



Type: Journal Article

---

## Bad Grammar in the Book of Mormon Found in Early English Bibles

Author(s): Stanford Carmack

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,  
Volume 36 (2020), pp. 1-28

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

---

**Abstract:** This study describes ten types of grammatical usage found in early modern Bibles with correlates in the original text of the Book of Mormon. In some cases Joseph Smith's own language could have produced the matching grammar, but in other cases his own linguistic preferences were unlikely to have produced the patterns or usage found in the original text. Comparative linguistic research indicates that this grammatical correspondence shouldn't be a surprise, since plenty of Book of Mormon syntax matches structures and patterns found in Early Modern English.

# INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT  
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 36 · 2020 · Pages 1 - 28

## **Bad Grammar in the Book of Mormon Found in Early English Bibles**

Stanford Carmack

Offprint Series

© 2020 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)  
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at [InterpreterFoundation.org](http://InterpreterFoundation.org). You can find other articles published in our journal at [Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org](http://Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org). You may subscribe to this journal at [InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription](http://InterpreterFoundation.org/annual-print-subscription).

# BAD GRAMMAR IN THE BOOK OF MORMON FOUND IN EARLY ENGLISH BIBLES

---

Stanford Carmack

**Abstract:** *This study describes ten types of grammatical usage found in early modern Bibles with correlates in the original text of the Book of Mormon. In some cases Joseph Smith's own language could have produced the matching grammar, but in other cases his own linguistic preferences were unlikely to have produced the patterns or usage found in the original text. Comparative linguistic research indicates that this grammatical correspondence shouldn't be a surprise, since plenty of Book of Mormon syntax matches structures and patterns found in Early Modern English.*

It can be difficult to know what to call the Book of Mormon's grammatical usage that was considered substandard by prescriptive norms of the early 19th century. I've decided to refer to its questionable usage using the short phrase at the beginning of the title: BAD GRAMMAR. This comports with the understanding of many nonspecialists and most Book of Mormon scholars, as exemplified in these excerpts from a recent essay:

The language of *The Book of Mormon* does not evince an appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of the King James Bible — the grammar and diction are quite awkward in comparison — yet the narratology is surprisingly sophisticated, \* \* \* the book's language was so obviously imperfect — it was difficult to find the miracle in poor grammar and monotonous phrasing. \* \* \* the work has more literary interest than is often assumed, despite its sometimes awkward grammar and diction.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Grant Hardy, "The Book of Mormon and the Bible," in *Americanist Approaches to The Book of Mormon*, edited by Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 110, 113, 125. These remarks are close to those made by B. H. Roberts in the early 1900s, who mentioned "errors in grammar and diction" and "awkwardness" — see Roberts, "The Translation of the Book of

This paper looks at ten different kinds of grammatical usage that occur in both the Book of Mormon and early English biblical texts. Most of the time the usage isn't found in the 1611 King James Bible. When it was part of the original King James text, it was edited out over the following decades, either completely or mostly. The ten topics addressed in this study cover usage often thought of as poor grammar — either from an early 19th-century perspective or from a biblical imitation perspective. The topics are these: “things that/which is,” plural *was*, object *they*, plural *hath*, subject *you*, third person singular verb forms in {-s}, irregular past participles, double negation, subjunctive ~ indicative variation after *if*, and object *who*.

The purpose of this paper isn't to give the views of specialists on grammatical usage, nor is it to determine whether a particular Book of Mormon archaism is a close or perfect match with popularity rates and diachronic shifts during the early modern era. Rather, its primary purpose is to show that early biblical grammatical usage thought to be bad grammar by Joseph Smith's time is well represented in the Book of Mormon. Text-critical studies strongly suggest that the matching is present in the original text because it has so many linguistic features of the 16th and 17th centuries (along with features of other centuries, but far fewer of them). The original text's lexis and syntax indicate that implicit knowledge of a wide variety of earlier modes of expression informed the English-language translation of the Book of Mormon. Almost all the bad grammar is part of its mostly early modern syntax.

Extensive comparative study shows that the Book of Mormon contains archaic, nonbiblical usage to such a degree as to reasonably rule out Joseph Smith as its author. In the case of lexis, Royal Skousen laid out in 2018 about 80 potential cases of nonbiblical, obsolete lexical usage in the Book of Mormon (see NOL §§1, 3, 4, 7).<sup>2</sup> Even though many of these don't hold

---

Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 6 (1906): 428; and Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 295.

Reading Hardy's remarks on Book of Mormon grammar, which noticeably lack important context, we might think we were still back in 1907, in the dark ages of Book of Mormon grammatical study — in an era without large digital corpora and without the benefit of any text-critical work. Readers in 2020 are entitled to a qualifying remark related to the complex topic of grammatical usage in the original Book of Mormon text, something as simple as “(although text-critical studies show that a lot of the bad grammar defies easy explanations).”

2. NOL stands for the critical text volume *The Nature of the Original Language* (see the appendix). For the reference to 80 potential cases of lexical archaism, see Royal Skousen, “The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018): 92.

up as instances of standalone archaism, the cases that remain represent a level of nonbiblical archaism that far exceeds any known pseudobiblical baseline. In the case of syntax, the Book of Mormon contains various large-scale archaic patterns and many individual archaic structures that are nonbiblical and nonpseudobiblical.

The primary sources consulted include Early English Books Online (EEBO), early English Bibles (from EEBO), the earliest text of the Book of Mormon (edited by Skousen), parts 3.1 to 3.4 of the critical text, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Google Books, 25 pseudobiblical texts, and Joseph Smith's early writings (see the appendix for further information on these sources).

The nine early English biblical texts examined for this study are the following:

- Tyndale's 1530 translation of the Pentateuch
- Tyndale's 1534 translation of the New Testament  
(a revision of his 1526 translation)
- 1535 Coverdale Bible
- 1539 Great Bible (1540 edition)
- 1560 Geneva Bible (1561 edition)
- 1568 Bishops' Bible
- 1582 Rheims New Testament
- 1609–1610 Douay Old Testament (including the Apocrypha)<sup>3</sup>
- 1611 King James Bible

Though the language of these scriptural texts is old, it's useful to bear in mind that it came from literate translators, many of whom knew more than one of the classical source languages: Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin.

Writing for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, David Daniell had this to say of the man responsible for much of the language of these early Bibles:

Tyndale's gift to the English language is unmeasurable. He translated into a register just above common speech, allied in its clarity to proverbs. It is a language which still speaks directly to the heart. His aims were always accuracy and clarity. King James's revisers adopted his style, and his words, for much of the Authorized Version. At a time when European scholars and professionals communicated in Latin, Tyndale insisted on being understood by ordinary people. He preferred a simple Saxon syntax of subject-verb-object. His vocabulary is predominantly Saxon, and often monosyllabic. An Oxford scholar, he was always rhetorically alert. He gave the Bible-reading nation an English plain style. It is a basis

---

3. The Douay–Rheims Bible was a Catholic translation, based on the Latin Vulgate.

for the great Elizabethan writers, and there is truth in the remark ‘without Tyndale, no Shakespeare’. It is not fanciful to see a chief agent of the energizing of the language in the sixteenth century in the constant reading of the Bible in English, of which Tyndale was the great maker.<sup>4</sup>

Before addressing the grammatical topics individually, I present here a summary of what is currently known about these in relation to pseudobiblical usage and early Joseph Smith usage (plural *hath* has been expanded to the more general case of the {-th} plural):

GRAMMATICAL TOPIC	PSEUDO-BIBLICAL USAGE	JOSEPH’S EARLY WRITINGS
“Things that/which is”	none	none
Plural <i>was</i>	none	yes
Object <i>they</i>	none	limited
Plural {-th}	limited	limited
Subject <i>you</i>	yes	yes
3sg verb forms in {-s}	yes	yes
Irregular past participles	yes	none
Double negation	limited	none
Mood variation after <i>if</i>	limited	none
Object <i>who</i>	none	yes

These observations are subject to change, and details of the comparative studies may appear in later publications. None of them, however, are crucial for determining Book of Mormon authorship.

