JOSEPH SMITH'S SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE: THE PRESENCE OF EARLY MODERN ENGLISH IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

William L. Davis

The question of whether or not Joseph Smith participated in the translation of the Book of Mormon as an actual translator, or merely as a transcriber, remains a point of debate in Mormon studies. Did Joseph receive spiritual impressions and visionary experiences by means of a translation device (seer stone, interpreters, and/or Urim and Thummim) and then articulate them into English by tapping into his own mental storehouse of English vocabulary, phraseology, and conceptualizations (the theory of "loose control")? Or did Joseph simply read the words of a preexisting translation that appeared to him on the surface of the translation device, without any significant contributions of his own (the theory of "tight control")? As Richard Bushman aptly observes, "Latter-day Saints themselves cannot agree on how the writings engraved on the gold surfaces relate to Joseph Smith's oral dictation to his secretaries."[1]

In the course of these debates, the research of Royal Skousen and Stanford Carmack has played an influential role. According to their

1. Richard L. Bushman, "The Gold Plates as Foundational Text," *Foundational Texts of Mormonism: Examining Major Early Sources* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 15.

theory, Joseph Smith did not actually translate the Book of Mormon but rather transmitted a preexisting text ("tight control"), and they point to an array of evidence to support their position. For example, they contend that certain nonstandard grammatical constructions that have been traditionally assigned to Joseph's western New York or New England dialects are also attested in Early Modern English works, indicating that 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."[2] Though the argument does not exclude Joseph's dialect from consideration (New England and New York dialects did not appear *ex nihilo*, but derived many of their features directly from the multiple dialects of Early Modern English spoken by seventeenth-century immigrants to the colonies), their argument nevertheless destabilizes the exclusive attribution of such linguistic features to Joseph's rural, nonstandard dialect(s). The observation thereby offers provisional support for Skousen and Carmack's theory that a speaker of Early Modern English (or a translation device attuned to it) was responsible for the translation of the Book of Mormon rather than Joseph himself.

Another important observation by Skousen and Carmack is that the language of the Book of Mormon contains a number of Early Modern English features that either do not derive from the King James Bible (hereafter KJV) or do not share the same meanings or types of usage.[3]

---

2. Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the book of Mormon" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 83. See also Stanford Carmack, "The Nature of the Nonstandard English in the Book of Mormon," in Royal Skousen, *Grammatical Variation*, parts 1 and 2 of vol. 3 of Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; BYU Studies, 2016) [hereafter *GV*], 1:45–95.

3. See, for example, Royal Skousen and Stan Carmack's introduction to "Archaic Syntactic Structures in the Book of Mormon," in Royal Skousen, *The Nature of the Original Language*, parts 3 and 4 of vol. 3 of Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2018) [hereafter *NOL*], 3:557–558.

In other words, the KJV text could not have been the exclusive model for the entire array of archaic-style language in the Book of Mormon—an observation that undermines the argument that Joseph merely lifted and recycled KJV verbiage to articulate the Book of Mormon. Some of the features necessarily had to originate from a non-KJV source (or sources), to which Joseph Smith, according to Skousen and Carmack, presumably did not have access.

Along with these non-KJV archaic features, Skousen points to "Hebrew-like" constructions expressed as "an extra *and* after an initial subordinate clause."[4] Consider, for example, the following "if, and" conditional construction in the 1830 Book of Mormon: "*If* he [God] saith unto the earth, Move, *and* it is moved."[5] As early as 1994, Skousen proposed that these unusual constructions represented possible Hebraic artifacts that persisted in the English-language text of the Book of Mormon, seeing as how they appeared to be "uncharacteristic of English in all of its dialects and historical stages." This observation prompted him to conclude that "these structures support the notion that Joseph Smith's translation is a literal one and not simply a reflection of either his own dialect or King James English."[6] Once again, Joseph, as a non-Hebrew speaker, is therefore excluded as a possible source.

This collection of evidence, combined with additional textual clues from the original scribal manuscript and the statements of those who witnessed the dictation process, have inspired Skousen and Carmack

---

4. Skousen, *GV*, 1:362. Skousen refrains from describing this construction as a "Hebraism," because "the comparison between the Hebrew construction and the corresponding one in the Book of Mormon is not always fully parallel," adding, "Sometimes it might be better to refer to these potential Hebraisms as Hebrew-like constructions" (362).

5. Royal Skousen, *GV*, 1:369. Book of Mormon (1830), 440; Helaman 12:12.

6. Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 34.

to assert that Joseph Smith did not translate the Book of Mormon, but merely dictated a preexisting text that appeared to him by means of the translation instruments. In the introductory chapter to his study on the nature of the original Book of Mormon language, Skousen makes this argument clear: "The first major point I wish to take up in this introduction is the evidence that Joseph Smith himself was not the author of the Book of Mormon nor even the actual translator of its English-language text. Instead, the evidence is very strong that the original text was revealed to Joseph Smith word for word in English and he dictated it to scribes. The text is not Joseph's creation, nor did he create a text in his own language."[7] Such emphatic and definitive claims suggest that the matter is all but closed. But this is not the case, and this essay seeks to question such premature conclusions.

While Skousen and Carmack have enlisted a complex and multi-faceted array of evidence in favor of their position, their conclusions nevertheless rest upon a set of foundational assumptions concerning the types of language features (vocabulary, grammar, expressions, etc.) that Joseph allegedly could—or, more specifically, *could not*—have known. This essay, however, argues that such conclusions should be regarded with caution. I would argue that the resources that they use and the interpretive lenses that they apply remain incomplete and underexplored. Early nineteenth-century working-class families, for example, routinely read and studied the works of several influential authors from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, resulting in their repeated exposure to presumably inaccessible and obsolete vocabulary, archaic expressions, and Early Modern English grammatical and syntactical constructions. Yet Skousen and Carmack seem not to have explored fully these resources. Moreover, idiosyncratic word usages and curious structural variants can emerge from an individual's incomplete understanding and misapplication of unfamiliar grammar

---

7. Skousen, *NOL* 3:37.

and syntax, as much as they can from artifacts persisting from a source language into a translated text. Yet this avenue of inquiry also remains incomplete.

The question of Joseph Smith's involvement as an actual translator thus hinges on the analytic lenses applied to the *interpretation* of evidence rather than the evidence itself. And, as I argue in this essay, the conclusion that Joseph Smith was not the actual English translator of the English rendition of the Book of Mormon does not derive from a comprehensive examination of all the valid interpretive possibilities. Indeed, I push the argument further by maintaining that the very same evidence that Skousen and Carmack use to support their interpretation of the translation process often and ironically presents more compelling evidence for Joseph's active participation and intervention. Given the nature and implications surrounding the unusual grammatical and syntactical features in the original text, combined with a more expansive understanding of the accessibility of key archaic language features in the early nineteenth century, this essay argues that the evidence does not, in fact, support the theory of "tight control" but rather points quite insistently to a process of "loose control," in which Joseph Smith himself articulated the English words of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph's Idiolect and Spiritual Register

Analyzing Joseph Smith's role as the translator of the Book of Mormon raises the question of whether or not he had the mental inventory of linguistic knowledge to produce all of the language features that appear in the Book of Mormon. In his 2018 review of Skousen's Critical Text Project, Grant Hardy provides a useful starting point when he raises the issue of "idiolects" ("that is, each individual's unique usage of grammar and vocabulary"), coupled with Joseph Smith's potential relationship to the language of the Book of Mormon ("there is some question as to how the language of the text relates to Joseph Smith's idiolect or to the dialectal usages that he might have grown up with in rural,

nineteenth-century Vermont and New York").[8] This issue raises further questions about the nature and relationship between Joseph's idiolect and the English rendition of the Book of Mormon, and I argue that if we pursue the issue of idiolects, particularly regarding how individuals develop and express them, then we can employ additional interpretive tools for the analysis of the text and the identification of the translator.

