

The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon

Royal Skousen

When I began the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project in 1988, my initial goal was to determine the reading of the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. There are two manuscripts: (1) the original manuscript (referred to as O), the manuscript the scribes wrote down as Joseph Smith dictated the text (the majority of the dictation was done in 1829); and (2) the printer's manuscript (referred to as P), the copy of O that the scribes produced from August 1829 through January 1830 and took into the Grandin print shop in Palmyra, New York, for typesetting the first edition of the Book of Mormon (published in March of 1830). Oliver Cowdery was the chief scribe for both manuscripts. Today, only 28 percent of O is extant. Most of that 28 percent is owned by the LDS Church; the remaining fragments are owned by private individuals, except for half a leaf that the University of Utah owns. On the other hand, P is extant except for three manuscript lines. From 1903 to 2017, this second manuscript was owned by the RLDS Church (later renamed the Community of Christ); in 2017, P was sold to the LDS Church.

The first important publications of the Critical Text Project were three books issued in 2001, books that fulfilled my original goal of publishing typographical facsimiles of the two manuscripts. These three books form volumes 1 and 2 of the critical text. In 2015, the Joseph Smith Papers published photographs of P, along with a revised transcript of P based on my 2001 publication. It is projected that in 2021 the Joseph Smith Papers will publish photographs of the remaining 28 percent of O, again with a revision of my transcript.

Simultaneous to working on the transcripts for O and P, I produced electronic versions of all the textually significant editions of the Book of Mormon. There are twenty of these, from the original 1830 edition to the most recent LDS and RLDS editions. Then, from 1995 through 1998, using my own computer program, I constructed the computerized collation of the Critical Text Project, which lines up the two manuscripts against the twenty significant editions of the Book of Mormon. The computerized collation has served as the workhorse for volumes 3 and 4 of the Critical Text Project. When those two volumes are completely published, the collation itself will be made publicly available as volume 5 of the critical text.

From 2004 to 2009, I published in six parts volume 4 of the critical text, the central work of this project. This work is entitled *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (referred to as ATV). In ATV, I consider every significant textual variant in the Book of Mormon (or in the case of conjectural emendations, every potential textual variant), from the beginning of the text (1 Nephi) to its end (Moroni), as well as the title page and the witness statements. My goal has always been to determine the original text of the Book of Mormon—to the extent that it can be determined by scholarly means. Of course, this goal is never fully achievable since one cannot be sure that the proposed original text is the actual original text, especially since we are missing 72 percent of O. So we end up with what I have termed the earliest text. Simultaneous with my completing the publication of ATV in 2009, I published that text with Yale University Press as *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*.

As I worked through ATV, I occasionally made adjustments to my analyses, and sometimes I revised my proposed reading of the original text. These corrections appeared in 98 pages of addenda at the end of the last part of ATV. In 2017, I was able to publish a second edition of ATV, where all the analyses appear in their proper order along with a few more analyses. Currently, the first edition of ATV is available online with the Mormon Interpreter and Book of Mormon Central.

In doing ATV, I did not provide a complete list of all the grammatical changes to the text. As an example, in his editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon (published in 1837 in Kirtland, Ohio), Joseph Smith replaced the relative pronoun *which* with *who* or *whom* 952 times. The first instance of this change in the text is explicitly discussed in ATV, but thereafter I discussed this grammatical change only here and there, sometimes in cases where Joseph made the change but should not have.

In general, the vast majority of grammatical variation involving *which* was ignored in ATV. Thus, in 2016, I published *Grammatical Variation* (referred to as GV), the first two parts of volume 3 of the critical text. In GV, I list all the grammatical editing that the Book of Mormon has undergone, including a whole section devoted to the editing of the relative pronoun *which*. But GV forms only the beginning of volume 3, which is entitled *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon*. Ultimately, there will be seven parts to volume 3:

- Parts 1–2 Grammatical Variation (GV)
- Parts 3–4 The Nature of the Original Language (NOL)
- Part 5 The King James Bible in the Book of Mormon;
Spelling in the Manuscripts and Editions
- Part 6 The Transmission of the Text:
From the Manuscripts through the Editions
- Part 7 Book of Mormon Textual Criticism

It turns out that *Grammatical Variation* is more than simply a listing of the grammatical editing in the history of the Book of Mormon. This editing, as we all know, removed what many have considered an embarrassment, namely, the nonstandard English that is found throughout the original text. Over the years, from its initial publication in 1830 to the present day, the Book of Mormon’s original nonstandard language has been interpreted as representing Joseph Smith’s own American dialect and taken as a clear sign that Joseph was indeed the author of the words of the text. But the important finding of GV is that this conclusion is not necessarily so. The so-called bad grammar of the original text of the Book of Mormon turns out to be acceptable usage during the 1500s and 1600s, in the period that we call Early Modern English.

On 13 March 2013, in a public lecture at BYU, I discussed the dialectal phrase “in them days” (which occurs twice in the original text of the Book of Mormon) and showed that this so-called ungrammatical form had appeared in scholarly works dating from around 1600. This finding immediately suggested that our intuitive reaction against the nonstandard English in the original text may have been misguided. And this hypothesis was greatly enhanced the following year in one of the most important papers ever written on the Book of Mormon, namely, Stanford Carmack’s 2014 “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar”, published in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon*

Scripture (volume 11, pages 209–262). In this paper, Carmack showed that basically the nonstandard grammar of the original text occurred in Early Modern English. And when I published *GV* in 2016, I not only listed all the grammatical editing of the text, I also provided—with the assistance of Carmack—examples of that supposedly incorrect usage in Early Modern English, showing that we should be cautious and less judgmental and recognize that the nonstandard English of the original Book of Mormon text could be Early Modern English rather than simply Joseph Smith’s dialectal usage. As an overview in *GV*, I republished Carmack’s 2014 paper (with some minor adjustments). In his paper, Carmack started out with some of the more egregious grammatical errors, as it was supposed, in the original text of the Book of Mormon. I list four of them here, each with one citation from Early Modern English showing its occurrence (and acceptability) in older English:

them days (emended to *those days*)

“and this shall be your language in **them days**” (Helaman 13:37)