That said, the most relevant ones in relation to Joseph’s potential authorship appear to be “things which is,” object *they*, plural {-th}, and double negation. There is little evidence for this kind of usage in pseudobiblical texts or in his early writings or from the greater textual record that might lead one to conclude that he would have been responsible for producing so many varied examples of these in his 1829 dictation. In the case of object *they* and double negation, additional details strengthen this determination: *they which* predominates in object *they* contexts, and “<personal pronoun> which” was not Joseph’s native relative pronoun usage; “nor no manner of X” occurs four times, which was very rare double negation by the 1820s. In addition, sometimes Joseph was unlikely to generate a subset of usage, as in the case of irregular past participles. In this domain, he certainly could have generated some of it,

---

4. David Daniell. “Tyndale, William,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Article published May 19, 2011, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27947>.

but he was unlikely to produce *arriven* five or six times and “had (been) spake” 13 times.

### “Things that is” and “things which is”

During the early modern period, it wasn’t rare for authors to employ the singular verb form *is* when the noun influencing the agreement was plural *things*. This peculiarity of present-tense verb agreement occurred almost all the time in contexts involving relative clauses. Consequently, it isn’t surprising that this grammatical usage is found in early English Bibles. (In the case of the syntax “things <relative pronoun> is,” the grammatical subject is the relative pronoun, but the agreement controller is the antecedent *things*.)<sup>5</sup>

For this study, 196 examples of “things that is” and “things which is” were noted in the EEBO Phase 1 database (25,368 texts; EEBO<sub>1</sub>).<sup>6</sup> These 196 instances were found in 166 texts. Just under three-fourths of these 196 examples employ *that* as the relative pronoun (145 of them), reflecting the general preference of the early modern period for the relative pronoun *that* over *which* (yet some writers clearly preferred *which*). Tallying the number of texts with instances, we find that their

---

5. The simpler syntax “things is,” where *things* is the agreement controller, is rarely found in the textual record. For example, in looking at about 150 instances of the string “these things is” in the EEBO<sub>1</sub> database, I found only two cases where *things* was actually the grammatical subject. In both cases there was an immediately following singular complement: “these things is a mystery” (1665, EEBO A35520); “these things is sin and evil” (1676, EEBO A44786; in this example the closest conjunct is singular). Such a syntactic arrangement slightly encouraged, but did not compel, the use of *is*. We can see this reflected in the textual record, since there are close to 25 instances of “these things are <singular noun phrase>” in EEBO<sub>1</sub>, such as “these things are a vexation” (1619, A11067) and “these things are a mystery” (1691, A41425). This 1691 example and the 1665 example constitute what linguists call a minimal pair; they plainly show the grammatical option to employ either *is* or *are* in this construction.

6. This number is subject to revision based on any errors or misinterpretations I might have made, including EEBO transcription errors that I didn’t catch. For instance, an EEBO transcription error in one of John Donne’s sermons currently gives an incorrect reading of “the things that is gone out of my lips,” with plural *things*. This is a mistranscription of Donne’s accurate quote of Psalm 89:34, which has singular *thing*. I didn’t verify most of the 196 instances of “things <relative pronoun> is” by consulting page images. Nonetheless, I did exclude many potential instances that were not clear examples of the syntax, including the construction “one of the things <relative pronoun> is,” since singular *one* could be the agreement controller, as in this instance: “this is one of the many things which is not likely to be bettered by legislative interference” (1797). Such expressions are not clear cases of the plural-singular syntax.

normalized frequency is nearly five times higher in the 16th century, suggesting that this syntax was more popular in the first half of the early modern period than in the second half.<sup>7</sup>

Here is one example showing immediate agreement variation (in the quotations below the spelling has almost always been adjusted, and less often the punctuation):

1661, Francis Howgill, *The glory of the true church* [EEBO A44790]

all that come to the beginning again, to union with God, must die  
to all these THINGS which **is** got and entered into the hearts of men  
since the transgression, and while these THINGS **are** loved,  
they alienate the mind from the living God, [page 146]

The difference in the syntax almost certainly led to the agreement difference: “all these THINGS *which is* got” versus “these THINGS **are** loved,” the latter without any relative pronoun. (There is also a plural personal expression “all that come” at the beginning of this excerpt.)

The syntax “things <relative pronoun> is” wasn’t found in any 17th-century Bibles, but three distinct examples were found in 16th-century Bibles:

1539, Great Bible (1540 edition) [A10405]

The robberies of the ungodly shall be their own destruction,  
for they will not do the THINGS that **is**  
right. [Proverbs 21:7; page image 483]

The 1568 Bishops’ Bible has singular *thing* in this verse.

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

Let our strength be the law of unrighteousness:  
for the THINGS that **is** feeble is reproved as unprofitable.  
[Wisdom of Solomon 2:11; page image 801]

The 1568 Bishops’ Bible has singular *thing* in this verse.

1568, Bishops’ Bible [A10708]

and if thou wilt take out the THINGS that **is** precious from the vial,  
thou shalt be even as mine own mouth: [1 Esdras 6:23; page cxi]

The 1539 Great Bible also has “things that is” in this verse.

The original Book of Mormon text has 18 instances of this syntactic construction (counting both contiguous and noncontiguous examples),

---

7. Among the 196 instances, 67 sixteenth-century documents have examples and 99 seventeenth-century documents have examples. The WordCruncher EEBO<sub>1</sub> database I used has 3,037 sixteenth-century documents and 22,189 seventeenth-century documents (counting from 1501 to 1600 and 1601 to 1700). A simple calculation of  $67 \div 99 \times 22189 \div 3037$  gives a figure of 4.94, representing how much greater the 16th-century popularity of “things <relative pronoun> is” might have been compared to 17th-century popularity.

which may be a record for a single book. All but one of these involve the relative pronoun *which*. There are also 42 instances of “things . . . which are” (none of “things . . . that are”). These numbers mean that the Book of Mormon employs *is* in this construction 30 percent of the time. Here is the one case of “things that is”:

Alma 30:44

Yea, and all things denote there is a God;  
yea, even the earth and all THINGS that **is** upon the face of it,

This passage provides a close syntactic contrast of “all things denote” and “all things that is,” similar to the 1661 Howgill example shown above.

Here are three more examples of this grammar from the 16th and 17th centuries:

1530, Hugh Latimer, quoted in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1583) [A67927]

For the world loveth all that are of the world,  
and hateth all THINGS that **is** contrary to it.

This excerpt has contrastive personal “all that are” and nonpersonal “all things that is.”

about 1540, Alexander Seton, quoted in Knox’s *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (1644 edition) [A47584]

For all THINGS that **is** contrary to the verity (which  
is Christ and his law) is of necessity a lie.

This might be a 17th-century modification of Seton’s original language, which reads variously in other editions: “all thing that is” and “all things which are.”