In order to do so, we need a more robust look at what idiolects are, as well as what their potential can be. In this regard, the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers us a succinct starting point: An idiolect is "the linguistic system of one person, differing in some details from that of all other speakers of the same dialect or language."[9] This definition reveals a key characteristic of idiolects: Each individual has his or her own distinctive, idiosyncratic, one-of-a-kind suite of linguistic characteristics that sets him or her apart from all the other speakers within a language community. These distinctions, moreover, derive from each individual's unique circumstances. In the process of gaining linguistic competence, individuals experience unique pathways of language acquisition within their given speech communities. Such influences cover a wide range of inputs: the formative language spoken at home; the language found in books, pamphlets, and newspapers; conversations with friends and neighbors; and the various styles of speech within the wider community. The sources for a developing idiolect are seemingly endless and interactive.

The development of an individual's idiolect, moreover, does not confine itself to colloquial language. Rather, language learners also

---

8. Grant Hardy, "Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project: A Review of Royal Skousen's *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* and *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Grammatical Variation,*" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2018): 169–170.

9. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "idiolect (n.)," https://doi.org/10.1093 /OED/7112683157. As the definition implies, idiolects refer to each individual's inventory of linguistic knowledge of a dialect or language, while "dialect" refers to the shared language within a community of speakers.

begin to acquire and differentiate between multiple *registers* of speech, such as the casual language used among friends versus the language of decorum in formal settings. These different registers not only have arrays of preferred vocabulary associated with them, but they also find expression through a variety of attendant grammatical, syntactical, and rhetorical forms.[10] From a cognitive linguistic perspective, these registers also accompany specific contexts, or "speech event frames," such as the varied language we use for "fairytales, academic lectures, spoken conversations, obituaries, newspaper reports, horoscopes and business letters, among others," and, as such, these contexts thereby "contain schematic knowledge about styles of registers of language use."[11] This understanding of speech registers within idiolects has direct relevance to the question of Joseph's role in the translation of the Book of Mormon, as well as the appearance of novel utterances in the text.

As a preliminary observation, it is critical to know that each individual learns and employs a variety of speech registers, and these registers can be significantly different from one to another. If we were to observe a Latter-day Saint's everyday spoken language, for instance, and then compare it to the language that he or she uses to utter prayers and blessings, the differences in language—stripped of the contexts or "speech event frames" in which they were spoken—might lead an observer to believe, incorrectly so, that the two sets of linguistic material indicated

---

10. Ever since Michael A. K. Halliday first defined the linguistic register as "the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type," the term has been contested. See Michael A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (University Park Press, 1978), 111. The use of "register" in this essay refers to all the language features—that is, the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, formulas, and so forth—that the speaker associates with particular sociocultural scenarios and contexts.

11. Vyvyan Evans and Melanie Green, *Cognitive Linguistics: An Introduction* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 228.

two different speakers. The same issue, in turn, offers an important critique to the common argument that Joseph could not have translated the Book of Mormon due to differences between his personal language and the language appearing in the text. This assertion does not take Joseph's multiple language registers into serious consideration, resulting in a flawed and overly reductionist assumption that Joseph's informal and everyday style, or even his semi-archaic style (such as the hybridized form he used for his own 1832 History), must inevitably duplicate the register found in the Book of Mormon—a different register that Joseph reserved for revelatory texts and utterances.[12]

In another key observation about the development of an individual's idiolect, the process of acquiring fluency and competence does not always occur without complications. In the course of normal language acquisition, children frequently make any number of overgeneralization errors, which result in a variety of novel forms of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax (e.g., "he runned," instead of "he ran"). Children, as well as adults and fluent speakers, also acquire faulty or incomplete definitions of words by making defective inferences from the context of their reading material.[13] Neither are they immune from developing unique and unusual variations of common phrases or expressions, or misapplying certain grammatical and/or syntactic constructs. To all of these potential challenges, one can add the variable of a nineteenth-century youth acquiring a non-native register of Early Modern English, and such difficulties would no doubt manifest in multiple ways. When we consider such dynamics of language acquisition and then revisit the original text of the Book of Mormon, we find strong indications

---

12. See, for example, Stan Carmack, "Is the Book of Mormon a Pseudo-Archaic Text?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 177–232.

13. See William E. Nagy, Richard C. Anderson, and Patricia A. Herman, "Learning Word Meanings from Context during Normal Reading" *American Educational Research Journal* 24, no. 2 (1987): 237–270.

that many of its idiosyncratic textual features point to a translator's idiolect—or, to be more precise, the imperfect biblical-style register of a translator with a penchant for expressing texts in Early Modern English.

Adopting the issues of Joseph's idiolect and the origins and development of his registers as a governing analytic, the following sections address three primary areas related to the original language of the Book of Mormon: Part I analyzes several idiosyncratic samples of Book of Mormon grammar and vocabulary that strongly suggest human error. Part II explores the persistence of archaic vocabulary in the reading material of early nineteenth-century working-class families, with a specific focus on John Bunyan's *The Holy War* (1682). Part III looks at John Bunyan's use of the periphrastic *did*, an archaic past-tense syntactic structure that appears frequently in the Book of Mormon, to show how nineteenth-century readers could readily access and deploy the forms and rhythms of this archaic style of speech.

Part I. Idiolects and Idiosyncrasies

In his monumental analysis, Skousen observes an unusual Book of Mormon construction, which he describes as non-English and Hebrew-like: "The original Book of Mormon text frequently separates an initial subordinate clause from its following main clause by means of an unexpected use of the connector *and.*"[14] In addition to this unexpected "and," these constructions frequently contain what Skousen describes as an "intervening clause" or "some kind of interruption or extended subordination," which appears between the main and subordinate clauses.[15] Among many examples, he offers the following construction from the

---

14. Skousen, *GV*, 1:362.

15. Skousen, *GV*, 1:362; Skousen, *NOL*, 3:50.

Original Manuscript (spelling modernized), which uses the connector "as" in the subordinate clause (1 Nephi 8:13):

And **as** I cast my eyes around about	[subordinate clause]
that perhaps I might discover my family also	[intervening material]
And I beheld a river of water	[main clause].[16]

In a simplified form (with the removal of the intervening material), the phrase reads, "*as* I cast my eyes around about . . . *And* I beheld a river of water." In English, of course, we would not expect the additional "and" opening the main clause, prompting Skousen to theorize that these unusual constructions represent a Hebrew-like artifact that persisted into the English translation.

As Skousen further observes, this textual oddity appears with a number of connectors, such as *after, as, because, had, if, when,* and *while.*[17] Among these options, moreover, Skousen indicates that "the clearest evidence for this usage being Hebraistic involves the subordinate conjunction *if,*" as in the example mentioned earlier: "*If* he [God] saith unto the earth, Move, *and* it is moved."[18] At the same time, however, Skousen cautions that these "if, and" conditionals are "not exactly a normal Hebraism since the equivalent cases involving simple subordinate clauses (such as '**if** you come **and** I will come') are not found in the Book of Mormon text."[19] With no precise equivalent construction

---

16. I have simplified Skousen's textual notations for this example. See Skousen, *GV*, 1:367. For the text in the Original Manuscript, see "Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, circa 12 April 1828–circa 1 July 1829," 12, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary /original-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon-circa-12-april-1828-circa-1 -july-1829/10#facts.

