

Hebraisms

You may like them, you may see...

The Hammers We Hold

Many apologists for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have posited several possible lines of linguistic evidence in favor of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. This section will be analyzing one specific type: Hebraisms. A Hebraism is an element of speaking or writing that uses the linguistic styles of Hebrew.

Example of a potential Semitic element:

- “Because of their unbelief, the Lamanites are cursed, receive a **skin of blackness**, and become a scourge unto the Nephites.”

Example of a potential English element:

- “Because of their unbelief, the Lamanites are cursed, receive **black skin**, and become a scourge unto the Nephites.”

In this example, “skin of blackness” may have matched how a Hebrew writer or speaker would express themselves. Given this, Book of Mormon scholars look for evidence of the Book of Mormon’s ancient Hebrew origins by identifying phrases or expressions which are not typical for an English speaker of Joseph Smith’s day. According to many Latter-day Saint apologists, the Book of Mormon has authentic Semitic constructions in it.

Cognitive bias (and other notes)

I, like others, suffer from cognitive biases which may negatively influence our objectivity in making opinions and decisions when considering Hebraisms to be positive evidence towards the semitic authenticity of the Book of Mormon

Functional fixedness ¹

¹This is the tendency to see objects as only working in a particular way. For example, if you don’t have a hammer, you never consider that a big wrench can also be used to drive a nail into the wall. You may think you don’t need thumbtacks because you have no corkboard on which to tack things, but not consider their other uses. This could extend to people’s functions, such as not realizing a personal assistant has skills to be in a leadership role.

If someone alleges to have found a Hebraism in the Book of Mormon, some hypotheses that should be included when discussing the nature of these patterns should include chance or style. The “Hebraism” may have occurred by accident or may have occurred naturally through Joseph Smith’s pseudo-biblical narrative style.

Attentional bias ²

When comparing perceived Hebraism found in the Book of Mormon with other Semitic texts, we must not ignore

- Texts from non-semitic origin that contain perceived Hebraisms
- Linguistic examples in the Book of Mormon that may offer negative evidence to a Semitic origin.

Comparisons!

The Book of Mormon, written in 1830, has around 270k words. Using linguistic analysis, some researchers have found that *The Late War*, a history of the revolutionary war in pseudo-biblical style, matched the text of the Book of Mormon very well. This section is not necessarily implying that Joseph Smith must have been explicitly inspired by this text, but rather that this text is a great reference of a similarly written, pseudo-biblical, text. If the same alleged Hebraisms that appear in the Book of Mormon similarly show up in *The Late War*, this offers some evidence that these alleged Hebraisms could be due to chance or originate naturally from pseudo-biblical writing. It is also important to note that *The Late War* has around 83k words—meaning the Book of Mormon is over three times longer than the *Late War*.

For an additional control, I used the *Doctrine and Covenants* to see if there were any similar perceived Hebraisms written by Joseph Smith. If the same alleged Hebraisms that appear in the Book of Mormon similarly show up in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, this offers some evidence that these alleged Hebraisms could be due to chance, originate naturally from pseudo-biblical writing, or just be a product of how Joseph Smith writes. Finally, if perceived Hebraisms appear in other texts not related to the authorship of Joseph Smith, this offers some evidence that these alleged Hebraisms could have resulted from chance.

The Goal Here

FairLatterDaySaints states that members “need to tread cautiously in establishing [authentic Hebraisms]. Each must be evaluated on its own merits. Hebraisms that could have been known to Joseph Smith may still be authentic, and may still enhance our appreciation of the text, but **they are weak evidence for Book of Mormon antiquity**”³. Since the faithful audience of the Book of Mormon may not hold this view, the goal of this list is to explain the plausibility of Hebraisms occurring naturally through Joseph Smith’s style or by chance. Below is an

²This is the tendency to pay attention to some things while simultaneously ignoring others. For example, when making a decision on which car to buy, you may pay attention to the look and feel of the exterior and interior, but ignore the safety record and gas mileage.

³[FairLDS: Hebraisms](#)

alphabetically sorted list of alleged Hebraism found in the Book of Mormon followed up by perceived Hebraisms of the same type from other sources.

Adverbials

Book of Mormon

- with patience
- with much harshness
- with joy
- in spirit and in truth
- in righteousness

The Late War

- with reverence
- with joy
- with great violence
- in abundance
- in safety

Doctrine and Covenants

- perform with soberness
- I speak unto you with sharpness and with power
- even with a loud voice, with a sound of rejoicing
- that I shall come in a cloud with power
- as well as in secret, in public as well as in private

Antenantiosis

The Book of Mormon - despise not the revelations of God

- if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out
- It is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you
- he [the devil] rewardeth you no good thing

The Late War - Nevertheless, the servants of the king struck not the flag of Britain

- Lo! they saw not the host of Britain
- it was an evil thing, and pleased not the people of Columbia.
- and they found no rest
- and her mighty armies had gained no honors
- Thou shalt do no murder.
- he arrogated to himself no praise in account of his success
- and the shores of Columbia knew no peace.

Doctrine and Covenants - Deny not the spirit of revelation

- if they know not the name by which they are called
- I revoke not the judgments
- and show not these things
- they received not the Holy Ghost