However, I must add that while I consider Royal Skousen and Stanford Carmack to be the most pre-eminent linguistic scholars regarding the text of the Book of Mormon, other opinions have been proposed. But before I continue with their ideas, let me answer the question: What is Early Modern English?

In a September 12, 2014 blog, Kirk Magleby wrote: “Scholars of English demarcate eras in the evolution of the language.” He then lists the following eras:

A.D. 450 was the beginning of Old English which continued until A.D. 1100 - 1170.

A.D. 1100 - 1170 was the beginning of Middle English which continued until A.D. 1300.

A.D. 1300 was the beginning of Late Middle English which continued until A.D. 1470 - 1500.

A.D. 1470 - 1500 was the beginning of Early Modern English which continued until A.D. 1670 – 1700. (Some even put the end of Early Modern English as late as A.D. 1800.)

A.D. 1670 - 1700 was the beginning of Modern English aka Late Modern English which has become Earth's lingua franca.

(Source: Kirk Magleby, “Early Modern English,” <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com>)

In Part 1 of the 3-part Volume 3 of *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Grammatical Variation* (2016), Royal Skousen writes [p. 3]:

The Book of Mormon, when it was first published in 1830 (Palmyra, New York), was immediately recognized as written in a biblical style but also filled with numerous instances of nonstandard English. As might be expected, that earlier text has undergone grammatical editing over the years, especially by Joseph Smith when he prepared the book for its second edition in 1837 (Kirtland, Ohio), along with additional editing by him for the third edition published in 1840 (Cincinnati, Ohio/Nauvoo, Illinois). Virtually all subsequent editions have continued the editing.

(Early Modern English)

On page 13 Skousen continues:

In quite a few cases, the Book of Mormon usage is restricted to Early Modern English and died out by the 1700s. One surprising finding is that nearly all the Book of Mormon usages that many have thought to be simply Joseph Smith's Upstate New York dialect have actually been identified as Early Modern English. In other words, the original Book of Mormon text is archaic English (dating from Early Modern English) rather than Joseph Smith's dialectal English.

Stanford Carmack writes that much of what we know concerning Early Modern English comes from the KJV Bible. Yet there are multiple Early Modern English grammatical forms in the Book of Mormon that are not found in the Bible, or their usage percentage in the Book of Mormon is not equivalent with that found in KJV Bible text. These grammatical forms in the Book of Mormon have been previously treated as poor English, and edited to a more "acceptable" grammatical form, even by Joseph Smith. However, these phrases, once scorned by critics, now become support for two very important ideas. That (1) the KJV Bible is a very important companion to the Book of Mormon in phrasing; yet (2) the Book of Mormon does not represent a plagiarism of the KJV.

Carmack writes:

I would assert that it is no longer possible to argue that the earliest text of the Book of Mormon is defective and substandard in its grammar. . . . [Moreover] Even if the composition of the book had been consciously manipulated by [Joseph] Smith and his associates in order to create a structurally and lexically plausible work of scripture based on the Bible they knew; the evidence is abundantly clear that the language is broader in scope and in many cases deeper in time than what might possibly have been derived from the KJV.

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 258-259)

Although Stanford Carmack and Royal Skousen have published a number of articles (see the "Sources" Volume), their work on Early Modern English as it relates to the Book of Mormon is ongoing. Thus I have set aside this special section of my Introduction. My purpose is neither to prove or disprove their hypothesis, as I do not lay claim to any formal training in languages, especially Early Modern English. Rather my intention is to provide a limited perspective of their proposed "discoveries" as they relate to my structured parallelistic text, in the hope that further insight can be achieved and catalogued.

To begin with, and for the benefit of the reader, what follows in this section is mainly derived from Carmack's article, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar."

(Note: The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon Part three: The Nature of the Original Language by Royal Skousen (with the help of Stanford Carmack) which treats the Early Modern English in the text of the Book of Mormon, would be published in 2018.)

I will first list some of the topics he covers, and then give more detail.