1682, William Penn [1644–1718] *Some sober and weighty reasons against prosecuting Protestant dissenters for difference of opinion in matters of religion* [A54221]

for it is to do the same THINGS that **is** condemned in others:

Rarely do we encounter relatively heavy use of this syntax in a single text. The EEBO<sub>1</sub> text found to have the most examples was the encyclopedic work, *De proprietatibus rerum* (“On the properties of things”: 1582, A05237; about 615,000 words). It has eight instances of “things that is” (none of “things which is”), along with 17 instances of “things <relative pronoun> are” and 82 instances of “things <relative pronoun> be.” (In these searches, I excluded cases with intervening punctuation.) An example of this is “he apprehendeth all things that **is** without himself.” If we count the *be* usage as plural, then this text’s singular to plural ratio is far from that of the Book of Mormon: 8:99 versus 18:42. If we don’t count the *be* usage, then the ratios are close. Also of note is that in the 17th century the Quaker Edward Burrough (1633–1663) employed at least eight examples of “things

<relative pronoun> is” in his writings (in several texts). An example of this is “to suffer all things that **is** put upon us” (1660, A30561).<sup>8</sup>

### Plural *was*

A closely related construction is the so-called plural *was*, with or without a relative pronoun subject. Tense was a factor in influencing usage rates of singular forms of the verb *be* with plural noun phrases. For example, “things is” usage (without a relative pronoun) was rare in Early Modern English, but “things was” usage was much more common. Plural *was* usage was more frequent than plural *is* precisely because of tense.<sup>9</sup> This tendency persisted into the late modern period.

As an example of this, Tyndale employed plural *was* with *things* twice in his 1534 Nephi Testament translation (besides seven examples of “things were”), and the Bishops’ Bible provides another instance from the Apocrypha (besides 21 examples of “things were”):

1534, William Tyndale (translator) [about 1494–1536]  
*The New Testament* [A68940]

and was also very God and that all THINGS **was** created and  
made by it [prologue to the four evangelists; page image 22]

And they told what THINGS **was** done in the way, and how they  
knew him in breaking of bread. [Luke 24:35; page image 275]

Other translations have *were* in Luke 24:35, or language without a form of  
the verb *be*.

1568, Bishops’ Bible [A10708]

and so at Ecbatana, a tower in the region of Media,  
there was found a place where these THINGS **was** laid up for memory.  
[1 Esdras 6:23; page image 1073]

---

8. As mentioned, this characteristic verb agreement of the early modern period became less frequent toward the end of the period (the late 17th century). It would be a time-consuming task to thoroughly verify its demise in the Eighteenth Century Collections Online database, since it isn’t amenable to precise syntactic searches. But if we limit our search to strings like “any things which is,” “many things which is,” and “some things which is,” then we can obtain some manageable results. Excluding language with intervening punctuation and other false positives, in the first case we encounter one actual instance dated 1701; in the second case we encounter a single early Scottish example dated 1705; and in the third case we encounter a single early Scottish example dated 1706. These results suggest that “things which is,” where *things* acted as the agreement controller, fell out of mainstream use in the early 1700s.

9. See, for example, the mention of local asymmetries in present-tense and past-tense verb agreement in Terttu Nevalainen, “Vernacular universals? The case of plural *was* in Early Modern English,” in *Types of Variation: Diachronic, dialectal and typological interfaces*, edited by Terttu Nevalainen, Juhani Klemola, and Mikko Laitinen (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 358.

The Coverdale Bible and the Great Bible have “there was found such a writing”; the Geneva Bible has “a place where such things were laid up for memory”; the King James text reads “there was found a roll wherein these things were recorded.”

The Book of Mormon also has one instance of “things was” (along with 15 examples of “things were”):

Mosiah 28:14

Now these THINGS **was** prepared from the beginning

The Coverdale Bible has the following instance of plural *was*, which is probably due to the Greek text having a clause-initial singular verb:

1535, Coverdale Bible [A10349]

Jesus also and his disciples **was** called unto the marriage.

[John 2:2; page xli]

Tyndale 1534 has “And Jesus was called also and his disciples unto the marriage.” The Greek verb is ἐκλήθη = ‘was called,’ the aorist passive indicative of *kaleō*.

These are not the only cases of plural *was* immediately following noun phrases in the early Bibles. For instance, the Bishops’ Bible has “the waters **was** risen” at Ezekiel 47:5 (cf. KJB “the waters **were** risen”; ESV “the water **had** risen”) and “the heavens **was** open” at Matthew 3:16 (cf. KJB “the heavens **were** opened”).

The Great Bible and the Geneva Bible also have examples of plural *was* that occur right after the relative pronoun *that*:<sup>10</sup>

1539, Great Bible (1540 edition) [A10405]

because they had understand the WORDS that **was** declared unto them.

[2 Esdras 8:12 (Nehemiah 8:12 in later Bibles); page cxcvij]

The Bishops’ Bible has “because they had understand the words that were declared unto them.” The Geneva Bible has “the words that they had taught them.”

---

10. I was surprised to find no examples of “things <relative pronoun> was” in the 16th-century Bibles (these texts have 171 examples of “things <relative pronoun> were,” without intervening punctuation). From what is known of early modern tendencies, it seemed reasonable to hypothesize that the 16th-century Bibles would have more examples of “things <relative pronoun> was” than of “things was.” Indeed, EEBO<sub>1</sub> has more than 100 examples of “things <relative pronoun> was.” As in the case of “things <relative pronoun> is,” the 16th-century occurrence rate of this past-tense verb agreement was markedly higher than the 17th-century rate. The original Book of Mormon text has three examples of “things which was,” along with 12 instances of “things which were” (none with the relative pronoun *that*).

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

Then the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night, by the way of the gate, which is between two WALLS that **was** by the king's garden: [2 Kings 25:4; page 153]

The syntax and punctuation make *gate* the agreement controller of *is*, and *walls* the agreement controller of *was*. In the King James Bible, the syntax and punctuation make *gate* the only agreement controller: “by the way of the GATE, between two walls, which **is** by the king's garden.”

The Book of Mormon has many instances of this kind of language; there are no fewer than 53 cases of plural *was* after the relative pronoun *which* (there are also three cases of plural “that was”). Seven times the agreement controller is *words*, as in the Great Bible’s “the words that was declared.” Here is one example of this:

Helaman 8:13

and also the WORDS which **was** spoken by this man Moses,

### Object *they*

Besides employing an apparent instance of plural *was* (John 2:2, shown above), the translator and clergyman Miles Coverdale (1488–1569) also employed *they* in object position after the preposition *for*. Here is how he expressed this phraseology in his translation of Acts:

1535, Coverdale Bible [A10349]

As **for** all **they** of Athens and strangers and guests, they gave themselves to nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some news. [Acts 17:21; page lx]

This object *they* syntax is not found in Tyndale 1534, and the King James Bible has a parenthetical here with different phraseology: “(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.)”

The usual way to express such language was “as for (all) **those** of” followed by “as for (all) **them** of.” In this case, *those* is favored over *them* a little more than three to one in EEBO<sub>1</sub>.

A similar example is the following:

before 1553, Nicholas Udall [1505–1556] *What creature is in health, either young or old* [Ralph Roister Doister] (1566) [A14193]

And as **for** all **they** *that* would do you wrong,

The structural difference is that this example has a following relative clause, while the Coverdale example has a following prepositional phrase. (The relative pronoun and the preposition are in italics above.)