17. Skousen, *GV*, 1:366–376.

18. Skousen, *GV*, 1:363. Book of Mormon (1830), 440; Helaman 12:12.

19. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:51.

in Hebrew, Skousen's cautionary assessment positions the construction as "Hebrew-like" rather than "Hebraic."[20]

Skousen's association of these forms with Hebrew does not, however, take into account the close relationships that these structures share with similar English-language models in the New Testament. These associations are particularly noticeable in the constructions that share analogous content and structural similarities. Consider the following examples from the Book of Mormon and the New Testament:[21]

> If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove. (Matthew 17:20)

> If ye shall say unto this mountain: Be thou cast down and become smooth! —and it shall be done. (Helaman 10:9)

> If he [God] saith unto this mountain: Be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up! —and behold, it is done. (Helaman 12:17)

> If he [God] saith unto the earth: Move! —and it is moved. (Helaman 12:13)

> If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. (Luke 17:6)

From a technical perspective, it is important to observe that these Book of Mormon and New Testament examples are not grammatically identical; they convey different dynamics. Nevertheless, in spite of these technical variations, the Book of Mormon formulations openly display their direct derivation and dependence upon the English renditions of the KJV New Testament models. (Among the many obvious structural

---

20. For Skousen's explanation, see *GV*, 1: 361–362.

21. The Book of Mormon examples follow Royal Skousen's reconstruction of these verses. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (Yale University Press, 2009), 542, 548–549.

and verbal parallels, note the conspicuous six-word, verbatim phrase, "ye shall say unto this mountain," appearing in both Matthew 17:20 and Helaman 10:9.) Such appropriations of New Testament phraseology—specifically KJV English phraseology—reveal a process involving both borrowing *and* modification. Such correspondences, moreover, run counter to assumptions about an underlying Hebrew or Hebrew-like text. With the Book of Mormon forms ultimately deriving from adaptations of New Testament lexico-syntactic templates, any linguistic artifacts from the translation process would necessarily come from Greek (the language underlying the New Testament), rather than Hebrew, presenting an admittedly awkward resolution for the theory of "tight control."

A close examination of these constructions, however, suggests a different process at play. When analyzing these forms in detail, we find that the Book of Mormon constructions introduce a new type of agent—an individual who already possesses the necessary power and faith to enact a miracle. This fundamental difference transforms the epistemic premises by introducing new background knowledge that radically alters the context and meaning. In this respect, the analysis of the "if, and" conditionals cannot be strictly limited to a grammatical assessment, isolated from the context in which the forms appear. Rather, as Barbara Dancygier observes in her study on conditional constructions within the framework of cognitive linguistics, "every aspect of the structure and wording of a given sentence is thus considered to make a contribution to its overall interpretation in ways that are governed by linguistic convention."[22] These new agents and their background associations, therefore, provide crucial information about the nature of the transformation of the New Testament structures into their Book of Mormon reconfigurations.

---

22. I am specifically following Barbara Dancygier's description of cognitive approaches in her study on conditional constructions. Barbara Dancygier, *Conditionals and Prediction: Time, Knowledge and Causation in Conditional Constructions*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 87 (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

In the Book of Mormon, the conditional constructions describe a *capable* agent performing a speech act that will definitely cause an event to happen, should the speaker desire it: "If you command it, [and] then it will happen." Here, the "if" subordinate clause presupposes a speaker who already has the quality and sufficiency of faith to make the miracle happen ("if you command it"), while the "and" conjunctive clause proclaims the inevitable consequent action ("the mountain will move"). By contrast, the New Testament constructions describe *deficient* agents, or individuals who do not yet have enough faith to realize such an event, and merely present the consequent action as a motivating future possibility: "If you had enough faith, then you would be able to make it happen." Thus, the capable agents in the Book of Mormon already have the necessary power to make miraculous events occur, while the deficient agents in the New Testament do not. These differing premises, in turn, have direct implications on the structuring of the conditionals.

To make these differences explicit, observe what happens when we insert one of the Book of Mormon *capable* agents—one who already has the necessary power to enact miracles—into the New Testament conditional framework for a *deficient* agent. In Helaman 10:5–10, the Lord blesses the prophet Nephi$_2$ (the son of Helaman$_3$ and older brother of Lehi$_4$), with the sealing power, giving him the ability to move mountains, destroy temples, and smite the people, if he so chooses. Now, observe what happens when we insert this capable agent into the position of a deficient agent in the conditional construction found in Matthew 17:20:

> If **Nephi$_2$** have faith as a grain of mustard seed, he shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove.

From a strictly formalist view ("an autonomous formal description of a linguistic structure," without recognition of context), this reconfiguration technically works as a grammatical construct.[23] Yet the background knowledge that informs this conditional—that is, Nephi$_2$ already having

---

23. Dancygier, *Conditionals and Prediction*, 1.

the necessary faith to move mountains—creates an irreconcilable con-tradiction when inserted into the context of a deficient subject. Nephi$_2$, who has been given full access to the sealing power, still somehow lacks the power and faith in the New Testament construction to invoke the very blessing that the Lord has already bestowed on him.[24]

Thus, if we position Nephi$_2$ as the agent within the New Testament conditional framework, then the framework itself *requires a recon-figuration* to accommodate Nephi$_2$'s divine blessings, character, and attributes. Using the agent "Nephi$_2$" and the conditional structure in Matthew 17:20, the transformation then involves the following path-way, beginning with the substitution of Nephi$_2$ for the subject (for the sake of clarity, I am identifying the result of the action as the "result, extension"):

> If **Nephi$_2$** have faith as a grain of mustard seed,   [subordinate clause]
> he shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence
>   to yonder place;   [main clause]
> and it shall remove.   [result, extension]

Because Nephi$_2$ is not deficient in his abilities and attributes, the con-dition of him needing "faith as a grain of mustard seed" is not only irrelevant but contradictory. This phrase, by necessity, thereby gets removed from the subordinate clause:

> If **Nephi$_2$** ~~have faith as a grain of mustard seed~~,   [subordinate clause]
> he shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence
>   to yonder place;   [main clause]
> and it shall remove.   [result, extension]

We should pause here and make an important observation: With this simple step of removing the offending phrase, the conditional

---

24. This contradiction becomes even more pronounced when God, one of the capable agents in the Book of Mormon, is inserted into the New Testament model: God, an omniscient and omnipotent deity, would then present as an agent lacking in full knowledge and power. God would become an imperfect and hesitant God, introducing a theological conundrum.

construction immediately transforms into the same conditional framework that appears in the Book of Mormon.

Let's look at this domino effect in detail. When we remove "have faith as a grain of mustard seed," the opening subordinate clause contains a gap following the initial words: "If Nephi$_2$ . . ." This gap, however, does not remain vacant. By default, the opening phrase of the main clause ("he shall say unto this mountain") shifts into the subordinate clause position:

> If **Nephi$_2$** . . . he shall say unto
>   this mountain   [new subordinate clause]
> ~~he shall say unto this mountain,~~
>   Remove hence to yonder place;   [main clause, remainder]
> and it shall remove.   [result, extension]

Consequently, this adjustment cascades through the remainder of the conditional construction, reconfiguring the component parts automatically (and, most likely, unconsciously and inadvertently). The remainder of the main clause becomes intervening material ("remove hence to yonder place"), while the final "result, extension" becomes the new main clause ("and it shall remove"). The resulting configuration thus recreates the conditional construction found in the Book of Mormon (the redundant "he" is removed in the subordinate clause):

> Nephi$_2$ substituted into the Matthew 17:20 model
> **If** [Nephi$_2$] . . . shall say unto this mountain,   [subordinate clause]
> *Remove hence to yonder place*   [intervening material]
> **and** it shall remove.   [main clause]
>
> Nephi$_2$ in Helaman 10:9
> **If** ye [Nephi$_2$] shall say unto this mountain: [subordinate clause]
> *Be thou cast down and become smooth!*   [intervening material]
> —**and** it shall be done.   [main clause]

These Book of Mormon reconfigurations reveal a specific dynamic at play: In the process of formulating an innovative expression based closely on New Testament models, the syntactic structure of the models

came into direct conflict with the introduction of a new type of sub-ject—that is, the substitution of the original *deficient* agent (lacking sufficient faith) with a *nondeficient, capable* agent. The resolution of this conflict resulted in the Book of Mormon forms: nongrammatical con-ditional constructions that emerged from a process of misapprehension of the original structure of the New Testament models, followed by faulty analogic mapping of the same misconception onto variant forms. Rather than revealing the presence of a divine translator introducing non-English artifacts into the text the Book of Mormon, these curious constructions, in what proves to be a rather pedestrian revelation, result from nothing more than simple human error.