“the wars and weapons are now altered from **them days**”
(1598, Robert Barret)

had smote (emended to *had smitten*)

“and after that I **had smote** off his head with his own sword”
(1 Nephi 4:19)

“and his cousin whose ear Peter **had smote** off”
(1617, Bartholomew Robertson)

they was (emended to *they were*)

“**they was** yet wroth” (1 Nephi 4:4)

“which veins and mines, if **they was** sought for”
(1694, Thomas Houghton)

ye was (emended to *ye were*)

“**ye was** not in the state of dilemma like your brethren”
(Alma 7:18)

“**ye was** able by his grace to bear the loss”
(Samuel Rutherford, died 1661)

Here are some other examples of nonstandard or unexpected Book of Mormon grammar that Carmack discussed in his 2014 paper (and are reprinted in GV):

nonstandard or unexpected *be*-verb usage:

“and if **there was miracles** wrought” (Mormon 9:19)

“**there were no part** of their frame that it did not cause to quake”
(3 Nephi 11:3)

“the **judgments** of God **was** upon them” (1 Nephi 18:15)

“in the **borders** which **was** nearer the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:5)

“I **were** about to write the names of those who were never to taste of death” (3 Nephi 28:25)

nonstandard or unexpected inflectional endings:

“from the time which **thou received** thy first message from him”
(Alma 8:15)

“Nephi’s **brethren rebelleth** against him” (1 Nephi preface)

“if **thou repent** of all thy sins and **will bow** down before God”
(Alma 22:16)

dative impersonals:

“**it sorroweth me** because of the fourth generation”
(3 Nephi 27:32)

nonstandard pronoun usage:

“the Lord remembereth all **they** which have been broken off”
(2 Nephi 10:22)

multiple negatives:

“that they should **not** do **none** of these things” (2 Nephi 26:32)

contrasting syntax:

“**I Nephi having been born** of goodly parents, **therefore I was taught** somewhat in all the learning of my father”
(1 Nephi 1:1)

“and notwithstanding **I being** young **was** large in stature”
(Mormon 2:1)

unexpected word forms and phrases:

“they did **fall** the tree to the earth” (3 Nephi 4:28)

- “after ye have **arriven to** the promised land” (1 Nephi 17:14)
 “by laboring with our **mights**” (Jacob 1:19)
 “they were exceeding **fraid**” (Alma 47:2)
 “I beseech **of** you” (Jacob 6:5)
 “even **to that** they did forget by what power they had been
 brought thither” (1 Nephi 18:9)
 “there were **much contentions**” (Helaman 3:3)
 “save it were repentance and **faith on** the Lord” (Mosiah 18:20)
 “the **more part of** them would not” (Alma 47:2)
 “**by the way of** Gentile” (title page)
 “**in the which alliance** he hath agreed to maintain the city of
 Zarahemla” (Alma 61:8)
 “if ye should serve him with **all your whole soul**” (Mosiah 2:21)
 “**if it so be** that they rebel against me” (1 Nephi 2:24)

It turns out that this discovery—that the nonstandard grammar of the Book of Mormon was in earlier English—is supported by a very important lexical finding about the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon, which was first brought up in Renee Bangerter’s 1998 BYU master’s thesis, written under my direction, *Since Joseph Smith’s Time: Lexical Semantic Shifts in the Book of Mormon*. Bangerter found three particular archaic word uses in the Book of Mormon. The first two, *break* and *mar*, are verbs that occur together in the same passage, and the context requires the rejection of the normal, current meanings for *break* and *mar*. Here only earlier definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) allow the passage to read correctly:

Break ‘to stop’ or ‘to interrupt’; *Mar* ‘to hinder’ or ‘to stop’

“no monster of the sea could **break** them, neither whale that
 could **mar** them” (Ether 6:10)

In both cases the pronoun *them* refers to the people of Jared, not to their vessels.

Bangerter’s third archaic example is the word *sermon*, conjectured in place of the standard text’s *ceremony*, which occurs only once in the text:

Sermon ‘conversation, discussion’

“after they had ended the **sermon** . . . they returned to the land
 of Nephi” (Mosiah 19:24)

Here there is no ceremony except by semantic speculation. The printer's manuscript reads *cerimony*, which I have argued is a misreading of *cermon* (a conjectured misspelling of *sermon* in the original manuscript, no longer extant here). The word *sermon* works, but only if we accept the possibility that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon derives from the 1500s and 1600s.

By 1998, in my own analysis of changes in the Book of Mormon text, I had found several other examples of archaic usage, which Bangerter included in her thesis:

Belove 'to love'

"among those who had so dearly **beloved** them" (Alma 27:4)

Counsel 'to consult'

"**counsel** the Lord in all thy doings" (Alma 37:37)

Desirous 'desirable'

"for I knew that it was **desirous** above all other fruit" (1 Nephi 8:12)

Devour 'to eat up'

"they did take with them all that they had not **devoured** of all their grain" (3 Nephi 6:2)

Molten 'to melt ore'

"I did make tools of the ore which I did **molten** out of the rock" (1 Nephi 17:16)

But I sat on this hypothesis—that the Book of Mormon lexicon was archaic (especially the conjectured word *sermon* for *ceremony*)—until September 2003 when Christian Gellinek proposed to me that the two instances in the text of *pleasing bar* are errors for *pleading bar*. Within the next few weeks, I was able to find a variety of examples of *pleading bar* on the internet, all dating back to the 1600s or referring to courtrooms in the 1600s and describing the defendant in court cases as standing before the pleading bar when pleading his case (that is, when making his plea or pleading). Even after the 1600s, when the dock replaced the pleading bar, evidence for the term *pleading bar* continued in the language, although only minimally. There is, for instance, a citation from an 1887 religious book by Julia Wood: "its ventilation . . . was apparently easily operated by an occasional pull of a cord hanging against the wall, adjacent to **the pleading bar**". And there were museum descriptions in

Fordwich, England, dating from the late 1990s and the early 2000s. On the other hand, I have found no evidence for “the pleasing bar of God” or any “pleasing bar of justice”, except for references to the standard text of the Book of Mormon. To be sure, there are plenty of references on the internet to “pleasing bars”, say in San Francisco or Las Vegas.