These were the syntactic structures — both involving post-modification — that made the use of object *they* more likely for these authors.<sup>11</sup>

The Book of Mormon has three examples of object *they* after the preposition *for*, each with a following relative clause. Thus these are structurally the same as the Udall case. Here is one such instance:

3 Nephi 19:23

And now Father, I pray unto thee for them,  
and also **for** all **they** *which* shall believe on their words,

The other two instances read “for they which are at Jerusalem”  
(1 Nephi 19:13, 20).

The Book of Mormon has a total of 36 instances of object *they* usage, which might be a record-setting amount for a single text. Twenty-three of these involve the two-word phrase *they which*, usage which was far down on a list of Joseph Smith’s native syntactic preference.

### Plural *hath*

William Tyndale’s translation contains a conjoined case of plural *hath*:

1534, William Tyndale (translator), The New Testament [A68940]

When his branches **are** yet tender and **hath** brought forth leaves  
[Mark 13:28]

The plural noun phrase his branches is the most likely subject of *hath*, while clearly it is the subject of *are*. If the grammatical subject of *hath* were the fig tree, then we would expect an *it* after the conjunction — that is, \**“and it hath brought forth leaves.”* The King James Bible reads consistently in the singular: “When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves.”

Instead of employing *have* after the conjunction *and*, Tyndale used a less-common option of the early modern period. A conjoined predicate made the use of the {-th} plural more likely during that time. That is what we see in this next Book of Mormon example:

---

11. In general, a preposition governing an object *they* in EEBO<sub>1</sub> is uncommon. Hundreds of instances of “for (all) they” with post-modification occur in EEBO<sub>1</sub>, but in almost all of these *for* is a conjunction, not a preposition. Many potential cases have not been individually examined. Though the number of instances of object *they* that occur after *for* is unknown, it seems to have decreased in popularity through the early modern period. At this point, at least seven have been noted — the two mentioned in the body of this paper, two very early ones, and these three: “as for *they* of Lincolnshire” (1572, A03482); “And for all *they* that assist a man in murdering his wife” (1574, A02895); “the time is near for all *they* that trust in him” (1661, A28238). Five of the seven are from the 16th century. Besides examples involving the preposition *for*, a few additional examples have been noted with other prepositions.

Alma 26:36

Yea, blessed is the name of my God,  
 who hath been mindful of this PEOPLE,  
*which are* a branch of the tree of Israel  
 and **hath** been lost from its body in a strange land.

The grammatical subject is *which* (in italics above) and the agreement controller is *people* (in small caps above). Even though the relative pronoun *which* doesn't tell us by its form whether it is plural or singular, we know it's plural because of the immediately following verb *are*. The subject of *hath* is understood to be the same plural *which*.

By way of comparison, here is what we read in Tyndale's Mark 13:28 translation and Joseph Smith's 1829 dictation of the Book of Mormon:

- branches **are** . . . and **hath** . . .
- people which **are** . . . and **hath** . . .

The earliest text of the Book of Mormon has at least 180 verb forms that take {-th} inflection when the grammatical subjects are not third person singular. Among these are close to 70 instances of plural *hath*, in various syntactic contexts.

These next examples of plural *hath* are not conjoined cases. In these, *hath* immediately follows the plural noun phrase. The first is from a margin note in Revelation 15 and the second is from a biblical preface:

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

For in all kings' courts, the POPES **hath** had his ambassadors  
 to hinder the kingdom of Christ. [Revelation 15:14, note o; page 109]

The *his* of "his ambassadors" appears to refer to the devil.

1568, Bishops' Bible [A10708]

It is not unknown, but that many THINGS **hath** been more diligently  
 discussed, and more clearly understood by the wits of these  
 latter days, as well concerning the Gospels as other scriptures,  
 than in old time THEY **were**. [preface; page image 44]

Here we read "things hath," but also "they were," referring back to *things*.

Other verbs with plural agreement controllers carry {-th} inflection in early Bibles, as in the following examples with the plural relative pronoun *that*:

1539, Great Bible (1540 edition) [A10405]

O how beautiful are the FEET of the AMBASSADORS that **bringeth**  
 the message from the mountain and **proclaimeth** peace:  
 [Isaiah 52:7; page image 523]

Then I looked, and behold, in process of time the FEATHERS that  
**followeth** were set up upon the right side, that they might rule also:  
 [4 Esdras 11:20; in *later Bibles*, 2 Esdras 11:20; page lvij]

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and is of the BEASTS that **cheweth** the cud, that shall ye eat.

[Deuteronomy 14:16; page 85]

Under him was the foundation of the double height laid, and the high WALLS that **compasseth** the temple. [Ecclesiasticus 50:2; page 403]

1568, Bishops' Bible [A10708]

All the GRIEFS that **lieth** hid in your hearts.

[Psalm 62:8, note a; page image 693]

even so shall the MULTITUDE of all NATIONS that **fighteth** against mount Sion. [Isaiah 29:8; page lxxxij]

The Geneva Bible and the King James Bible have the base form of the verb in Isaiah 29:8, *fight*. Even if the agreement controller is *multitude* instead of *nations*, *fighteth* might still be plural, since *multitude* was sometimes construed as plural, as in Matthew 9:25 in the Geneva Bible and 1 Samuel 14:16 in the Bishops' Bible.

Or shall the cold flowing WATERS that **cometh** from another place be forsaken? [Jeremiah 18:14; page image 875]

The King James Bible has the base form of the verb here, *come*.

## Subject *you*

Subject *you* is included as an example of bad grammar, since almost all the usage was edited out of the King James Bible and many think that instances of subject *you* in the Book of Mormon are errors, cases of Joseph failing to measure up to a biblical standard.

In the textual record, *you* overtook *ye* in subject position during the decade of the 1560s. The earlier pronominal variation mostly proceeded in the absence of judgments about correctness; it happened before attempts to codify English usage became prevalent.

Chart 1 gives an idea of the change in usage over time. It was generated from hundreds of thousands of instances of subject *you* and subject *ye* taken from the EEBO<sub>1</sub> database. The search strings “if you,” “then you,” “that you”; “if ye,” “then ye,” “that ye” were used as a simple way to reliably isolate nominative forms.<sup>12</sup>

Shakespeare, writing at the turn of the century, employed *ye* only one percent of the time in these same contexts (11 out of 1,055 instances in the Riverside Edition available in WordCruncher). The low-level

12. Several spelling variants were included in searches: *if* ~ *yf*, *then* ~ *thenne*, *that* ~ *yt*; and *you* ~ *youe*, *ye* ~ *yee*.

maintenance of subject *ye* seen at the right of Chart 1 can be ascribed in large part to biblical quoting and influence.

Charles Barber wrote that “the first examples of nominative *you* go back to the fourteenth century, but in the standard literary language its encroachment was not rapid until the 1540s.”<sup>13</sup> Chart 1 shows that the last part of this statement is quite accurate.

The variation that was an integral part of the process of replacing subject *ye* with subject *you* in English is why we can find instances of these forms used very close together in 16th-century Bibles. Here are three examples of this:

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

And I will bring a morsel of bread, that **you** may comfort your hearts,  
afterward **ye** shall go your ways: [Genesis 18:5; page image 21]

1568, Bishops' Bible [A10708]

on this manner, see that **you** speak unto Esau when **ye** meet him.  
[Genesis 32:18; page xxij]

1582, Rheims New Testament [A16049]

And do **ye** all things without murmurings and staggerings:  
that **you** may be without blame, [Philippians 2:14; page 528]

The Book of Mormon has at least 15 instances of subject *you*, and most of the time these occur near instances of subject *ye*, as in these two cases:

Mosiah 5:15

that Christ the Lord God Omnipotent may seal *you* his,  
that **you** may be brought to heaven,  
that **ye** may have everlasting salvation and eternal life

The first *you* (in italics) is an object and the second *you* (in bold) is a subject.