- (1) The phrase “they was”
- (2) The phrase “them days”
- (3) “Smitten” / “Smote”
- (4) Plural noun / Singular verb
- (5) Singular noun / Plural verb
- (6) The phrase “faith on the Lord [Jesus Christ]”
- (7) The phrase “it supposeth me”
- (8) The past participle “arriven”
- (9) The phrase “the more part of”
- (10) The use of the phrase “beseech of you/thee”
- (11) The phrase “much + plurals”
- (12) The Use of the phrase “did go”
- (13) Miscellandous examples

As I have previously mentioned in Part 1 of this Introduction (Method #13), as I list the textual examples from the categories listed above in which there has been a change from Early Modern English to Modern English, I will sometimes color the modern grammar in pink, then a slash, and then the change in pink that has been made to the text. Then at the right margin I will insert a pink {AG}. Other times I will color the present text in pink and insert at the right margin the original grammatical form in pink in brackets, followed by a pink {AG}. I will also alert the reader to the fact that there are some instances in which the archaic grammar is still present in the text. In those cases, I will just color the text in pink and place the customary {AG} (“Archaic Grammar”) at the right margin. Sometimes I will note when the archaic grammar was deleted, which in most instances was during the extensive editing of 1837.

[deleted in 1837]

Examples: (Helaman 14:21)

[Original text] “and the rocks which is upon the face of this earth”

[Present text] “and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth”

Example #1: “and the rocks which is/are upon the face of this earth” [P / 1837→] {AG}

Example #2: “and the rocks which are upon the face of this earth” [“is” – P] {AG}

Example #3: (Helaman 14:21 – Full structured text)

21	Yea	at	the	time	
	that	He	shall	yield up the ghost	
		there	shall	be	thunderings
			and		lightnings
				for	the
					space of MANY hours

(Early Modern English)

and *the earth shall* shake
 and [the earth *shall*] tremble

 and *the rocks*
which *is/are* *upon* *the face of this earth*
which *is/are* **both** *above* *the earth* [*Q*/ 1837] {AG}
and *beneath* [*the earth*]

which ye know **at** **this** **time**
is/are solid

 >or *the more part* *of* *it* [*the earth*] {AG}
 is one solid mass

 22 [and *the rocks*]*shall* be broken up
 Yea *they* *shall* be rent in twain

(1) The phrase “**they was**”: (plural pronoun/singular verb)

According to Stanford Carmack, The phrase “they was” is uncommon in the Book of Mormon. It occurs five times, while “they were” occurs 628 times. Yet it is well attested in Early Modern English where plural pronouns we, ye, you, and they were used with the singular “was.” Although there are no examples in Volume 5 for “they was,” there are a number of examples of a plural pronoun originally followed by a singular verb:

Example: Helaman 7:23

23 . . .

I [**the Lord**]
 will NOT **show** unto the **wicked**
 of **My** **strength**

 to one
 MORE than the other

 SAVE it **be** unto **those**
that **repent** of their **sins** [*“repenteth” in Q, 1830*] {AG}
 and **hearken**
 unto **My** **words**

Examples: Helaman 7:23 *those* (plural) that *repenteth* (sing.)
 Helaman 13:19 cursed be *they* (plural) who *hideth* (sing.) up their treasures
 Helaman 13:34 *we* (plural) *layeth* (sing.) a tool here and tomorrow it is gone

The phrase “we **was/were**” does not occur in Volume 5. While the phrase “ye were” appears in 3 Nephi 9:13, it appears in that same way on the Original Manuscript—not “ye was.”

The phrase “there **was**” followed by a plural noun occurs 30 times in the Book of Mormon, compared to 120 instances of the phrase “there were.”

Example: Helaman 7:11

11 And **it came to pass**

that there **were** certain **men** [“was” – P] {AG}
passing by
and [they] saw **Nephi**

Examples: Helaman 6:11
Helaman 7:11
3 Nephi 8:7

Originally, the Book of Mormon contained a construction “there were no” followed by a singular noun. All of these have since been standardized. Interestingly, the KJV doesn’t have any such examples of this construction.

Example: 3 Nephi 4:4

4 **Therefore**

there **was** NO chance for **the robbers** [“were” – P] {AG}
to plunder
and to obtain food

From another perspective, the Book of Mormon originally contained the construction “there was no” followed by a plural noun. These likewise have been standardized.

Example: 3 Nephi 7:5

5 **Now** ALL this was **done**
and there **were** NO **wars** as yet [“was” in P, 1830] {AG}
among **them**

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 217, 221-225; Royal Skousen with the collaboration of Stanford Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: Grammatical Variation.* Provo, Utah: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016, p. 881-915). *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, Vol. I and II, FARMS, 1986.)