Gellinek’s conjectural emendation set me to looking for more examples of archaic vocabulary and phraseology in the Book of Mormon, ones that appear from all the evidence to have ceased to be productive in English, with their last recorded citations dating from the mid-1500s through the mid-1700s. In *The Nature of the Original Language* (NOL), I list 39 words with archaic meanings and 25 archaic phrases, for a total of 64 language items, that disappeared from English before the mid-1700s and do not occur in the King James Bible. Besides the ones already mentioned, here are some of the other striking ones discussed in NOL:

Archaic Word Uses

But ‘unless’

“I greatly fear lest my case shall be awful **but** I confess unto God”
(Jacob 7:19)

Call ‘need’

“thus we see the great **call** of the diligence of men to labor in the vineyards of the Lord” (Alma 28:14)

Consigned ‘assigned’

“I am **consigned** that these are my days” (Helaman 7:9)

Course ‘direction’

“in the **course** of the land of Nephi, we saw a numerous host of the Lamanites” (Alma 2:24)

Cross ‘to contradict’

“that thereby they might make him **cross** his words” (Alma 10:16)

Depart ‘to divide’

“the waters of the Red Sea . . . **departed** hither and thither”
(Helaman 8:11)

Depressed ‘rendered weaker’

“and they were **depressed** in body as well as in spirit” (Alma 56:16)

Extinct ‘physically dead’

“and inflict the wounds of death in your bodies, that ye may become **extinct**” (Alma 44:7)

Flatter ‘to coax’ or ‘to entice’

“or that they might by some means **flatter** them out of their strong holds” (Alma 52:19)

Give ‘to describe or portray’

“he **gave** all the land which was south . . . a chosen land and the land of liberty” (Alma 46:17)

Great ‘supreme’

“I thus did send an embassy to the **great** governor of our land” (Alma 58:4)

Hail ‘to challenge by hailing’

“they saw him a coming and they **hailed** him, but he saith unto them: fear not” (Alma 55:8)

Idleness ‘meaningless words or actions’

“see that ye refrain from **idleness**; do not pray as the Zoramites do” (Alma 38:12–13)

Opinion ‘considered judgment’

“I give it as my **opinion** that the souls and the bodies are reunited . . .” (Alma 40:20)

Raigned ‘arraigned’

“and all shall be brought and be **raigned** before the bar of Christ” (Alma 11:44)

Rebellion ‘opposition’

“and he began to stir his people up in **rebellion** against my people” (Mosiah 10:6)

Rent ‘rent part’

“waving the **rent** of his garment in the air” (Alma 46:19)

Reserve ‘to preserve’

“and thus we will **reserve** the flocks unto the king” (Alma 17:31)

Tell ‘to foretell’

“that I should come and **tell** this thing unto you” (Helaman 14:9)

Views ‘visions’

“rebel no more against your brother, whose **views** have been glorious” (2 Nephi 1:24)

Welfare ‘success’

“he was exceedingly rejoiced because of the **welfare** . . . which Helaman had had” (Alma 59:1)

Whereby ‘why’

“**whereby** hath my father so much sorrow?” (Ether 8:9)

Archaic Phrases

About to ‘engaged in preparations to’

“he was **about to** flatter away those people to rise up in rebellion” (Helaman 1:7)

Arrive to ‘to arrive in’ or ‘to arrive at’

“they **arrived to** the land of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 24:25)

Be aware ‘to beware’

“let him **be aware** lest he shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mormon 8:17)

Begin to ‘to begin at’ or ‘to begin with’

“he **began to** the creation of the world, and also **to** the creation of Adam” (Alma 18:36)

Belief on ‘belief in’

“and this because of their **belief on** the words of Alma” (Mosiah 25:18)

But if ‘unless’

“**but if** he yieldeth to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19)

Do away ‘to dismiss’

“and woe unto them which shall **do** these things **away** and die” (Moroni 10:26)

For the cause of ‘because of’

“while your iniquity is **for the cause of** your love of glory”
(Alma 60:32)

Hurl away ‘to drag away’

“who art seeking to **hurl away** your souls down to everlasting misery” (Helaman 7:16)

In the favor of ‘in favor of’

“the voice of the people came **in the favor of** the freemen”
(Alma 51:7)

In the fourth day ‘on the fourth day’

“in the first month, **in the fourth day** of the month” (3 Nephi 8:5)

Into an effect ‘into effect’

“we were desirous to bring a stratagem **into an effect** upon them”
(Alma 56:30)

On the seventh month ‘in the seventh month’

“in the morning of the third day **on the seventh month**”
(Alma 56:42)

Search knowledge ‘to search for knowledge’

“for they will not **search knowledge**” (2 Nephi 32:7)

Somewhat contentions ‘somewhat of contentions’

“he had **somewhat contentions** among his own people”
(The Words of Mormon 1:12)

Strong hold ‘a hold that is strong’

“he had obtained the possession of the **strongest hold**
in all the land” (Helaman 1:22)

To that ‘until’

“even **to that** they did forget by what power they had been
brought thither” (1 Nephi 18:9)

Where unto ‘with respect to which’

“**where unto** thou hast not made us mighty in writing”
(Ether 12:23)

Scattered throughout the first part of NOL are more than a dozen additional examples of archaic expressions and grammatical forms. Thus far I would estimate that there are at least 80 examples of archaic usage in the original text of the Book of Mormon.

Occasionally this finding about the language of the Book of Mormon is denigrated by saying that only a few examples have been found, as if that solves the problem. This is how Grant Hardy puts it in his 2018 review of the Critical Text Project in *BYU Studies*: “there are a few words that make more sense if they are read with obsolete meanings”.¹ Although even a few examples should cause us to pause (and should not be left unexplained), the truth is that there are considerably more than “a few words” (there are at least 39 specific words with archaic meanings).