Alma 7:6

Yea, I trust that **ye** have not set your hearts  
upon riches and the vain things of the world.  
Yea, I trust that **you** do not worship idols,  
but that **ye** do worship the true and the living God  
and that **ye** look forward for the remission of your sins

Here we see a nearby minimal pair: “I trust that *ye/you*.” The EEBO<sub>1</sub> database has 34 instances of “trust that *ye*” and 54 instances of “trust that *you*” (using several spelling variants).

The late 16th-century Bibles have the majority of the scriptural examples of nearby subject *you* ~ subject *ye* variation. But the earlier Bibles do have

---

13. Charles Barber, *Early Modern English*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 149.

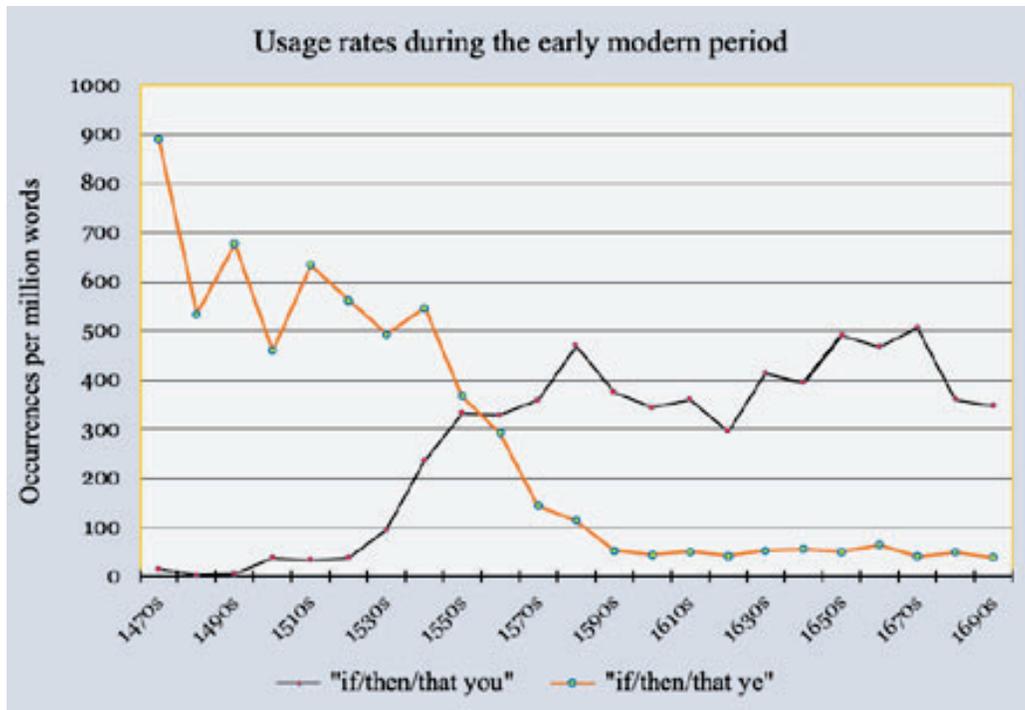


Chart 1. Comparison of nominative *you* and *ye*.

instances of subject *you*. Here are two examples of subject *you* from two biblical texts of the 1530s, the first with nearby object *you* and subject *you*:

1534, William Tyndale (translator), The New Testament [A68940]

that is to say, whosoever receiveth *you*, there abide  
as long as **you** are in the city or town, [addendum; page image 860]

The first *you* is an object (in italics) and the second *you* is a subject (in bold). This excerpt is found in an addendum at the end of the book.

1539, Great Bible (1540 edition) [A10405]

how happeneth it then, that **you** come unto me now in  
time of your tribulation? [Judges 11:7; page cij]

The Geneva Bible also has *you*, but the King James Bible has *ye*. (The EEBO<sub>1</sub> copy of the Bishops' Bible is missing a page for this passage.)

It cannot be that **you** and we together should build the house unto  
our God: [1 Esdras 4:3; in later Bibles, Ezra 4:3; page image 385]

The Geneva Bible has different syntax here, but the Bishops' Bible has subject *you*, and the King James Bible has subject *you* with quite different wording.

The King James Bible originally had hundreds of examples of subject *you* (about 300, according to one source).<sup>14</sup> Consequently, there are quite

14. "I find in the whole Bible about 3830 nominative *ye*'s and 300 nominative *you*'s, or over 7 per cent. of *you*'s. The ratio of *you*'s to *ye*'s is in the Old Testament

a few examples of nearby variation between subject *you* and subject *ye* in the 1611 text, such as the following:

1611, King James Bible

Why are **ye** so fearful? How is it that **you** have no faith? [Mark 4:40]

### Third person singular verb forms in {-s}

The use of third person singular {-s} forms is included as an example of bad grammar, since this variation has been edited out of the King James Bible and people tend to think that the scriptural {-s} forms of the Book of Mormon are errors, cases of Joseph failing to measure up to a biblical standard.

Third person singular (3sg) verb forms ending in {-s} (the northern form, historically) eventually took over from 3sg {-th} forms (the southern form, historically).<sup>15</sup> Nearby variation in the written record began to be prevalent in the late 16th century. The 1568 Bishops' Bible has an example with the verb *make* (shown immediately below), and even the King James Bible originally had a few examples, such as the one below with the verb *take*:

1568, Bishops' Bible [A10708]

What imagine ye against the Lord? he **makes** an utter destruction:  
ye shall not be troubled twice. [Nahum 1:9; page image 1037]

Two verses earlier, the 3sg verb form *knoweth* is used, so there is nearby variation. The King James Bible has a future tense here: "he will make an utter end."

1611, King James Bible

every man that **takes** it up, will shake his hand. [Ecclesiasticus 22:2]

Instead of 3sg *takes*, the Bishops' Bible employs 3sg *toucheth*.

Here is an example of nearby {-s} ~ {-th} variation, which was eventually edited to be {-th} consistently:

1611, King James Bible

He **sticks** not to spend his life with his wife,  
and **remembereth** neither father nor mother nor country.  
[1 Esdras 4:21]

The Book of Mormon has more than a dozen examples of nearby 3sg inflectional variation with main verbs, as in these two examples:

---

about 6 per cent., Apocrypha 35 per cent., and New Testament 5 per cent." John S. Kenyon, "Ye and You in the King James Version," *PMLA* 29, no. 3 (1914): 454, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/456929>.

15. See Barber, *Early Modern English*, 166.

## 1 Nephi preface

The Lord **warns** Lehi to depart out of the land of Jerusalem  
because he **prophesieth** unto the people concerning their iniquity

Nephi **taketh** his brethren and **returns** to the land of Jerusalem  
after the record of the Jews.