(Early Modern English)

(1) **The phrase “them days”:**

We see the phrase “them days” twice in the original text of the Book of Mormon. While not normal Early Modern English, it is not abnormal either. The two examples from the original text from Volume 5 are listed below:

Examples: Helaman 7:8 " Yea, if my days could have been in **them** days"
Helaman 13:37: " . . . And this shall be your language in **them** days."

Both instances have since been edited to read "those days."

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, p. 217; Royal Skousen with the collaboration of Stanford Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: Grammatical Variation*. Provo, Utah: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016, p. 885.)

(3) **Had “Smitten” / “Smote”:**

According to Stan Carmack, the past-participial *smitten* is used 42 times in the Book of Mormon. In the original text, the past-participial form “had smote” is used 6 times.

Examples: NONE

Interestingly, the Oxford English Dictionary informs us that “smote” functioned as a past participle for centuries in English, beginning in the 16th century.

While there are no specific examples in Volume 5 of this particular past participle (using the “past tense” form of the verb), there are a number of similar examples.

Examples: Helaman 3:36 had **got**
Helaman 4:23 had **began**
Helaman 11:24 had **took**
Helaman 16:1 had **came**

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, p. 219)

(4) **Plural noun / Singular verb:**

In modern-day noun phrases, we correlate a plural noun with a singular verb. In Early Modern English, this is not always the case.

Examples: Helaman 5:12 men **buildeth**
 3 Nephi 5:22 the children of Lehi **hath** kept his commandments

Third-person plural subjects are used with archaic third-person singular inflection.

Examples: Helaman 8:13 words which **hath**
 Helaman 12:9 at his voice **doth** the hills and the mountains tremble
 Helaman 12:12 by the power of his voice **doth** the foundations rock
 Helaman 12:26 the words which **saith**
 Helaman 13:5 four hundred years **passeth** not away
 Helaman 15:12 the promises of the Lord **hath** been extended

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 217, 234; Royal Skousen with the collaboration of Stanford Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: Grammatical Variation.* Provo, Utah: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016, p. 881-915). *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, Vol. II, FARMS, 1986)

(5) **Singular noun / Plural verb:**

Example: 3 Nephi 7:18

18 And **it came to pass**
 that **they** were **angry** with **him**
 even because he [**Nephi**]
 had **GREATer power**
 than **they** [had]
 for it **were** NOT possible **{AG}**
 that **they** could **disbelieve*** **his words** [*dispute/disprove*] **{AL}**

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 230-231; Royal Skousen with the collaboration of Stanford Carmack, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Two: Grammatical Variation.* Provo, Utah: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016, p. 881-915)

(Early Modern English)

(6) The phrase “faith on the Lord [Jesus Christ]:

Although the Book of Mormon parallels the Bible in using phrases such as “faith in God,” faith in the Lord,” and faith in him,” ONLY the Book of Mormon uses phrases like “faith on the Lord,” or “faith on the name of the Lord.”

<u>Examples:</u>	Helaman 3:28	believe on
	Helaman 13:6	faith on
	Helaman 14:2	believe on
	Helaman 14:8	believe on
	Helaman 16:1	believed on
	Helaman 16:3	did believe on
	Helaman 16:5	believed on
	3 Nephi 7:16	faith on
	3 Nephi 9:17	believe on

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 235-236)

(7) The phrase “it supposeth me”:

Phrases like “it supposeth me,” “it sorrowth me,” and “it whispereth me” are found in the Book of Mormon, but not in the KJV Bible. However, the phrase “it repenteth me” is found in Genesis 6:7 and 1 Samuel 15:11.

Example: Helaman 14:15

15 For **behold** **He** surely MUST die
 that **salvation** may come
 yea it **behooveth** **Him** [it is His covenant responsibility] {AL}
 and [it] becometh **expedient**
 [for **Him**] [or the means of attainment] {AL}
 that **He** to **dieth**
bring to pass the **resurrection**
 of the **dead**

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 237-238)

(Early Modern English)

Helaman 16:10
Helaman 16:15
3 Nephi 12:22
3 Nephi 7:26

Apparently, the phrase was in use from about 1380 to about 1610.

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, pp. 240-241)

(10) The use of the phrase "beseech of you/thee":

In the KJV we find the following pattern: "I/we beseech you/thee would / might."
In the Book of Mormon we find: "I beseech of you / thee" . . . should."