On the other hand, there is hardly any evidence in the Book of Mormon for words and phrases that entered the English language in the second half of the 1700s or in the first decades of the 1800s. It is true that there are a number of words (mostly from the Romance languages, especially French) that the OED originally claimed entered English in the second half of the 1700s, but now the online, third edition of the OED and other databases show that these words entered English in the late 1600s or early 1700s:

Attitude ‘posture, position’

“in the **attitude** of singing and praising their God” (1 Nephi 1:8)

Civilization ‘civil behavior’

“and subjecting them to peace and **civilization**” (Alma 51:22)

Derangement ‘disturbance’

“and this **derangement** of your minds comes because of the tradition of your fathers” (Alma 30:16)

Embarrassments ‘difficulties’

“now the cause of these our **embarrassments** . . . we knew not”
(Alma 58:9)

Frenzied ‘crazy’

“but behold, it is the effects of a **frenzied** mind” (Alma 30:16)

1. Grant Hardy, “Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project”, *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2018): 176.

Machinery ‘mechanical devices designed to perform specific tasks’

“and we . . . became exceeding rich . . . in **machinery**”

(Jarom 1:8)

Pickets ‘pointed stakes for fences and stockades’

“that there should be a frame of **pickets** built upon the timbers round about” (Alma 50:3)

Plan ‘organized proposal’

“and thus the **plan** of redemption would have been frustrated”

(Alma 12:26)

Rations ‘an allowance of provisions made on a regular basis’

“and by and by we shall receive wine for our **rations**”

(Alma 55:11)

Risk ‘to take a risk’

“upon those points of doctrine which ye hath hitherto **risked** to commit sin” (Alma 41:9)

Station ‘a place or position to which a person is assigned’

“after having blessed them according to their several **stations**”

(Alma 17:18)

Stimulate ‘to incite’

“I did **stimulate** them to go to battle with their might”

(Mosiah 10:19)

Now the challenge for those opposed to the Early Modern English hypothesis is to get rid of all, not just a few, of these archaic language uses. Here are some of the possible ways, ones that Carmack and I have been employing in our own research:

- (1) try to find evidence that the archaic reading is a manuscript error that occurred in the early transmission of the Book of Mormon;
- (2) try to find the archaic reading as an example of relic usage in Joseph Smith’s own language or in the dialectal language spoken in upstate New York;
- (3) try to find examples of the reading as a hard-to-find, rare reading in the English of the late 1700s or early 1800s;
- (4) simply reject the archaic reading in favor of a non-archaic reading.

So the question is: Have we found any words in the Book of Mormon that date from nearer to Joseph Smith's time? There is one clear example, *heft*. This word occurs only once in the text, and, in fact, it occurs in the extracanonical eight-witness statement, which was probably authored by Joseph Smith himself in 1829 (see section 14, Witness Statements, in NOL):

Heft (1789 first citation, in the OED)

“for we have seen and **hefted** and know of a surety”
(eight-witness statement)

In addition, there are two other Book of Mormon words that could have been created in earlier English itself but which are attested in the databases only after 1800; each one occurs only once within the Book of Mormon text:

Hinderment (1807 first citation, in Google Books)

“and he became a great **hinderment** to the prosperity of the church of God” (Mosiah 27:9)

The noun *hinderment* could have been created from the verb *hinder*, just as *government* is derivable from the verb *govern*.

Ites (1852 first citation, in the OED)

“neither were there Lamanites nor no manner of **ites**” (4 Nephi 1:17)

The morpheme *ite* can become lexicalized from *Israelites* and similar biblical names ending in *-ite*. Compare this with the earlier lexical *ism*, derived from words like *capitalism* and *socialism* (“and all those other *isms*”).

Thus far we have found a few word uses, phrases, and expressions that seem, from the evidence gathered thus far, to have been used only in later English:

A descendant of (with a plural subject)

“they are a **descendant of** the Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4)

An eye singled to (*singled* rather than the expected *single*)

“for God will that it shall be done with **an eye singled to** his glory” (Mormon 8:15)

Morrow month

“on the **morrow month** I will command that my armies shall come down against you” (3 Nephi 3:8)

Murmur with (non-participatory *with*)

“the people began to **murmur with** the king because of their afflictions” (Mosiah 21:6)

Visit your destruction

“and those of the fourth generation shall **visit your destruction**” (Helaman 13:10)

Wax strong in years

“they had many children which did grow up and began to **wax strong in years**” (3 Nephi 1:29)

And to this list we can add a few expressions and word uses that seem to have never occurred in the history of the English language (except, of course, in the Book of Mormon):

Cite your minds forward to ‘to urge you to consider’

“I would **cite your minds forward to** the time which the Lord gave these commandments” (Alma 13:1)

Pollutions ‘people who are polluted or who pollute’

“O ye **pollutions**, ye hypocrites . . . why have ye polluted the holy church?” (Mormon 8:38)

Retain ‘to take back’

“even until they had **retained** the one half of their property” (Helaman 4:16)

Subsequent to man ‘consequent to man’

“to remove the cause of diseases which was **subsequent to man**” (Alma 46:40)

Wax ‘to cause to become’ (causative usage, in the passive)

“and they **having been waxed** strong in battle” (Alma 9:22)

This is the entire list of examples that have not yet been found in Early Modern English nor in the early 1700s. Even so, these 14 examples do not permit us to ignore the 80 or more examples of archaic language usage (words, phrases, expressions, and grammatical forms) that have been found in the original text of the Book of Mormon.

In the second part of NOL, I list 133 examples of Book of Mormon archaic language usage that also occur in the King James Bible. One could claim from these examples that Joseph Smith must have known

his Bible extremely well. It should be kept in mind that many of these examples occur rarely in the Bible and are typically found only in obscure passages, yet ones that Joseph Smith must have known if Joseph is the one responsible for the text of the Book of Mormon:

Require ‘to request’

“thy fathers have also **required** of me this thing” (Enos 1:18)

“for I was ashamed to **require** of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way”
(Ezra 8:22)

For the multitude ‘given the crowd’

“and as many as could come **for the multitude** did kiss his feet”
(3 Nephi 17:10)

“and when they could not come nigh unto him **for the press**”
(Mark 2:4)

Here in the New Testament the word *press* means ‘multitude’ or ‘crowd’ (see definition 1a for the noun *press* in the OED).