This same nearby variation is attested in the 17th-century textual record. EEBO<sub>1</sub> has one instance of *warns* and *prophesieth* occurring in the same paragraph (1677, A42781), and there are 11 distinct cases of the verbs *taketh* and *returns* occurring within 20 words of each other (dating between 1579 and 1700), as in these two examples:

1652, Alexander Ross [1591–1654] *The history of the world* [A57652]  
he **taketh** divers towns and **returns** to Spain; [page image 762]

1679, Robert Barclay [1648–1690] *Apology for the true Christian divinity*  
[A30896]

To all this he **returns** no answer, which **taketh** up  
six pages in my apology, [page 17]

A corpus linguist might be interested in quantifying this inflectional variation during the early modern period. For the purposes of this study, I am merely interested in showing that sometimes we find specific matching between early modern variation and Book of Mormon usage, many times with very little or no pseudobiblical support.

### Irregular past participles

Three-form verbs such as *drive* ~ *drove* ~ *driven* or *sink* ~ *sank* ~ *sunk* are much less common than two-form verbs in English, and so the force of analogy toward the more common, simpler two-form type drives the leveling of past participles toward past-tense verb forms. Tyndale provides an example of the leveled past participle *smote* (instead of King James–style *smitten*). The syntax is a match with a Book of Mormon example (shown further below):

1530, William Tyndale (translator), [The Pentateuch] [A13203]

And it continued a week *after that* the Lord **had smote** the river  
[Exodus 7:25; page xii]

This 1530 translation has another case of “had smote” and one of “had smoten” (there are 15 instances of *smoten* in EEBO<sub>1</sub>). The 1611 King James text reads “And seven days were fulfilled, after that the Lord had smitten the river.” The Coverdale Bible, Great Bible, Geneva Bible, and Bishops’ Bible each have 10 or 11 examples of invariant “had smitten.”

Even though the use of *smote* as a past participle instead of *smitten* in this past perfect context was the exception during the early modern period, it wasn’t rare. In EEBO<sub>1</sub> it occurs about nine percent of the time

(29 out of 328 possible cases), despite strong biblical influence favoring “had smitten.” Though it was on balance always the less-common usage, past participle leveling became particularly prevalent in the textual record in the 1600s, with a wide variety of verbs.

The earliest text of the Book of Mormon has dozens of instances of past participle leveling, with many different verbs (see GV 599–627). Here is the one that is just like the above example:

1 Nephi 4:19

And *after that* I **had smote** off his head with his own sword,

The syntactic match with Tyndale’s rendering of Exodus 7:25 includes archaic “after that” (in italics) as well as “had smote.”

The Book of Mormon clearly favors the past-participial verb form *smitten* over *smote*, 42 to 6, but it has three instances of “had smote” and none of “had smitten.”

Tyndale provides an example of another kind of past participle leveling, involving the verb *eat*:

1530, William Tyndale (translator), [The Pentateuch] [A13203]

And when they **had eat** up that corn which they brought out of the land of Egypt [Genesis 43:2; page image 145]

The past participle of *eat* has adopted a few different forms through the centuries. In the above example, the pronunciation of the past participle was probably /ɛt/, with a short *e*, to judge from the Oxford English Dictionary entry. Here is another instance of this leveled past participle from Tyndale’s writings, along with a Book of Mormon example:

1536, William Tyndale, *An exposition upon . . . Matthew* [A14133]

and the rest they and their households did eat before God, as though they **had eat** and drunk with God,

Alma 8:23

after he **had eat** and was filled, he saith unto Amulek:

The original Book of Mormon text has four instances of “had . . . eat” (all edited out) and two of “had . . . eaten.”

For a long time, past participle leveling was relatively favored after *had*, in the pluperfect, which is the tense of the above examples. This tendency even persists to this day with some verbs, such as *speak*. For example, “had spoke” is still more commonly used than “have/has spoke.”<sup>16</sup> Here is an example of “had spoke” from a Douay–Rheims annotation:

16. More than 80 percent of “he/they has/have/had spoke” leveling currently occurs in the pluperfect, according to this Google Ngram Viewer chart: [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=\(he+had+spoke%2Bthey+had+spoke\)%](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=(he+had+spoke%2Bthey+had+spoke)%)

1609, Douay Old Testament [A11777]

and therefore *spoke*, as if God himself **had spoke** in divine person,  
[Exodus 3:1, annotation; page 162]

Past-tense *spoke* (in italics) occurs just before the past participle *spoke*  
(in bold).

The Book of Mormon has 12 examples of the leveled form “had spake,”  
as in the following case:

3 Nephi 28:4

And when he **had spake** unto them,

The poet John Donne provides a similar example of “had spake” (also  
in a subordinate clause headed by *when*) in a sermon that he gave as a  
Church of England clergyman:

1619, John Donne [1572–1631] *Fifty sermons* (1649) [A36296]

when he **had spake** of light, and a firmament, and earth, and sea,  
[page 93]

Sermon No. 11, preached at Lincoln’s Inn, most likely before 18 April 1619.

Past participle leveling was less common in passive contexts (and it  
still is), but it did occur, and so we can find examples of passive “been  
smote” and “been spake” in the textual record, with matches found in  
the Book of Mormon:

1683, John Bulteel (translator) [fl. 1683] | François Eudes de Mézeray  
[1610–1683] *A general chronological history of France* [A70580]

They say he immediately fell into a fit of madness,  
as if he had **been smote** from heaven, [page 60]

Alma 17:39

bearing the arms which had **been smote** off by the sword of Ammon

■ ■ ■

1646, John Bastwick [1593–1654] *The utter routing of the whole  
army of all the independents and sectaries* [A26759]

This had not **been spake** of at all (*saith the Author*) if some  
idle men to gull the world had not given the honor of the day  
to those who had but little or no share in it. [page 634]

Alma 6:8

according to the revelation of the truth of the word  
which had **been spake** by his fathers

This latter match is rare; currently only three instances of “been spake” are known outside of the Book of Mormon: the above 17th-century example and two others from the same century.

■ ■ ■

Another kind of past participle leveling is when a past participle immediately follows a conjunction. The distance from the auxiliary verb *have* increases the likelihood of leveling. Here is a possible example of this:

1610, Douay Old Testament [A11777]

All these things I **have** considered and **gave** my heart on all the works that are done under the sun. [Ecclesiastes 8:9; page 327]

The interpretation that *gave* in this verse might actually be a past participle — that is, “have . . . gave” — finds support in an earlier Bible, which has “have given” in this verse:

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

All this have I seen and **have given** mine heart to every work which is wrought under the sun, [Ecclesiastes 8:9; page 249]

The original Book of Mormon text has an example of this kind of leveling with the same verb:

1 Nephi 5:8

the Lord **hath** protected my sons and delivered them out of the hands of Laban and **gave** them power

Here is one of three similar examples I’ve been able to verify in EEBO<sub>1</sub>:

1560, John Daus (translator), Sleidane’s *Commentaries* [A09567]

He **hath** chosen Octavius to his son in law, and **gave** to his father Aloise the city of Novaria forever, [page image 749]

Two other examples of this syntax are found in A57385 (1657) and A51846 (1684).

## Double negation

Double negation wasn’t uncommon in Early Modern English, and so it’s possible to find it in early English Bibles. Here are two examples of one type of double negation that is also found in the Book of Mormon:

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

When the jaws shall scarce open and **not** be able to chew **no** more. [Ecclesiastes 12:4, note g; page 250]

therefore he feared him, and would **not** see his face **no** more. [1 Maccabees 7:30; page 415]

Other Bibles, including the King James text, have single negation in 1 Maccabees 7:30: “would [ø] see his face no more.”