The nature of these errors, moreover, offers clues about the trans-lator. As demonstrated above, the translator did not fully grasp the mechanics of the original conditional construction, as modelled in the New Testament passages. Nevertheless, as the text of the Book of Mormon abundantly indicates, the translator repeatedly used this faulty lexico-syntactic frame as the structural basis for a wide variety of variant forms, from "if, and" conditional constructions to the pres-ence of an extra "and" in subordinate clauses with the connectors *after*, *as*, *because*, *had*, *if*, *when*, and *while* (Skousen provides approximately four dozen examples of these defective forms, scattered throughout the text).[25] In addition, and most clearly observed in the variety of "if, and" conditionals in the Book of Mormon, these constructions became *for-mulaic* in nature—meaning the core "if, and" structural pattern had developed into an *entrenched mental and oral formulaic template,* which the translator deployed to express a variety of related ideas (that is, the formulaic templates consisted of flexible, semi-preconstructed frames with substitution slots for novel material).[26]

---

25. Skousen, *GV*, 1: 361–376.

26. This essay follows Alison Wray's working definition of "formulaic language" (which she terms "formulaic sequences"): "a sequence, continuous or discon-tinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated:

This combination of a faulty formulaic template with apparent fluency in variability and substitution (e.g., the many different scenarios that God's power or the prophet Nephi's power could potentially enact) strongly suggests that the translator was still developing his/her/their/its syntactic competency with an unusual and seemingly archaic complex form. These expressions, moreover, suggest that the development of these constructions took place *outside* a community of native Early Modern English speakers, who, as part of the normal dynamics within a speech community and the attendant fertile environment for language acquisition, would have provided various natural mechanisms of corrective feedback. As a result, the Book of Mormon constructions express an idiosyncratic usage that mirrors the continuum of a youth in process of mastering oral formulaic utterances by "adopting stereotyped expressions that are neither copied directly from nor even directly reduced from adult usage" (that is, adopting expressions without examining, fully comprehending, duplicating, and/or making use of all the component parts of the original formulas), resulting in idiosyncratic formulations that persist into adulthood.[27] The presence of the idiosyncratic "if, and" conditional constructions, along with several related forms (the extra "and" in subordinate clauses), provides strong indications that these peculiar constructions reflect the translator's idiolect, rather than artifacts of translation.

Idiosyncratic definitions and uses, awkward reconfigurations of preexisting templates, and human missteps can also account for several other words on Skousen and Carmack's list of archaic meanings.

---

that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar." Alison Wray, *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

27. Ann M. Peters, *The Units of Language Acquisition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 82. For Peters's discussion on idiosyncratic formulas with children and adults, see esp. 80–88. More recently, Alison Wray turns to Peters's work to address the issue of "provenance," or "the way that formulaic sequences come about." See Wray, *Formulaic Language*, 59.

Consider "depart," meaning "divide, separate, part," which appears in Helaman 8:11: "God gave power unto one man even Moses to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea and they *departed* hither and thither."[28] The language of this passage originates from multiple verses in the KJV (see, e.g., Exodus 7:17; Exodus 14:16, 21–22; Exodus 16:1; Deuteronomy 9:7; and 2 Kings 2:8, 14). But for our purposes the final phrase "departed hither and thither" demands our attention. This formulaic phrase comes not from the story of Moses parting the Red Sea but from the story of Elijah and Elisha parting the Jordan River: "And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and *smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither*, so that they two went over on dry ground. . . . And he [Elisha] took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and *smote the waters* . . . and when he also had *smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither*: and Elisha went over" (2 Kings 2:8, 14). The phrases "*divided* hither and thither" and "*parted* hither and thither" provide the formulaic model for the Book of Mormon phrase "*departed* hither and thither" (these specific KJV phrases only occur in 2 Kings 2:8, 14). The word "departed," however, which only occurs in Helaman 8:11, appears to come from other related expressions associated with this story, such as "the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin . . . after their *departing* out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 16:1)—a phrase that would evolve into the commonplace

---

28. Stanford Carmack and Royal Skousen, "Revisions in the Analysis of Archaic Language in the Book of Mormon," in Royal Skousen, *Textual Criticism of the Book of Mormon*, part 8 of vol. 3 of Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon*, preprint page 7 (bolding in original) [hereafter "Revisions, Archaic Language"]. This essay follows the preprint version released by the Interpreter Foundation on Oct. 22, 2020. Skousen and Carmack's lists may therefore contain further revisions in the final publication. For the preprint version used in this essay, see https://interpreterfoundation .org/blog-pre-print-of-revisions-in-the-analysis-of-archaic-language-in-the -book-of-mormon/.

formula, "the children of Israel departed from Egypt."[29] The atypical use of "departed" in this Book of Mormon passage thus emerges from simple human error during the adoption and reconfiguration of biblical phraseology: In the process of oral dictation, Joseph spontaneously drew on habituated formulaic language from multiple stories in the KJV, reconfiguring the phraseology in the moment of performance to express the ideas in a novel text, only to conflate the different formulas in an awkward manner.

This same process, moreover, explains the unusual use of "scatter" on the title page of the Book of Mormon, which Skousen and Carmack define as "to separate from the main group" (as opposed to a general dispersal of the entire group).[30] The phrasing in question reads, "from the book of Ether also, which is a record of the people of Jared *which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people.*"[31] The latter portion of this sentence derives, however, from the KJV rendering of Genesis 11:9: "The Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."[32] The awkward use of "scatter," deriving once again from an imprecise reconfiguration of preexisting biblical phraseology, provides strong evidence that Joseph drew on habituated and entrenched language from the KJV to articulate the Book of Mormon text.

In like manner, Joseph's idiolect could easily account for other idiosyncratic usages or allegedly archaic meanings in the Book of Mormon.

---

29. See also, Deuteronomy 9:7: "the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt."

30. Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 19.

31. The Book of Mormon, title page (italics added). See https://www.church ofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/bofm-title?lang=eng.

32. The phrases "confound the(ir) language" and "scattered" also appear in verses 7 and 8, reinforcing the connection between the language and the narrative.