Cast arrows ‘to shoot arrows’

“the Lamanites could not **cast** their stones and their **arrows** at them” (Alma 49:4)

“as a mad *man* who **casteth** firebrands, **arrows**, and death”
(Proverbs 26:18)

One wonders if Joseph Smith or any other reader of the text would have known King James examples like these. But since they are in the Bible, Joseph must have somehow absorbed them from his Bible reading if he is the author of the Book of Mormon text.

Given the bad grammar in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, Alexander Campbell (in his 1831 critique of the book) assumed that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon, and he further claimed that Joseph Smith wrote about the political and religious issues that had been discussed in New York State in the 1820s. Campbell’s list of the issues has too often been accepted at face value by both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars alike:

infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, **transubstantiation**, fasting, **penance**, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of **freemasonry**, republican government, and the rights of man

But Campbell got carried away when he constructed this list: he included issues that do not appear in the Book of Mormon (such as transubstantiation, penance, and freemasonry). More importantly, if one looks at the text from the perspective of Early Modern English and Reformed Protestantism (including what has been called Radical Protestantism, that is, a Protestantism that attempts to restore an original Christianity based solely upon New Testament practice), there are numerous issues which show that the Book of Mormon is concerned with what the Protestants dealt with and argued over during the 1500s and 1600s:

- (1) People are burnt at the stake for heresy (especially in the 1530s and the 1550s in England).

There is also evidence for burning their scriptures (especially in the 1520s in England).

- (2) Judgment day will occur at the bar of God (each person will stand at the bar when their case is tried before the Lord).

There is no bar of justice in the New Testament. Rather, the judicial bar dates from medieval times. Moreover, we have the term *pleading bar* dating from the 1600s (the bar at which a person makes their pleading or plea). On the other hand, there is no independent evidence for “the pleasing bar of God”.

- (3) The term *secret combinations* is used to refer to secret conspiracies against the government and the state church throughout the 1600s and the 1700s.

The earliest citation for *secret combination(s)* dates from 1602. Shortly thereafter, the phrase was commonly used in reference to the 1605 attempt by Guy Faux and other Catholics to blow up Parliament. The first reference of *secret combination(s)* to masons dates from 1796, but this refers to a union of brick layers attempting to control the price of labor.

- (4) There are four pairs of ecclesiastical words that William Tyndale and Thomas More debated in the late 1520s (*congregation* versus *church*; *elder* versus *priest*; *love* versus *charity*; and *repent* versus *do penance*); translators of the English Bible from 1526 to 1611 were forced to deal with these terms in their biblical translations.

The Book of Mormon text is informed by this debate: *church* is used with its dual meaning (the word *congregation* is ignored except in biblical phraseology); the church has both elders and priests; the word *charity* means ‘love’; and the

word *penance* is completely ignored since the practice does not occur in the Book of Mormon.

- (5) The true church does not permit child and infant baptism, thus accepting the position of the Anabaptists (who were considered radical and were murdered by both Catholics and Reformed Protestants).

The prophet Mormon provides a very strong discourse against child baptism. Note his severe condemnation of those who advocated or even believed in child baptism (Moroni 8:14–16).

- (6) There is a strong preference for piety in living and worship (the Puritan lifestyle).
- (7) The Lord's sacrament is "a symbolic memorial" (Zwingli, 1484–1531) but includes a spiritual renewal (Bullinger, 1504–1575).

These two concepts characterize the essence of the sacrament prayers, first given by Jesus in 3 Nephi 18:11 and 20:8–9 and then later by Moroni in Moroni 4–5. Any question of transubstantiation or any variant of it, such as consubstantiation, is ignored.

There is also a secondary issue relating to the sacrament, the reference in Moroni 4:2 to the congregation kneeling down with the elder or priest when he blesses the sacrament. In 1552, during the reprinting of the Book of Common Prayer under King Edward VI, the issue of the church kneeling with the priest was resolved in favor of the traditional kneeling. This practice had been criticized by the Presbyterian John Knox as an unnecessary Catholic practice that the Church of England had continued using.

- (8) The Catholic practice of secret confession to church leaders and required works of penance never shows up in the text.

Only once does the Book of Mormon refer to people going to an ecclesiastical authority (in Helaman 16:1, when Nephites converted by the preaching of Samuel the Lamanite go to Nephi for confession of sins and then baptism). In every case, repentance before God is required, and repentant souls must always be willing to publicly declare their repentance.

- (9) The Trinitarianism of the Book of Mormon is most clearly expressed by Abinadi in Mosiah 15 and best matches the Trinitarianism found in the Gospel of John.

God will come down among the children of men and take upon himself a body of flesh and be sacrificed for mankind. This was the heresy that led to the death of Abinadi (or at least it was the official accusation against him, described in Mosiah 17:7–8). This characterization of the Trinity is not the current LDS view of the Godhead.

- (10) The church is separated from the state and will act independently in dealing with questions of church discipline and excommunication.

In Mosiah 26, King Mosiah refuses, as the secular leader of the state, to intervene in the disciplining of church members and leaves that to Alma, the leader of the church. The Lord then instructs Alma that he is limited in his disciplining of church members to excommunicating them rather than physically punishing them. The separation of the church from governmental control is more significant than replacing hereditary kings with elected judges since in the Book of Mormon those judges end up acting much like kings. Ultimately, Campbell is wrong to assume that Mosiah's change in governance was a good example of republican government. It should also be noted that the issue of separation of church and state is an important one in the development of American constitutional law, but it also played a significant role in debates between Reformed and Radical Protestants in Europe in the mid-1500s.

Given all of these similarities with Reformed Protestant issues of the 1500s and 1600s, it is not surprising then that the Book of Mormon resonates so well with a number of Protestants coming from the Radical Protestant tradition.

Numerous scholars, in attempting to disprove the Early Modern English influence in the Book of Mormon, have been trying to find religious expressions in the book that date solely from Joseph Smith's time rather than from the 1500s and 1600s. They mistakenly think that finding such expressions will disprove the Early Modern English hypothesis. (At the same time, most of them are not trying to find examples of the proposed archaic usage in Joseph Smith's time, which is what

really needs to be done if the Early Modern English hypothesis is to be disproven.) In all of these studies, these critics generally fail to find a particular expression in Early Modern English for one of several reasons: (1) they depend on Google and *Literature Online* (LION), which do not have enough religious-oriented books from the 1500s and 1600s; (2) they do not take spelling variants into account (the Early Modern English citations usually take nonstandard spellings); or (3) their expression is too long and complex and ends up being rare or non-existent, yet shorter or equivalent expressions do exist. (One may not be able to find “swift to do iniquity” in the databases, but there is evidence for the alternative “swift to do evil” and the shorter expression “to do iniquity”.)