Alma 23:7

they did lay down the weapons of their rebellion,  
that they did **not** fight against God **no** more,

Another kind of double negation which was quite common during the early modern period is “nor no,” occurring with various noun phrases.<sup>17</sup> For instance, the original reading of 4 Nephi 1:17 was “nor no murderers.” Similar examples of this double negation with agentive noun phrases can be found in the textual record, such as “nor no preachers” (1648, A64135) and “nor no troublers of Israel” (1656, A27047).

While the 1611 King James Bible doesn’t have any examples of “nor no,” the EEBO<sub>1</sub> database has nearly 4,500 instances in just over 2,300 texts. In the 16th century, “nor no” (as opposed to “nor any”) occurred about 20 percent of the time. In the 17th century, the usage rate of “nor no” dropped to 12.5 percent, and in the last decade of the century it was approaching nine percent. Chart 2 compares the usage rates of “nor no” and “nor any” during the early modern era. This chart shows that the decade of the 1550s was the last one where “nor no” was used as frequently as “nor any.”

The Ngram Viewer indicates that the usage rate of “nor no” (as opposed to “nor any”) was about 3.5 percent in the 1820s, but the actual rate was lower than that (probably much lower), since there are many instances of old, reprinted language in that decade of the Google Books database.<sup>18</sup>

Here is an example of “nor no” in a 16th-century Bible, along with a Book of Mormon example:

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

That our oxen may be strong to labor: that there be none invasion  
nor going out **nor no** crying in our streets:  
[Psalm 144:14; page image 509]

The King James text reads “that there be no complaining in our streets.”

Mosiah 3:17

And moreover I say unto you  
that there shall be no other name given **nor no** other way nor means  
whereby salvation can come unto the children of men,

17. For a specific mention of “nor no,” as well as a general discussion of double negation in Early Modern English, see Barber, *Early Modern English*, 198–99.

18. The reality is that the later in time we go, the more contamination of reprinted language there is in many textual corpora, such as the Google Books database, which underlies the Ngram Viewer.

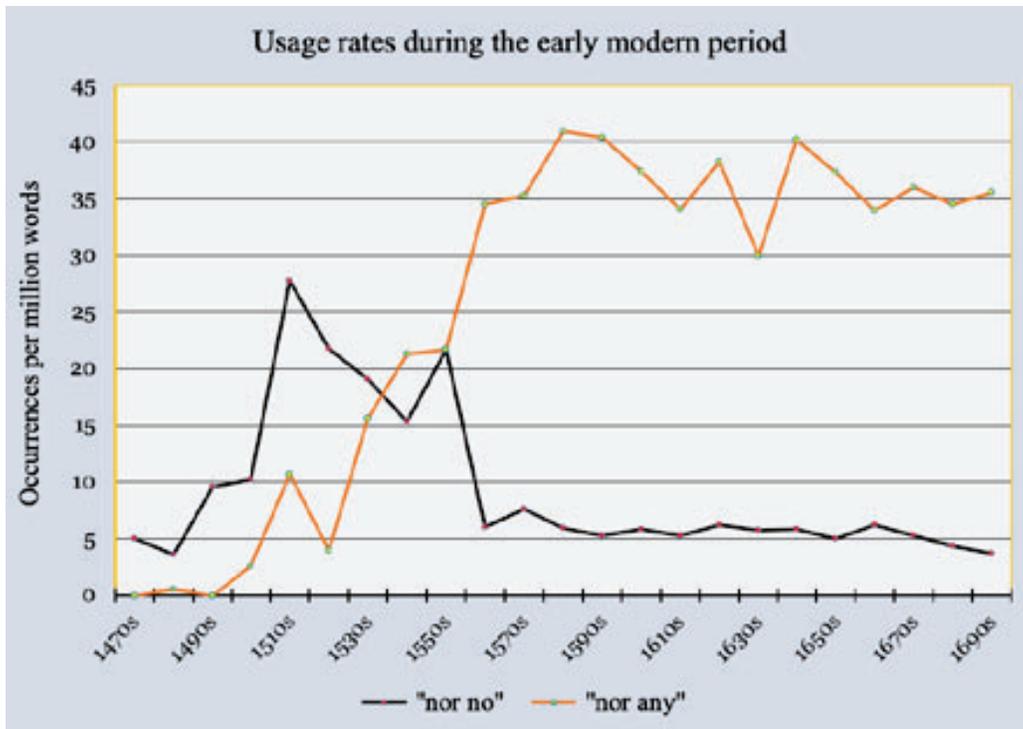


Chart 2. Comparison of “nor no” and “nor any.”

Tyndale has an example of “nor no” in a prologue:

1530, William Tyndale (translator) [The Pentateuch] [A13203]

For the Holy Ghost is no doom God [‘God of judgment’]

**nor no** God that goeth a mumming [‘who disguises himself’]

[Leviticus, prologue; page image 359]

In addition, the Bishops’ Bible has an example of “nor no” in a margin note at Romans 10:2; the Rheims New Testament has five instances: one in the preface and four in annotations; and the later Douay Old Testament has one as well:

1609, Douay Old Testament [A11777]

we attribute no more **nor no** less to Christ, nor to our lady,

by the one reading than by the other:

[Genesis 3:15, annotation; page 12]

### Subjunctive ~ indicative variation after *if*

There are quite a few cases of variation in grammatical mood after the hypothetical *if* in early English Bibles. This variational syntax involves a subjunctive verb form followed by a conjoined indicative verb form. Here are nine examples of this:

1534, William Tyndale (translator) The New Testament [A68940]

If any man **long** after life and **loveth** to see good days  
[1 Peter 3:10; page cccxviii]

1535, Coverdale Bible [A10349]

But if his offering **be** a goat and **bringeth** it before the LORD,  
[Leviticus 3:12; page image 105]

But if he **be** poor and **getteth** not so much with his hand,  
[Leviticus 14:21; page xlviii]

If any man **teach** otherwise and **agreeth** not unto the wholesome  
words of our LORD Jesus Christ, [1 Timothy 6:3; page image 1139]

1539, Great Bible (1540 edition) [A10405]

Either if a soul **swear** and **pronounceth** with his lips to do  
evil or to do good [Leviticus 5:4; page image 87]

For if any man **hear** the word and **declareth** not the same  
by his works, [James 1:23; page image 1014]

The Bishops' Bible has the same verb forms as the first excerpt.

1560, Geneva Bible (1561 edition) [A10675]

If any man **teach** otherwise and **consenteth** not to the wholesome  
words of our Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Timothy 6:3; page 90]

The Bishops' Bible has the same verb forms.

1582, Rheims New Testament [A16049]

If any man **come** to me and **hateth** not his father and mother,  
[Luke 14:26; page 181]

The Bishops' Bible and the King James Bible have subjunctive *hate*.

1611, King James Bible

If a man **say**, I love God, and **hateth** his brother, he is a liar.  
[1 John 4:20]

As shown immediately above, even the 1611 King James Bible has an example of this syntactic variation, and surprisingly, *hateth* has never been changed to *hate*.

The Book of Mormon has four examples of this nearby variation:

Mosiah 26:29

And if he **confess** his sins before thee and me  
and **repenteth** in the sincerity of his heart,

Helaman 13:26

if a prophet **come** among you  
and **declareth** unto you the word of the Lord,

3 Nephi 27:11

But if it **be** not built upon my gospel  
and **is** built upon the works of men or upon the works of the devil,

Moroni 7:44

And if a man **be** meek and lowly in heart  
and **confesses** by the power of the Holy Ghost

Searches indicate that the mixture of subjunctive and indicative verb forms in 3 Nephi 27:11 — “if <subject> be . . . and is” — rarely occurred after the hypothetical in the textual record. Here is one early 16th-century example:

1525, translation, Jerome Brunschwig [about 1450–about 1512]  
*The noble experience of the virtuous handiwork of surgery* [A03315]

If it **be** in a fleshly place and **is** not possible to be holpen  
after this manner aforesaid [page image 66]

In contrast with this 1525 usage, in 3 Nephi 27:11 the subjunctive is used for what is not the case, and the indicative is used for what is the case.

