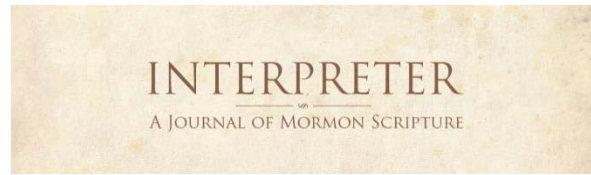




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The Case of the {-th} Plural in the Earliest Text

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Stanford Carmack

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THE CASE OF THE {-TH} PLURAL IN THE EARLIEST TEXT

Stanford Carmack

Abstract: *The earliest text of the Book of Mormon employs the {-th} plural — for example, “Nephi’s brethren rebelleth” — in a way that is substantially similar to what is found in many writings of the Early Modern period. The earliest text neither underuses nor overuses the construction, and it manifests inflectional variation and differential usage rates typical of Early Modern English. The totality of the evidence tells us that the Book of Mormon is most reasonably classified as a 16th- or 17th-century text, not as a 19th-century text full of biblical hypercorrections.*

CAREFUL READERS of the Yale edition of the Book of Mormon notice the following language:

1 Nephi [HEADING]

Nephi’s BRETHREN **rebelleth** against him. He confoundeth them and buildeth a ship.

2 Nephi [HEADING]

Nephi’s BRETHREN **rebelleth** against him. The Lord warns Nephi to depart into the wilderness etc.

Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009), pages 5 and 72. For many of the Book of Mormon examples discussed here, we can profitably consult Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 parts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–2009).

Indeed, we can find more than 100 instances of the type “Nephi’s brethren rebelleth” in the earliest text. In the Book of Mormon and in Early Modern English, this particular syntax usually involves a grammatical subject that is third-person plural and a verb that carries archaic third-person singular inflection (ending in {-th}).¹ After Lass (1999), I refer to

1. Phonetically speaking, this inflection is a voiceless interdental non-sibilant fricative — IPA symbol /θ/.

such morphosyntax as the {-th} plural.² This usage has been recognized and discussed by historical linguists like Lass for some time.³ Barber (1997:169) wrote, “The old southern {-eth} plural appears sporadically throughout the sixteenth century, possibly encouraged by the analogy of the third-person singular.”⁴ Of course when we read the standard LDS text we miss most of these since they have been changed by subsequent editors, and more often than not by Joseph Smith himself in 1837.⁵

Here are a number of quotes exhibiting lexical and morphological correspondence between the above Book of Mormon language and the textual record:

1523 EEBO A71318 John Bouchier, tr. (Lord Berners) [1466/67–1533] | Jean Froissart [1338?–1410?] *Chronicles*

as for the comon PEOPLE *that rebelleth* about London

This example is ambiguous since *people* can be construed as either singular or plural.

1548 EEBO A04807 William Kethe [d.1608?] *A ballet declaringe the fal of the whore of babylone*

Let THEY *that rebelleth* beware

The principal data source used in this study is *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) [Chadwyck-Healey <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>>]. Many of these texts can be freely accessed by using the provided EEBO number and entering it after <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/>>. The publicly searchable portion of EEBO–TCP (Text Creation Partnership) is <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup/>>. Mark Davies provided a very useful corpus and interface: *Early English Books Online, 400 million words, 1470s–1690s* (2013–). I have also derived some of the examples from a 500-million-word corpus of my own elaboration, made from several thousand publicly available EEBO–TCP texts.

2. See Roger Lass, “Phonology and Morphology”, *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume III: 1476–1776*, ed. Roger Lass (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 165–66.

3. See also, for example, Henry C. Wyld, *A History of Modern Colloquial English* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1936), as well as the Lass citation in the previous footnote.

4. Charles Barber, *Early Modern English*, 1976 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997).

5. Nevertheless, six or seven instances of the {-th} plural remain in the current LDS text. Besides “mine eyes hath beheld” (2 Nephi 25:5), the few that have escaped emendation involve relative pronouns and subject–verb inversion: “for I will contend with them that contendeth with thee” (2 Nephi 6:17; cf. 1 Nephi 21:25), “the judgments of God which hath come to pass” (2 Nephi 25:6); “the prophecies . . . which leadeth” (Helaman 15:7); “what meaneth the things” (1 Nephi 15:21); “what meaneth the words” (Mosiah 12:20); “these . . . works . . . of which hath been spoken” (Helaman 16:16). This last example could also be considered to be an adjunct construction where the subject slot of the clause is occupied by the prepositional phrase, which is construed as singular by default.

■ ■ ■

2 Nephi 2:10

And because of the intercession for all, all MEN **cometh** unto God.