In order to show the general futility in hunting for religious expressions that are restricted to Joseph Smith’s time, I provide in section 7 of NOL, *Archaic Expressions*, a list of 34 Book of Mormon expressions that Carmack and I have analyzed during our research of the text during the past few years. In this section of NOL, we are not trying to prove that these expressions never existed during Joseph Smith’s time. To the contrary, they did. Instead, our goal here is to find them being used from the mid-1500s up through the mid-1700s. Here are some examples that at first we thought we would not find in that earlier time period; we were wrong:

1557, Roger Edgeworth	they made a mock of the prophet’s words
1560, John Knox	by the cruel and ignominious death of his own Son
1580, Calvin’s <i>Commentaries</i>	we are spiritually begotten into the similitude of Christ
1595, Johannes Lansperger	with a determined resolution to do all those things
1599, King James VI	drinking in with their very nourish-milk
1603, Richard Knolles	and upwards of twenty thousand horsemen
1607, John Harington	and sure he had bled out his life and all
1608, William Bishop	to pardon whatsoever he saw fit to be pardoned

1614, Robert Horne	while we dwell in flesh
1620, Thomas Shelton	he caused all the highways to be laid and watched
1643, Richard Baker	if yourself will refuse to take it upon you
1649, <i>Trial of John Lilburne</i>	I and mine must unavoidably perish for want of my money
1653, Christopher Love	thy heart will be drawn out towards him in prayer
1660, William Seckep	he who was guarded to the cross with a band of soldiers
1669, Thomas Manley	when the capital parts of the city are rebuilt
1673, Nathaniel Wanley	which is strange to relate
1676, <i>China and France</i>	this persuasion is so fixed in their minds
1681, Edward Bury	the memory then will be enlarged
1681, Robert Knox	where all his militia stand in their arms

In 2014, Grant Hardy sent me a list of 29 Book of Mormon expressions that he proposed were contemporary to Joseph Smith's time and did not occur earlier. Some of Hardy's expressions were first noted by Alexander Campbell and other nineteenth-century anti-Mormons. Hardy could not find them in earlier English on Google Books or *Literature Online* (LION). But using *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO), along with Google Search, I readily found 27 of them in Early Modern English (and Carmack found the other two); all of these expressions have citation dates between 1531 and 1733, as in this sampling:

1533, Thomas More	of them that have felt the taste of the good word of God
1612, Richard Greenham	guided and nourished by the word of God
1612, Charles Richardson	we are only instruments in the hands of God
1654, Anthony Burgess	and an infinite atonement made

- 1663, Richard Hubberthorn or **save his people in their sins** and
not from them
- 1695, Dudley Loftus so was Adam loosed from the **chains
of hell**
- 1696, Thomas Gregory if we misspend these **days of
probation**
- 1721, Joseph Perry the Saints do **sing this song of
redeeming love**
- 1733, Thomas Ridgley the **eternal plan** that was laid

There seems to be no end to these kind of challenges to our earlier English hypothesis. People continue to send them to us or to publish them on the internet, and sometimes we find some intrinsic interest in a given expression, as in these striking examples:

- 1612, William Jewel but would choose rather to **endure
the crosses of the world**
- 1632, William Bloys as his messenger bringing **glad
tidings of great joy**
- 1681, Henry Harrison the **peaceable . . . follower of Christ**
enjoys his rest
- 1697, Lancelot Blackburne he laid the **plan of our redemption**

In general, these lists of proposed counter-examples continue to fail. And that is because the language of religious expression in English originated in the 1500s and 1600s and continued up through the 1700s and into the 1800s. So it will not be surprising that we are able to find these expressions in Early Modern English since they represent the language of the Protestant Reformation and Christian religion in general; and despite their prevalence in the 1800s, they did not originate in the early 1800s.

Nonetheless, Carmack and I have found some expressions that appear to date from the last part of the 1700s or from the early 1800s (or even ones that seem to date after the Book of Mormon was published in 1830). Two sections in NOL are devoted to what we have not found in Early Modern English (namely, sections 10, Non-Archaic Language, and 11, Unique Language). In fact, earlier in this paper I reproduced the complete, current lists from these two sections, although it is worth noting that over the past two years these lists have grown shorter and shorter.

In summary, the real task for those wishing to claim that the non-biblical language of the Book of Mormon is Joseph Smith's English

will be to concentrate on the 80 or so examples of archaic language that have thus far been identified in the original text of the Book of Mormon, that is, the word uses, phrases, expressions, and grammatical forms that appear from all the evidence to have died out sometime between the mid-1500s and the mid-1700s. This kind of research requires more sophisticated databases than Google Books, along with a knowledge of spelling variants in Early Modern English.

Another fruitful area of research has been studying the syntax of the Book of Mormon. In particular, Stanford Carmack has found that the Book of Mormon syntax matches best what we find in English from the second half of the 1500s, but it does not match the syntax of the 1611 King James Bible nor the pseudo-biblical texts that were popular during the late 1700s and early 1800s, such as Richard Snowden's 1793 *The American Revolution* and Gilbert Hunt's 1816 *The Late War*. Thus, the occasional similarity of the Book of Mormon with King James English cannot be dismissed by simply stating that "it may share some syntactic patterns" (as in Hardy's review of the Critical Text Project²). In section 12 of NOL, Carmack examines in detail the following cases where the syntax of the Book of Mormon matches the syntax of the second half of the 1500s, but not the syntax of William Tyndale's late 1520s and early 1530s biblical translations, nor the 1611 King James syntax (which heavily borrows from Tyndale's syntax):

the plural *-th* ending

"Nephi's **brethren rebelleth** against him" (1 Nephi preface)

"all **those** who **hath** hearkened unto their words" (Mosiah 15:11)

the periphrastic past-tense *did*

"the voice of the Lord came and **did speak** many words unto them" (1 Nephi 16:39)