### Object *who*

Although *whom* is used in object position the vast majority of the time, the late 16th-century Bibles have at least two instances of object *who*. In both cases below, the relative pronoun *who* precedes the verb that normally triggers object marking on *who*:

1568, Bishops’ Bible [A10708]

Meaning that he was not like in strength to the king of the Assyrians,  
**who** the Babylonians overcame.  
[Ezekiel 31:2, note b; page image 963]

The relative pronoun *who* is the object of the verb *overcome*.

1582, Rheims New Testament [A16049]

the obdurate obstinacy that is in such **who** I have, for so great  
sins, forsaken. [Romans 9:17, annotation; page 407]

The relative pronoun *who* is the object of the verb *forsake*.

When a pronoun precedes a verb that normally triggers object marking on the pronoun, then the pronoun adopts the object form at a slightly lower rate.

The following Book of Mormon example of object *who* occurs in the same syntactic context:

Mosiah 2:19

And behold also, if I, **who** ye call your king,  
*who* has spent his days in your service

The second instance of *who* (in italics) is in subject position.

The same syntactic phenomenon is seen in the case of object *they* here:

Jacob 1:14

**they**<sub>(object)</sub> which are friendly to Nephi I shall **call**<sub>(governing verb)</sub> Nephites

Examples of this kind of object *they* syntax — including a close paraphrase of Luke 11:52 — are found in the early modern textual record:

before 1534, John Bourchier (translator), Antonio de Guevara's  
*The golden book of Marcus Aurelius* (1537) [A02303]

He hated delicate and gay nurses, and **they** that were laborous,  
homely, and wholesome he **loved**, [page image 51]

before 1687, Thomas Watson, *A body of practical divinity* (1692) [A65285]

ye entered not in yourselves, and **they** that were  
entering in ye **hindered**. [page 9]

King James Bible, Luke 11:52

ye entered not in yourselves,  
and **them** that were entering in, ye **hindered**.

## Conclusion

This study has presented a number of matches involving the grammatical usage of early Bibles and the original Book of Mormon text. In the case of the latter, most of these instances have been and are considered to be instances of poor grammar produced by Joseph Smith. However, a broad early modern view of most of its English usage accounts nicely for this bad grammar, while a modern dialectal view fails in several respects. This reality supports not viewing any of the above items as emanating from Joseph's own language, except rarely as inadvertent misreadings of words that were given to him. The same reasoning applies to virtually all of the bad grammar found in the earliest text, whether or not it appears in earlier Bibles.

**Stanford Carmack** has a linguistics and a law degree from Stanford University as well as a doctorate in Hispanic Languages and Literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in historical syntax and textual analysis. He currently researches Book of Mormon syntax and lexis as they relate to English usage and contributes to aspects of the Book of Mormon critical text project carried out by Royal Skousen.

## Appendix

Early English Books Online: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup>.

Early English Bibles: EEBO A13203 (1530), A68940 (1534),  
A10349 (1535), A10405 (1540), A10675 (1561),  
A10708 (1568), A16049 (1582), A11777 (1609–1610).

Critical text: Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*  
(New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2009).

GV: *Grammatical Variation* (Provo, Utah:  
FARMS and BYU Studies, 2016)

NOL: *The Nature of the Original Language* (Provo, Utah:  
FARMS and BYU Studies, 2018)

Eighteenth Century Collections Online: [https://www.gale.com/  
primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online](https://www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online).

Google Books: [https://books.google.com/advanced\\_book\\_search](https://books.google.com/advanced_book_search).

■ ■ ■

Twenty-five pseudobiblical texts consulted for this study  
(about 580,000 words total):

### LONGER PSEUDOBIIBLICAL TEXTS (12)

- A. Robert Dodsley, *Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1740)  
[London] [about 16,500 words]
- B. Jacob Ilive, *The Book of Jasher* (1751) [London]  
[about 22,800 words]
- C. John Leacock, *American Chronicles* (1775) [Philadelphia]  
[about 14,500 words]
- D. Richard Snowden, *The American Revolution* (1793)  
[Philadelphia] [about 49,300 words]
- E. Matthew Linning, *The First Book of Napoleon* (1809) [Edinburgh]  
[about 19,000 words]
- F. Elias Smith, *History of Anti-Christ* (1811) [Portland ME]  
[about 15,000 words]
- G. Gilbert Hunt, *The Late War* (1816) [New York]  
[about 42,500 words]
- H. Roger O'Connor, *Chronicles of Eri* (1822) [London]  
[about 131,000 words]
- I. W. K. Clementson, *The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp* (1827)  
[Brighton UK] [about 18,000 words]
- J. Philemon Stewart, *Sacred Roll* (1843) [Canterbury NH]  
[about 62,000 words]
- K. Charles Linton, *The Healing of the Nations* (1855) [New York]  
[about 111,000 words]
- L. Richard Grant White, *The New Gospel of Peace* (1863)  
[New York] [about 59,000 words]

SHORTER PSEUDOBIBLICAL TEXTS (13)

- M. Horace Walpole, *Book of Preferment* (1742) [London]  
[about 2,700 words]
- N. *The French Gasconade Defeated* (1743) [Boston]  
[about 900 words]
- O. Benjamin Franklin, *Parable Against Persecution* (1755)  
[Philadelphia] [about 400 words]
- P. *Chronicles of Nathan Ben Saddi* (1758) [Philadelphia]  
[about 3,000 words]
- Q. Samuel Hopkins, *Samuel the Squomicutite* (1763) [Newport RI]  
[about 600 words]
- R. *The Book of America* (1766) [Boston] [about 2,500 words]
- S. *Chapter 37th* (1782) [*Boston Evening Post*] [about 600 words]
- T. *Chronicles of John* (1812) [Charleston SC?] [about 800 words]
- U. *The First Book of Chronicles, Chapter the Fifth* (1812)  
[*The Investigator*, SC] [about 1,800 words]
- V. Jesse Denson, *Chronicles of Andrew* (1815) [Lexington KY]  
[about 4,800 words]
- W. White Griswold, *A Chronicle of the Chiefs of Muttonville* (1830)  
[Harwinton CT] [about 900 words]
- X. *Reformer Chronicles* (1832) [Buffalo NY] [about 700 words]
- Y. *Chronicles of the Land of Gotham* (1888) [New York]  
[about 1,300 words]

■ ■ ■

Eleven early writings of Joseph Smith consulted for this study (up to January 1833; texts available at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>):

	INDEXED WORDS
Letter to Oliver Cowdery, 22 October 1829	334
Letter to the Church in Colesville, 2 December 1830	908
Letter to Martin Harris, 22 February 1831	245
Letter to Hyrum Smith, 3–4 March 1831	579
Letter to Emma Smith, 6 June 1832	632
Letter to William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832	2,731
Letter to Emma Smith, 13 October 1832	836
Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832	1,088
Letter to Noah C. Saxton, 4 January 1833	1,771
Letter to William W. Phelps, 11 January 1833	766
History, circa Summer 1832	2,037