Consider, for example, the Book of Mormon phrase "cite your minds forward to," which Skousen includes in a short list of "words, phrases, and expressions that appear to occur only in the Book of Mormon," without "any evidence for their independent existence, in either Early Modern English or modern English."[33] Skousen states, "Thus far I have not been able to find any evidence in English for the precise expression 'to cite one's mind forward' or even 'to cite one's mind' or 'to cite forward' (there are, on the other hand, a good number of examples of 'cast one's mind')."[34] In a letter dated July 31, 1832, however, Joseph Smith wrote to William W. Phelps expressing frustration with Church leaders in Missouri. In the course of telling them about the Lord's displeasure, Joseph admonished Phelps and the leaders to recall the words of Christ: "*I cite your minds* to this saying: he that loveth Father or Mother, wife & Children more than me is not worthy of me."[35] Rather than being evidence for "tight control," in which Joseph transmitted some other entity's words, the expression "cite your minds (forward)" reveals Joseph's own idiosyncratic variation of a common—and likewise variable—expression: "call one's mind forward," "call to mind," "carry one's mind forward," "cast the mind back," "cast the mind's eye back," and "lead one's mind forward," among others.[36]

---

33. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:535.

34. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:536.

35. Joseph is paraphrasing Matthew 10:37. "Letter to William W. Phelps, 31 July 1832," 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-william-w-phelps-31-july-1832/2 (spelling and punctuation lightly modernized).

36. See, respectively, Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (London, 1796), 2:159; John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.* Reprint. Roger Sharrock, ed. (1666; Clarendon Press, 1962), 3; Joshua P. Slack, *The American Orator* (D. & E. Fenton, 1817), 127; "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," *National Intelligencer*, Feb. 3 1809, 4; "Commerce," *Columbian Centinel,* Jan. 6, 1813, 1; William Gilpin, *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England* (R. Blamire in the Strand, 1795), 41.

Idiosyncratic definitions within Joseph's idiolect could also account for the unique meanings of "pollutions" (referring to "people who are polluted or who pollute"), "retain" (meaning "to take back," an apparent conflation of "retake" and "regain"), "subsequent to man" (meaning "consequent to man"), and "wax" ("causative usage, in the passive," as in, "to cause to become").[37] As Skousen has observed, these usages appear to be unique to the Book of Mormon: "Thus far I have not been able to find any evidence for their independent existence, in either Early Modern English or modern English."[38] Idiosyncratic meanings and definitions are, however, normal occurrences in the formulation and development of an individual's idiolect—particularly, I would argue, when the unique usages are also part of an individual's religious register, which makes heavy use of non-native, archaic forms.

When we expand the scope of analysis to include the possibility of scribal flaws and the pressures of a rapid dictation process, in which Joseph sought unsuccessfully to find the precise language to express an idea in the moment of performance, then such factors can further account for additional idiosyncratic or allegedly archaic usages, such as using "ceremony" instead of the more specific description of a council of peace, parley, or peace ceremony (Mosiah 19:24); "counsel" instead of "counsel *with*" (Alma 37:37; 39:10); "consigned" instead of "resigned" (Helaman 7:9); "whereby" instead of "wherefore" (Ether 8:9); and "whereunto" instead of "while" or "but" (Ether 12:23).[39] The scribe's spelling of "nithermost" might, in fact, be a phonetic

---

37. See Skousen, *NOL*, 3:535.

38. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:535.

39. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:92–93, 210–211, 265.

representation of what appears to be Joseph's rural New England pronunciation of "nethermost" (Jacob 5:13–14, 19, 38–39, 52).[40]

When we step back from all of these examples and look for a common thread, we find an array of idiosyncratic usages that reflect the types of common mistakes that occur during the formation of an individual's idiolect and, in this case, non-native spiritual registers. But perhaps more importantly, we also discover a much larger underlying and repeated strategy of textual production: a process of appropriating and modifying biblical and biblical-sounding language to produce innovative texts and readings. This process, moreover, is not limited to occasional turns of phrases or isolated passages. Rather, the process reveals a ubiquitous, persistent, and fundamental characteristic of the Book of Mormon translator's method. We would be remiss, therefore, if we failed to recognize that this same creative process characterizes, and is entirely consistent with, virtually all of Joseph's scripture-making endeavors and revelatory texts.[41]

---

40. In his study on New England dialects, James W. Downer Jr. compared the representations of rural mid-nineteenth-century speech in the *Biglow Papers* (1848), written by James Russell Lowell (1819–1891), a prominent early American author and scholar of linguistics, with the dialects of their rural mid-twentieth-century counterparts. Downer observed that the rural New England dialects, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often switched the /ɛ/ sound for /ɪ/, so that words such as "kettle" were pronounced "kittle"; "engine" as "ingin"; "generous" as "gin'rous"; regiment" as "rigiment"; "steady" as "stiddy"; and "yet" as "yit." This dialectical shift in vowel sounds strongly suggests that Joseph Smith, who lived in rural New England until approximately eleven years of age (the most formative years of his language development), would have pronounced "nethermost" as "nithermost," prompting the scribe's misspelling. See James W. Downer, "Features of New England Rustic Pronunciation in James Russell Lowell's *Biglow Papers*" (PhD diss., Michigan University, 1958), 162. See also figures 21–24 (166–169).

41. Working with the Johannine Prologue, Nicholas J. Frederick offers a masterclass in close reading when he explores Joseph Smith's creative reworking

Part II. Archaic Vocabulary and Meanings

Joseph Smith's New England and New York dialects, coupled with the language of the KJV and the registers of contemporary revivalism and religious discourse, have provided obvious locations of investigative research to identify possible sources of the archaic biblical-style language in the Book of Mormon. Meanwhile, another prominent resource remains neglected: the popular reading material of the day. When we look into the family libraries of early nineteenth-century farmers and artisans, we find that they owned and read the works of a number of influential authors from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Yet, with regard to Joseph, the availability of such materials and their popularity in working-class homes rarely receives attention, presumably due to his alleged illiteracy and purported lack of

---

of biblical phraseology and "how the Bible is both *deconstructed* and *reconstructed* in the course of composing the Mormon scriptural corpus." Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), xviii. See also Seth Perry, *Bible Culture & Authority in the Early United States* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 110–128; and Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, updated ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. 21–23. For Joseph's appropriation of non-biblical religious phraseology, such as the language of contemporary revivalism, see William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 112–114; Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Signature Books, 2003), 123–147; and Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Signature Books, 2002), 95–133. For the wider use of archaic, scriptural language as a textual genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2013), 84–150; and Perry, *Bible Culture & Authority*, 86–109.

interest in reading.[42] In the early American republic, however, regular reading—silent and aloud, by individuals, families, or groups in various gathering places (from literary and debate societies to local inns and taverns)—was a common and popular pastime.

In his influential study on the cultural life of rural New England, William J. Gilmore observes that the 1787–1830 personal libraries of the rural residents in Vermont's Windsor District (located immediately south of the region where the Smith family lived in Randolph, Royalton, Sharon, and Tunbridge) contained works from such authors as William Shakespeare (1564–1616), John Milton (1608–1674), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), John Flavel (ca. 1627–1691), John Bunyan (1628–1688), Isaac Watts (1674–1748), Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), John Wesley (1703–1791), Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), and James Hervey (1714–1758), among others. According to Gilmore, the most popular religious texts in these working-class libraries were "Bibles (and New Testaments), Watts' *Psalms* and his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, and the writings of Flavel and Baxter and Wesley."[43] Moreover, many of these authors, particularly when engaged in religious discourse, adopted and adapted styles of conservative and archaic language in order to enhance the spiritual gravity of their works.

---

42. Lucy Smith famously said that Joseph "seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children," which commentators often use to assert Joseph's lack of interest in reading. See Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Signature Books, 2001), 344. Lucy's comment does not, however, state that Joseph did not like to read. She simply makes a comparison of Joseph's reading habits in relation to his siblings. Thus, without knowing how much the other Smith children were inclined to read, the comment remains an observation without a reference point.