Examples: NONE

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, p. 243)

(11) The phrase "much + plurals":

In the earliest text of the Book of Mormon we find the singular modifier "much" connected with a number of plurals, in much the same manner as in Early Modern English.

Example: Helaman 3:3

3 And **it came to pass**
in the forty and sixth [year] ["yea" = "year?"]
yea there was MUCH contentions and MANY dissensions ["s" deleted in 1841]

In the KJV we find an example of this construction in Luke 12:19: "much goods."

(Source: Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, p. 253)

(12) The use of the phrase “did go”

This grammatical form is very recognizable from the Book of Mormon. It is used in Early Modern English for emphasis and contrast. The phrase “did + infinitive appears more than 1,000 times in the Book of Mormon, and 54 times as “did go” or didst go.” In comparison, the KJV never uses “did(st) . . . go”, but rather “went” or “wentest”—more than 1400 times.

Example: Helaman 3:12

12 And **it came to pass**
that there were MANY
of the **people of Ammon** [covenant people]
who were Lamanites by birth
[who] **did also go forth into this land**

Example: Helaman 10:12

12 And **behold**
now **it came to pass**
that **when the Lord**
had spoken these **words**
unto **Nephi**
he [Nephi] **did stop**
and **did NOT go** unto **his own house**
but [he Nephi] **did return** unto the multitudes
who were **scattered about**
upon the face of the land

(Source: Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209-262, p. 255)

(13) Miscellaneous examples:

Some of the other Early Modern English word uses in the Book of Mormon are as follows:

- Examples:
- Helaman 5:26 **in the which**
 - Helaman 7:21 **for the which**
 - Helaman 8:19 **for the which**
 - Helaman 9:27 **in the which**
 - 3 Nephi 1:23 **in the which**
 - 3 Nephi 4:4 **in the which**
 - 3 Nephi 5:6 **in the which**
 - 3 Nephi 5:12 **in the which**
 - Helaman 3:20 **observe to keep**
 - Helaman 15:5 **observe to keep**
 - Helaman 15:9 **suffer themselves**
 - 3 Nephi 1:29 **became for themselves**

(Early Modern English)

3 Nephi 3:10 retaining
3 Nephi 8:5 such and one
3 Nephi Preface the reign of Zedekiah the king of Judah
3 Nephi 9:9 the people of the king Jacob

Helaman 1:31 (Double Negative)

31 And **now**

behold [they] **the Lamanites**

could NOT **retreat NEITHER way** ["N" deleted in 1837] [double negative]

(Source: "Use of Early Modern English" in the Editor's Preface, page xxxvii, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, edited by Royal Skousen, 2009.)

Note: In an intriguing comment submitted by David Brown on January 8, 2016 in response to Stanford Carmack's article, "Joseph Smith Read the Words" (*Interpreter A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 41-64) he writes:

Neurolinguistic research conducted at the University of Liverpool has looked at different brain responses to different forms of text. Phillip Davis and his team have discovered that of all the different forms of English, Early Modern English stimulates the brain like no other. While current English texts tend to lull the brain into relative inactivity, EmodE texts excite the brain into a deep, self-assessing state.

A summary of Davis' work stated that, "The research also found that reading poetry in particular, increases activity in the right hemisphere of the brain, an area concerned with 'autobiographical memory', helping the reader to reflect on and reappraise their own experiences in light of what they have read.

Note: On page 50 of his *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon Part three: The Nature of the Original Language*, Royal Skousen writes:

In Hebrew, an *if*-conditional clause like "if you come, I will come" (or "if you come, then I will come") would be literally rendered as "if you come **and** (then) I will come". . . . And it is precisely this kind of construction that is found in the original Book of Mormon text . . . But such a construction is definitely not English; thus the overwhelming tendency for scribes, typesetters, and editors has been to remove the extra **and** from this construction, as in these [sample] cases involving various subordinate conjunctions:

Helaman 13:28 (**and** removed in the 1837 edition)

and because he speaketh flattering words unto you

and he sayeth that all is well

and then ye will not find no fault with him

The main point here is that as far as I have been able to discover, this construction is foreign to English, whether we consider earlier English (including Early Modern English) or modern English, or the English of Joseph Smith's time and place.