"they **did quake** and had fallen to the earth" (Helaman 9:5)

complex finite clausal complements (for five different verbs)

"he can **cause** the earth **that** it shall pass away"
(1 Nephi 17:46)

"ye will not **suffer** your children **that** they shall go hungry"
(Mosiah 4:14)

2. Hardy, "Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project", 176.

“and I would **desire** him **that** he come in unto me”

(Alma 18:11)

“and he **commanded** them **that** they should arise”

(3 Nephi 20:2)

“thou hast **made** all this people **that** they could speak much”

(Ether 12:23)

Carmack is quite correct to characterize the syntax of the Book of Mormon as “excellent and even sophisticated”. Yet this syntax does not show up in Joseph Smith’s own writing, including his 1832 History written only three years after he finished translating the Book of Mormon. There are, for instance, no examples of the periphrastic past-tense *did* or the *-th* plural in his 1832 History—nor in the letters he wrote while he was translating the Book of Mormon. In addition, Joseph never used the relative pronoun *which* for persons in his 1832 History or in his contemporary letters, yet that biblical usage is found throughout the original Book of Mormon text:

personal *which* in the original text

“a man **which** was large and was noted for his much strength”

(Alma 1:2)

“there were none **which** were Amlicites or Amulonites”

(Alma 24:29)

“our first parents **which** came out of the land of Jerusalem”

(Helaman 5:6)

Instead, Joseph used *who* and *that* in his 1832 History and in his contemporary letters, the same relative pronouns that are used in current English.

One incredible aspect of the Book of Mormon is the complex blending into the text of phraseology from all over the King James Bible. Other scholars have been working on this issue and generally refer to it as “intertextuality”. (Nicholas Frederick has referred to it as “allusivity”, a word that has not yet made it into the Oxford English Dictionary.) Here I am not referring to the language of the long biblical quotations in the Book of Mormon (from Isaiah and Matthew, for instance) but within the Book of Mormon text proper. Under this subject, I also ignore the few cases of commentary in the Book of Mormon based on specific biblical passages (for instance, from Isaiah 29 and 1 Corinthians 13). Instead, in section 19 of NOL, King James Blending, I discuss four different biblical phrases and show how they are blended in varying

ways into the text of the Book of Mormon proper: “hearts knit together”, “lay hold upon every good gift”, “sit down in the kingdom of God”, and “sting of death”. Consider, for instance, the following astonishing case of linguistic gymnastics found in the book of Mosiah, where every phrase shifts to a different King James passage:

Mosiah 18:21	KING JAMES PHRASEOLOGY	
one faith and one baptism	one faith / one baptism	<i>Ephesians 4:5</i>
their hearts knit together	their hearts being knit together	<i>Colossians 2:2</i>
together in unity	together in unity	<i>Psalms 133:1</i>
in love one towards another	in love one toward another	<i>1 Thessalonians 3:12</i>

Another biblical blending that I discovered quite a few years ago involves the borrowing of the phraseology of Hebrews 10:27, yet used in a rather different way:

Alma 40:14	Hebrews 10:26–27
now this is the state of the souls of the wicked	for if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth
yea in darkness and a state of awful fearful looking for of the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them	there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries

In conclusion, we end up with these general results with respect to the archaic nature of the Book of Mormon: (1) the words, phrases, and expressions mainly date from the 1530s through the 1730s; (2) the syntax best matches that of the second half of the 1500s; and (3) there is an astounding blending in of King James phraseology (from both the Old Testament and the New) throughout the Book of Mormon.

NOL is much more than an encyclopedia of Book of Mormon usage. It is a whole new way of looking at the Book of Mormon text. And the main point is that the original language of the text is complex, and it is going to take work if you want to consider the text seriously. The day of casual claims about the language of the Book of Mormon is over, especially those general statements that the language is a crude imitation of the King James style, intermixed with Joseph Smith’s dialectal usage.

Several important questions derive from this work on the nature of the original language of the Book of Mormon. I discuss them here at the end of this summary article on NOL:

(1) *Is the original Book of Mormon text an Early Modern English text?*

The answer is no. Here are four findings that must be considered:

- (a) The word *retain* often takes the meaning ‘to take back’ rather than the expected meaning ‘to keep’; this etymological meaning for *retain* has never occurred, as far as I know, in the history of English.
- (b) In the original text, we have the nearly consistent use of the extra conjunctive *and* after a complex subordinate clause and before its following main clause (as originally in Moroni 10:4: “and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, **and** he will manifest the truth of it unto you”). As far as I know, this syntactic structure (which is Hebrew-like, but is strictly speaking not a Hebraism) has never occurred in English.
- (c) In the Book of Mormon, the use of the perfective auxiliary *have* is considerably more frequent than the archaic perfective auxiliary *be* for verbs of motion and change; this syntax appears to date from the late 1700s, nearer to Joseph Smith’s time, than from the Early Modern English period, which definitely favored the perfective *be* (as in “he is risen”).
- (d) The vocabulary of the text has been filtered so that no truly obsolete words from Early Modern English get through (except in the long quotations from the King James Bible, with its archaic examples like *besom*, *carbuncle*, *tabret*, and *crisping pin*). Nonetheless, the words that occur in the Book of Mormon proper are recognizable as current words in English, but they often take on archaic meanings that neither Joseph Smith nor his scribes understood.

Thus we end up with a very complex and interesting mixture of specific language usage, but definitely not an ignorant mishmash of language imitative of the biblical style.

(2) *What happens to the Early Modern English hypothesis if we find clear evidence of words, phrases, and expressions dating from the second half of the 1700s?*

This could well happen. The short lists in sections 10, Non-Archaic Language, and 11, Unique Language, could expand instead of diminish, and we may end up having to say that the language of the text dates from

the 1530s up to the late 1700s—or even up to the 1820s (although this latter case seems highly unlikely). But even if the upper bound on the dating of the text approaches Joseph Smith’s time, we will still have to deal with the lower bound, the clear examples of archaic language usage dating from the 1500s and 1600s. Particular examples in the original text like *but if* ‘unless’ (in Mosiah 3:19), *do away* ‘to dismiss’ (in Moroni 10:26), and *idleness* ‘meaningless words or actions’ (in Alma 38:12) are not going to disappear, although some scholars will either continue to ignore these examples or simply declare that they must be instances of relic upstate New York English, despite the lack of evidence.