43. William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 62, 64–67.

John Bunyan's *The Holy War* (1682)

Among these authors, John Bunyan warrants our particular attention. Born in Bedfordshire, England, in late 1628, Bunyan grew up in poverty. Apart from a short stint in school, where he learned how "to Read and Write," Bunyan educated himself by reading and self-improvement, further developing a writing style that reflected his religious environment and his ubiquitous storytelling culture.[44] In all, Bunyan produced at least fifty-eight works (ranging from tracts and treatises to sermons and allegories), but he remains best known for *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a work that has never gone out of print.[45] Christopher Hill, one of Britain's preeminent historians, observed that "next to the Bible, perhaps the world's best-selling book is *The Pilgrim's Progress*, translated into over 200 languages, with especially wide sales in the Third World."[46] For early nineteenth-century readers, however, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not the only work that received significant attention.[47]

---

44. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, edited by Roger Sharrock (Clarendon Press), 5; Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 5, 85. See also N. H. Keeble, "John Bunyan's Literary Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, edited by Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20; Nancy Rosenfeld, "The Holy War (1682)," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan,* ed. Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (Oxford University Press, 2018), 277.

45. For a broad description of the works, see Keeble, "John Bunyan's Literary Life," 18.

46. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628–1688* (W. W. Norton, 1988), 375.

47. Popular titles in America included *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666); *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part 2* (1684); *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680); *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658); *The Holy City or the New Jerusalem* (1665); *Seasonable Counsel* (1684); *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized* (1688); *The Water of Life* (1688); and *The Heavenly Footman* (1698). For additional titles and publications, see Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, appendix, 637–641; David E. Smith, "Publication of John Bunyan's Works in America" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 66, no. 10 (1962): 640–652.

Bunyan's *The Holy War* (1682) also stood as one of his most beloved and popular allegories, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Britain and America. In the eighteenth century, the work appeared in over fifty editions in Britain.[48] Yet, even with these vast numbers flooding both British and American markets, American publishers began issuing their own editions to keep up with the demand. Between 1794 and 1818 alone, eight American editions and reprints appeared in several centers of publication: New York (1794, 1805), Portsmouth, New Hampshire (1794), Philadelphia (1803, 1818), Baltimore (1812), Albany (1816), and Boston (1817).[49] In addition to these British and American publications, John Wesley included an edited version of *The Holy War* in his multivolume *Christian Library*, an educational resource for Methodist exhorters and preachers, who often had little or no formal education.[50] With such extensive publication and circulation of Bunyan's works, it is no surprise that titles such as *The Holy War*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Grace Abounding*, along with biographies of John Bunyan, were readily available in the bookstores near the Smith family residences in Palmyra and Manchester, New York.[51]

In terms of the story, *The Holy War* is an extended, militaristic allegory that recounts the epic tale of a town called Mansoul (Man's

---

48. Anne Dunan-Page, "Posthumous Bunyan," in Dunan-Page, *Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, 144.

49. Smith, "Publication of John Bunyan's Works," 647.

50. Vicki Tolar Burton, *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism: Reading, Writing, & Speaking to Believe* (Baylor University Press, 2008), 106, 110–112. See also Nancy Rosenfeld, "The Holy War (1682)," 280.

51. James Bemis, a major regional printer and bookseller, advertised copies of *Pilgrim's Progress, Grace Abounding, The Holy War, Law and Grace Unfolded*, and *The Life of Rev. John Bunyan* in his Canandaigua shop, seven miles south of the Smith's Manchester farm. See, for example, "Canandaigua Book-Store," *Ontario Repository*, Nov. 11, 1817, [3]; and "Books in Divinity," *Ontario Repository*, June 20, 1820, [1]. Palmyra bookseller T. C. Strong also frequently advertised *The Life of John Bunyan*; see, for example, "T. C. St[r]ong Books, and Stationary," *Palmyra Register*, May 17, 1820, 4.

Soul), whose citizens battle to overcome a series of assaults by Diabolus (Satan) and to live in accordance with the laws of their rulers, King Shaddai (God the Father) and his son Emanuel (Christ). And, like the Book of Mormon, *The Holy War* makes use of archaic language and grammatical structures, along with sharing an assortment of textual features that make it an apt example for comparison. We begin with Bunyan's vocabulary and how his popular work provided a vehicle for archaic meanings to persist into the early nineteenth century.

In *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part 3: The Nature of the Original Language* (2018), Royal Skousen and Stan Carmack originally identified thirty-nine words that "sometimes take on a meaning that dates from Early Modern English" rather than Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century language.[52] Since that time, they have recategorized several of the lexical items, reducing the list to twenty-six words with archaic meanings.[53] This new list, however, requires further review. "Raigned" and "Call of," for example, persisted into the nineteenth century, while the meaning they assign to "Mar" does not provide the most suitable definition for its context.[54] In addition, as mentioned earlier,

---

52. Skousen, *NOL*, 3:91.

53. Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 2.

54. *Raigned* ("arraigned"): "the culprits were *raigned*, convicted, and condemned, by competent tribunals," in Alexander Stephens, *The History of the Wars Which Arose out of the French Revolution* (John Bioren and Thomas L. Plowman, 1804), 2: 253 (emphasis added). *Call of* ("need for"): "though you think there is a *great call of* public justice, let no unmerited victim fall," in T. B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials* (Longman, Hurst, Reese, et. al., 1820), 27:379 (emphasis added). *Mar*: in the verse, "no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them," Skousen and Carmack define "mar" as "hinder, stop." This choice, however, obliterates the parallel structure ("no monster . . . could break / neither whale . . . could mar"), which sets up "mar" as synonymous with "break." A more precise definition would be "damage," as in the OED sense I.2, "to damage (a material thing) so as to render useless; to destroy or impair the quality of (an object)." The OED offers a fitting example from Richard W. Hamilton's 1853 publication of *The Revealed Doctrine of Rewards and Punishments*: "The vessel is so marred that it cannot be repaired." See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "mar (v.)," sense I.2, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3414607628.

idiosyncratic definitions, awkward articulations, and human mistakes (e.g., speaker or scribal errors) can account for the usages and meanings of "consigned," "counsel," "depart," "nithermost," and "whereby." For whatever words remain on their list, *The Holy War* further reduces the collection by nine more items. The relevant words (*in italics*) appear below, together with Skousen and Carmack's definitions in quotation marks. I then provide samples from *The Holy War* that either express the same meanings, or, alternatively, provide meanings and examples that appear to fit the Book of Mormon usage more precisely:[55]

> *Break* [meaning] "to stop, interrupt": "Diabolus their king had in these days his rest much broken" (53); "this Diabolonian council was broken up" (217).
>
> *But* "unless, except": "the walls . . . could never be opened nor forced but by the will and leave of those within" (9); "nor can they by any means be won but by their own consent" (12).[56]
>
> *Course* "direction"; specifically, "the motion of people in a certain direction":[57] "they . . . steer their course towards the town of Mansoul" (10); "coming up to the wall of the town, he steereth his course to Ear-gate" (62).
>
> *Cross* "to contradict": "to send our petition by a man of this name, will seem to cross the petition itself" [the messenger's name and the message itself appear to be at cross purposes] (98).

---

55. See Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 2. For *The Holy War* examples, I follow John Bunyan, *The Holy War*, edited by Roger Sharrock and James F. Forrest (Clarendon Press, 2012), which uses a first edition of *The Holy War* (1682) as a copytext. See Roger Sharrock and James F. Forrest, "Note on the Text," in Bunyan, *The Holy War*, xl–xlviii.

56. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan writes, "the tempter came in with this delusion, That there was no way for me to know I had faith, *but* by trying to work some miracle" (18; emphasis added).

57. Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 6.

Flatter "coax, entice": "I will try to catch them by fawning, I will try to flatter them into my net" (192).

Give "describe, portray": "he gave it out in special that they should bend all their force against Feel-gate" (203). ["Gave it out in special" means that Diabolus described the assault plan in detail, with special attention to the attack on Feel-gate.]

Manifest "expound, unfold" [or "reveal"; see footnote]:[58] "it is not myself, but you—not mine, but your advantage that I seek by what I now do, as will full well be made manifest, by that I have opened my mind unto you" (14); "This is manifest by the very name of the tree; it is called the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil'" (15).

---

58. Skousen and Carmack argue that the definition "expound, unfold" (OED, manifest, v., sense 3) best suits Alma's words: "But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God" (Alma 36:23). Yet the full entry for this definition reads, "To expound, unfold, clear up (a matter), as in a manifesto or public declaration," which refers to a scenario in which ambiguous information requires further clarification. This is not the context of Alma 36:23, where Alma has risen from a redemptive trance and is telling the people what has happened to him. The OED definition in 1.a., "To make (a quality, fact, etc.) evident to the eye or to the understanding; *to show plainly, disclose, reveal,*" provides the most suitable definition for the context. *The Holy War* examples reflect this same sense of revealing, disclosing, and making information apparent. For additional examples, see Bunyan, *The Holy War*, 5, 239. For the definitions of "manifest," see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "manifest (v.)," sense 1.a. and 3, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8022393336.

Opinion "expectation" [or an expectation based on belief; see footnote]:⁵⁹
The trial of Mr. Lustings: "I was ever of opinion that the happiest life
that a man could live on earth was to keep himself back from nothing
that he desired in the world" (122); The trial of Mr. Atheism: he "did
briskly talk of divers opinions; and then and there I heard him say, that
for his part, he did believe that there was no God" (120).

Study "to concentrate thought upon": "Since, therefore, the giant could
not make him wholly his own, what doth he do but studies all that he
could to debauch the old gentleman" (19); "your greatness is pleased to
give us to continue to devise, contrive, and study the utter desolation
of Mansoul" (169).⁶⁰

---

59. Skousen and Carmack revised the archaic meaning from "considered judg-
ment" to "expectation" ("Revisions, Archaic Language," 16), arguing that Alma's
meaning best matched the OED, sense 5, meaning: "Thought of what is likely
to be the case, knowledge; expectation based on knowledge or belief." But this
interpretation proves imprecise, particularly in light of the examples that the
editors provide, such as "The warre continuing beyond opinion [beyond what
was expected], the State was inforced to procure pay for the armie" (R. John-
son, translation of G. Botero, *Trauellers Breuiat* [1601], 136) or "When their
consciences are possessed with an opinion of hell fire [knowledge based on
belief]" (J. Dove, *Confutation of Atheisme* [1605], 5). In contrast, Alma states, "*I
give it as my opinion* that the souls and the bodies are reunited of the righteous
at the resurrection of Christ" (Alma 40:20; emphasis added), which indicates
Alma's "opinion" is his "belief" in a doctrine. The OED, sense 1.a., provides a
more accurate definition: "What or how one thinks about something; judge-
ment or belief. Esp. in **in my opinion**: according to my thinking; as it seems
to me. **a matter of opinion**: a matter about which each may have his or her
own opinion; a disputable point." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "opinion (n.),"
sense 1.a. and 5, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5028687369 (bolding in original).
Any sense of expectation in Alma's words is founded on his "belief"—refer-
ring to the hoped-for, future outcome—therefore the sense of expectation is
secondary. *The Holy War* examples reflect Alma's central meaning: a belief in
a doctrine and/or a belief in a future outcome. For additional examples, see
Bunyan, *The Holy War*, 159, 216.

60. For additional examples, see Bunyan, *The Holy War*, 144, 237.

The presence of these nine archaic meanings in *The Holy War* should give us pause in attributing distinctive meanings to words in the Book of Mormon. If a single work can produce such results, then an analysis of the archaic language in the reading material of the early nineteenth-century needs to be taken more fully into account. If we expand our analysis to more of Bunyan's works, for example, we find that Skousen and Carmack's definitions for "*Desirous* 'desirable'" and "*Extinct* 'physically dead'" appear in *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part 2*: "they make the Woods and Groves, and Solitary places, places *desirous* to be in" (235–236) and "Tis pity this Family should fall and be *extinct*" (260).[61] In addition, their definitions for *Idleness* ("meaningless words or actions") and *Profane* ("to act profanely") match some of the ways in which Bunyan also uses the terms "idle, idleness, idly, profane, and profaneness."[62] For example, "he suffers his house to be scattered with profane and wicked books, such as stir up to lust, to wantonness, such as teach *idle, wanton, lascivious discourse*, and such as have a tendency *to provoke to profane drollery and jesting*; and, lastly, such as tend *to*

---

61. Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 2, 9, 11.

62. Skousen and Carmack's definition for "idleness" includes "passionate expression or perhaps meaningless prayers," and "instances in the Book of Mormon of *idleness* and *idle* that seem to work best if we interpret them as referring to the Lamanites as people whose actions are 'voice of meaning or sense; foolish, silly, incoherent' (see definition 2b in the OED for idle, also definition 3 for idleness)." This meaning, however, appears in the New Testament: "Their words seemed to them as *idle tales*, and they believed them not" (Luke 24:11). Their definition for "profane" is "intransitive and means 'act profanely' rather than 'speak profanely,'" which the Bunyan examples also demonstrate. Skousen and Carmack, "Revisions, Archaic Language," 9, 11.

corrupt, and pervert the doctrine of faith and holiness" (62).[63] Thus, fully half of the twenty-six archaic meanings on Skousen and Carmack's list can be found in these three works by Bunyan alone.

Part III: Grammar, Syntax, and Periphrastic *Do*

Along with archaic word meanings, Bunyan's *The Holy War* offers models for a variety of archaic syntactic and grammatical structures. In her study on Bunyan's prose in five of his most popular works (*Pilgrim's Progress, Parts 1 and 2*; *Grace Abounding*; *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*; and *The Holy War*), Julie Coleman identifies some of Bunyan's most common archaic elements: "Bunyan used six linguistic variants to Biblicize his language: -*eth* inflections, *mine/thine* before vowels, *mine/thine* before consonants, *yea* in place of *yes* or *aye*, periphrastic *do*, and *thou* singulars." In terms of overall usage of all of these categories, Coleman notes, "*The Holy War* is the text whose language is most influenced by the language of the Bible as Bunyan repeatedly signals that a more elevated interpretation underlies the literal story."[64] When Bunyan composed his works, the periphrastic *do* (e.g., "his words *did shake* the whole town," instead of "his words *shook* the whole town") had largely fallen out of use, though his writings remained "reminiscent of periphrastic

---

63. For "idleness" (meaningless, frivolous words), see also "if they railed on religion so could he; if they talked beastly, vainly, *idly*, so would he." For "profane" (behavior), see also, "when he could get [away] from his friends, and so spend it [the Sabbath] in all manner of idleness and profaneness then he would be pleased," and "they that shall inwardly chuse the company of the ungodly and openly profane [profane behavior], rather than the company of the godly, as Mr Badman did, surely are not godly men, but profane." John Bunyan, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (W. Nicholson, 1808), 137–138, 42, 257, respectively.

64. Julie Coleman, "The Manufactured Homespun Style of John Bunyan's Prose," *Bunyan Studies*, no. 18 (2014): 114; see also figure 16. Readers should note that Coleman's examples of archaisms extend beyond the features she mentions in this quote.