(3) *Is the Book of Mormon English translation a literal translation of what was on the plates?*

It appears once more that the answer is no. The blending in of specific King James phraseology, from the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, tells us otherwise. The Book of Mormon is a creative translation that involves considerable intervention by the translator (or shall we say translators, since we’re in a speculative mood). There is also evidence that the Book of Mormon is a cultural translation. Consider, for instance, the interesting case of the anachronistic use in the Book of Mormon of the noun *bar*, which consistently refers to the bar of judgment that we will stand in front of (and hold on to) on the day of judgment. The judgment bar is not a biblical or ancient term, but instead dates from medieval times. The Bible refers to standing before the judgment seat of a judge or the throne of the king, as does the Book of Mormon when it refers to secular judgment. The Book of Mormon goes further and refers to the “bar of God” and to the future day of judgment. However, the question arises concerning how this would have been expressed on the plates. I suppose the authors of the words on the plates could have been told, by inspiration, to write a word equivalent to *bar*, the word that would be used in the future to refer to God’s final judgment. Note that *bar* is never used anachronistically within the Book of Mormon text itself to refer to a secular judgment, but is consistently used to refer to the final day of judgment. So rather than the equivalent for the word *bar* occurring on the plates, it is possible that the translator(s) decided to use the word *bar* (and even the more specific *pleading bar*, which clearly dates from the 1600s) to refer to the final judgment, a scene then that would have been fully understood by Early Modern English readers but not by modern readers nor by ancient readers. All of this cultural translation linking the text to

Early Modern English argues that Joseph Smith was not the author of the English translation.

(4) *Did the Lord himself do the translation, or did he have others do it?*

The answer is: We have no idea, and it's basically a waste of time trying to figure out how the translation was produced. Early on in my work on the text, I speculated about there being a translation committee. This was a mistake. Soon thereafter, there were claims on the internet that I thought William Tyndale had been on the committee! I may have referred to the actual translator of the Book of Mormon as "the Lord himself or his translation committee", but I have never speculated on who could have been on a translation committee. Nor have Carmack and I ever found any writer from the second half of the 1500s, say, whose language style sounds like the Book of Mormon's. I know that others have claimed that the translator was some Nephite prophet (such as Moroni) who learned English imperfectly and did the translation, and that's why we get the Hebrew-like constructions in the text (and perhaps even the bad grammar). Well, there is no end to this, nor is there any benefit in this kind of speculation. I find this whole exercise unfruitful and do not recommend it. I'm afraid we're just going to have to wait for the answer from the Lord. More importantly, we need to continue to study the nature of the original language of the Book of Mormon.

(5) *Why didn't the Lord reveal the text to Joseph Smith in his English or in our current English (or in B. H. Roberts' or James E. Talmage's "correct" English)? Why would the Lord give us a text that we don't fully understand, so that we have to study it all out?*

It's worth pointing out that the same holds for reading the King James Bible. We need help in understanding passages, which can be indecipherable, misleading, or scandalous to modern American readers, as in these examples where I also provide a modern, literal translation from the English Standard Version (ESV), which pays respect to the King James text and to the Greek and Hebrew originals:

Acts 3:17 I **wot** that through ignorance ye did it
'I **know** that you acted in ignorance' (ESV)

Luke 8:46 someone hath touched me, for I perceive that **virtue** is
gone out of me
'someone touched me, for I perceive that **power** has
gone out from me' (ESV)

Joshua 15:18 and she lighted off *her ass*
 ‘and she got off her **donkey**’ (ESV)

In fact, even reading the scriptures in their original Greek (the New Testament) or in their original Hebrew or occasional Aramaic (the Old Testament) will not solve this problem. We don’t precisely know what all the words mean even in the original languages. All of scripture reading is difficult and requires study.

(6) *Is there a need for a modernized text of the Book of Mormon?*

As far as the nonstandard grammar goes, we already have that kind of a text (for the most part). Of course, we could go further and make a thoroughly modern English version without any archaic syntax, thus avoiding verbs with the inflectional endings *-(e)st* and *-(e)th* and the archaic pronouns *thou, thee, thy,* and *thine* as well as eliminating archaic words like *yea* and *nay*. Going in the opposite direction, the Yale text of the Book of Mormon restores the original nonstandard grammar and all the original archaic syntax; yet in reading that version, modern readers may stumble over expressions like “in them days” and “they was yet wroth”. And what about all the changes in meaning discussed in this new work, *The Nature of the Original Language*? Should we have footnotes for all of these changed words in the Book of Mormon? And the English language continues to change, so a few centuries down the road, we may very well be forced to have an English text with notes explaining an increasing number of changes in the language (this is what we have already begun to do with our LDS King James Bible). Or we will need a conservative, modern translation of the Book of Mormon, but one that pays respect to the textual tradition. For scholarly work, of course, there is no substitute for the earliest text, along with its conjectural emendations. In that case, not only do we accept the nonstandard language of the original text, we embrace it! And we take the text seriously, as words revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith from the Lord. Ultimately, then, we may need three kinds of text: (1) an annotated and grammatically correct Book of Mormon for more literate and educated readers, one that basically retains the King James style of language; (2) a modernized text for English readers of all economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, one that basically eliminates all the Early Modern English language; and (3) a scholarly edition that restores all the original readings, including the nonstandard grammar as well as conjectural emendations that have sufficient support and remedy actual deficiencies in the text. Of course, some of us will simply skip the first two alternatives.

Fortunately, the third alternative already exists, in the Yale edition of the Book of Mormon. Ultimately, we may want a scholarly text that provides the original text along with annotations explaining the archaic usage, whether lexical, semantic, or grammatical, as well as notes specifying significant changes in the history of the text.

Royal Skousen, professor of linguistics at Brigham Young University, has been editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project since 1988. In 2009, he published with Yale University Press the culmination of his critical text work, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. He is also known for his work on exemplar-based theories of language and quantum computing of analogical modeling.