Biblical usage in a trend also apparent in other religious writings of the period."[65] (We should also note here that "Biblical usage" for Bunyan includes the Geneva Bible, a text saturated with examples of periphrastic *do*.)[66] Moreover, as Coleman demonstrates, Bunyan's decision to adopt this archaic feature was part of a larger project of using "Biblicized language for distinct stylistic purposes," and his use of the periphrastic *do* fluctuated according to the type of work that he was composing.[67]

When observing the use of the periphrastic *do* in *The Holy War*, we find that Bunyan not only made frequent use of this structure but also composed a variety of forms that, in turn, reflect the full array of usage in the Book of Mormon. In his essay addressing the use of periphrastic *do* in the Book of Mormon, with specific focus on the past-tense syntax ("affirmative declarative periphrastic *did*," which he terms "ADP *did*"), Carmack provides four different types of expressions of this feature: (1) "Adjacency (the auxiliary *did* is adjacent to the infinitive)"; (2) "Inversion (did + subject + infinitive – verb – second syntax with a preceding adverbial or object)"; (3) "Intervening Adverbial Use (an adverb or an adverbial phrase is used between did and the infinitive)"; and (4) "Ellipsis (*did* carries through to a second infinitive, akin to *I didn't see or hear anything, I will go and do,* etc.)."[68] Later in the essay, Carmack provides yet another configuration, which he describes as "consecutive ADP

---

65. Coleman, "Manufactured Homespun Style," 126.

66. W. R. Owens observes that "although Bunyan generally quotes the Authorised Version, it is clear that he knew the Geneva Bible well, and he also refers to the work of Tyndale." W. R. Owen, "John Bunyan and the Bible," in Dunan-Page, *Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, 41. See also, Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory,* 463.

67. Coleman, "Manufactured Homespun Style," 133.

68. Carmack, "The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 122–123, table 1.

did," in which periphrastic *did* is "used consecutively in the KJB [KJV] and the BofM [Book of Mormon] without a repeat of the subject."[69]

With regard to all of these features, *The Holy War* provides multiple examples. Consider the following representative configurations:

Adjacency: "Yea, how by hostile ways she *did oppose* / Her Lord, and with his enemy *did close*" (2); "my Father *did accept* thereof " (75); "he *did cast up* four mounts against the town" (188).

Inversion: "Then *did* the town of Mansoul *shout* for joy" (49); "Then *did* the giant *send* for the prisoners" (52); "there *did* the tyrant *set up* his standard" (189).

Intervening Adverbial: "they *did* never as yet *see* any of their fellow-creatures" (11); "This image was so exactly engraven, (and it was engraven in gold,) that it *did* the most *resemble* Shaddai himself " (24); "nor *did* there now *remain* any more a noble spirit" (17).

Ellipsis: "they two *did range* and *revel* it all the town over" (27); "He also *did kiss*, and *embrace*, and *smile* upon the other two" (106); "Then *did* the Prince's trumpets *sound*, the captains *shout*, the town *shake*, and Diabolus *retreat* to his hold" (87).

Consecutive ADP *did*: "the Prince's men *did* bravely *stand* to their arms, *and did*, as before, *bend* their main force against Ear-gate and Eye-gate" (86); "Now *did* Mansoul's cup *run over*, now *did* her conduits *run* sweet wine" (149).

Considering the popularity of Bunyan's works in early nineteenth-century America, any of his readers would have been exposed to an abundant variety of periphrastic *do* constructions.

These structures, moreover, are not the only archaic elements in Bunyan's biblical style. Limitations on space do not allow a more extensive exploration, but his works also provide additional examples relevant to Skousen's and Carmack's several analyses, such as verbal complementation (especially with *cause, command* and *desire*), command syntax,

---

69. Carmack, "Implications of Past-Tense Syntax," 138.

agentive *of* syntax, and archaic phraseology. Whether or not one chooses to believe that Joseph Smith read any of Bunyan's stories, the writings themselves were certainly widely accessible and could easily have provided a wide range of templates for many of the Book of Mormon forms.[70]

---

70. This accessibility of archaic forms speaks to the issue of influence and comparative analysis. Carmack frequently dismisses texts as possible sources of influence based on differing rates of usage from one text to another, but this is a systemic flaw in his analyses. It is a faulty assumption to argue that two texts must share a similar profile for a given feature in order for one to qualify as a possible source of influence for the other. Carmack notes, for example, that the periphrastic *did* rate in the KJV is 1.7 percent, while the Book of Mormon rate is 27.2 percent, prompting him to argue that "the occasional intersection" of KJV and Book of Mormon periphrastic *did* syntax argues against the KJV as a source of influence: "The rates and patterns of use strongly indicate independence" (Carmack, "Implications of Past-Tense Syntax," 123, table 2). This reasoning, however, rests on the faulty premise that the human mind processes language in empirically predictable ways. Yet, the mind does not read a text, isolate a particular feature, calculate the frequency of usage, and then attempt to reproduce that same frequency in a new composition. Rather, the mind is unpredictable, focusing on different linguistic elements and making use of language features in idiosyncratic ways. An individual, for instance, could encounter the unfamiliar periphrastic *do* in a work, and then, struck by the novelty of the form, latch onto it and use it at a much higher rate of frequency than the source text expresses. These differences would not disqualify the original text from being a source of inspiration. Though the rate of periphrastic *did* in the KJV is 1.7 percent, this percentage refers to *515 instances* of the form (as Carmack indicates in table 2), which would provide an ample resource to observe and mimic. Grant Hardy raises the same concern: "It seems to me, however, that Carmack does not give adequate consideration to alternative hypotheses: for instance, Joseph may have picked up the *do*-auxiliary from the King James Bible and then overused it in an idiosyncratic way." Hardy, *Approaching Completion*, 15n17.

Conclusion

While this essay does not provide a comprehensive survey of every textual phenomenon that Skousen and Carmack employ to assert their theory of "tight control," the information presented here nevertheless offers more than sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Joseph Smith's participation in the translation work was far more involved than a simple process of transmitting a preexisting, pretranslated work to his scribes. Rather, the English-language text of the Book of Mormon points ineluctably to Joseph himself as the source of the English rendition. The textual characteristics reveal much about the translator: The language came from a fallible source—specifically, a translator who was a non-native speaker of Early Modern English, despite adopting some of its characteristics; a translator who did not have perfect command of the specific meanings of all the words being used (or occasionally misspoke and used similar but incorrect words); and a translator prone to human error, especially when adapting KJV structures and patterns to new forms and contexts. The attribution of such idiosyncratic meanings and defective constructions to God, his angels, his sacred instruments, or some other divine agent results in a strained and implausible position to maintain.

By restoring Joseph Smith to the power, function, and title of being an actual *translator*, we enhance our understanding of the nature of his revelations. In doing so, we also clarify the message and meaning of the Book of Mormon. As one of the many possible insights that such a view would bring, there is perhaps no greater opportunity than recovering the final intentions for the text of the Book of Mormon. In this important and consequential regard, the 1840 third edition of the Book of Mormon—the last edition that Joseph Smith personally edited and corrected—would assume authoritative status over the earlier versions. Royal Skousen's work to recover the earliest (spoken) version of the text would then prove invaluable as a means to observe the original expression of the ideas, but it would be the 1840 revision of the

work that would provide the foundational text for analysis to determine authoritative readings. Understanding the nature of the text as being the product of Joseph Smith's "loose control" translation thereby provides a crucial and essential foundation for future explorations of the Book of Mormon.

WILLIAM L. DAVIS {wdavis777@ucla.edu} is an independent scholar with a PhD in theater and performance studies from UCLA. He is the author of *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), which received the Smith-Pettit Best Book Award from the John Whitmer Historical Association and was selected as a finalist for the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion: Textual Studies.