1537 EEBO A02303 John Bourchier, tr. (Lord Berners) [1466/67–1533] | Antonio de Guevara [d.1545?] *The golden boke of Marcus Aurelius Emperour and eloquent oratour*

Many tymes of wyse yonge men **cometh** olde FOLES,
And of yonge fooles customably **cometh** wise olde MEN:

■ ■ ■

Mosiah 3:18

but MEN **drinketh** damnation to their own souls

1542 EEBO A18528 William Thynne, ed. [d.1546] | Geoffrey Chaucer [d.1400] *Works*

To say this worde, and fouler is the dede whan MEN so **drinketh** of the whyte & rede

1675 EEBO A37049 James Durham [1622–1658] *A practical exposition of the X. Commandements*

and so one man, or several MEN, **drinketh** by the measure, will, and appetite of another;

Besides the possibility of proximity agreement, this could be “one **man** . . . drinketh”.

■ ■ ■

Helaman 5:12

a foundation whereon if MEN **buildeth** they cannot fall.

1484 EEBO A07095 William Caxton, tr. [ca.1422–1491] | Aesop *The subtyl historyes and fables of Esope*

And that of me MEN . . . **byldeth** fayre edefyces

1525 EEBO A71319 John Bourchier, tr. (Lord Berners) [1466/67–1533] | Jean Froissart [1338?–1410?] *Chronicles*

But the Frensshe MEN **knoweth** all our secretes and counsayles

When it comes to Book of Mormon language, the tendency has been (and is) to suspect that virtually every identifiable instance of variation is bad grammar, such as the use of modern *warns* after obsolete *rebelleth*, in the heading of 2 Nephi. Yet here are clear examples from the 1670s of this same close inflectional variation:

1676 EEBO A61535 Edward Stillingfleet [1635–1699] *A defence of the discourse concerning the idolatry practised in the Church of Rome*

but withal, he saith, honour that which is most excellent in the world,
THAT WHICH **disposeth and Governs** all:

1677 EEBO A43357 *Heraclitus Christianus, or, The man of sorrow*

being born, IT **nourisheth and sustains** us, and at last **takes** us into her entrails as in our Couch, and **keepeth** us until our God shall call us to appear before his Tribunal:

1677 EEBO A45885 Nathaniel Ingelo [1621?–1683] *A discourse concerning repentance*

This goodness HE **despiseth, and maintains** in himself the hardness of an impenitent heart, a heart that will not relent.

That being so, an apparent failing of the earliest text points us to Early Modern English. Indeed, in my examination of the text, I have found that in almost every instance of suspect grammar, both the curious and the critical have pointed out archaic or obsolete usage. This next passage not only has *rebelleth/warns* variation, but also mixed use of the {-th} plural and the {-th} singular (the same as “brethren rebelleth” and “he counfoundeth” in the heading of 1 Nephi):

1660 EEBO A85476 Daniel Gotherson *An alarm to all priests, judges, magistrates, souldiers, and all people*

for THEY *that* **hath** the Commandments, and **keepeth** them, **dwelleth** in Christ, and Christ in them: . . . for HE *that* **manifests** his faith by being obedient, he shall live for ever: for the KINGDOME of God **consisteth** not in words, but in life and power, which is righteousness; and THAT **procureth** true peace, such peace as men and Devils can never take from you:

■ ■ ■

JOSEPH SMITH is known to have used the following grammar book in Kirtland in 1835, as part of his study in the School of the Prophets: Samuel Kirkham, *English Grammar, in Familiar Lectures* (New York: Robert B. Collins, 1829).⁶ Kirkham’s grammar clearly states that {-th} inflection was only to be used with third-person **singular** (3sg) subjects, and that {-st} inflection was only to be used with **second**-person singular (2sg) subjects. So Smith could have learned from that resource precisely what biblical style was. In 1829, however, it is highly likely that he knew biblical style only implicitly. Therefore, one possible view of Joseph’s heavy 1837 editing is that in 1829 he willingly dictated without question

6. This is mentioned in *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, Vol. 15 (Liverpool: Samuel W. Richards, 1853), 230.

the words revealed to him. A better educated man might have imposed his own will on the revealed text. Of course in 1837, with increased education and awareness, Smith consciously edited for biblical style. As a result, while he may have placated grammarians and his own emergent views on proper scriptural style, an important, tell-tale component of the text was lost. What has remained of the {-th} plural in the current LDS text could be called a vestigial use characteristic of the first half of the 18th century. Which being the case, this study points out a vital accomplishment of the critical text project.

The extensive presence of the {-th} plural in the Book of Mormon is one more piece of evidence in support of the position that its extrabiblical language is Early Modern English.⁷ A seemingly viable view is that {-th} plural inflection in the Book of Mormon results from a HYPERCORRECTION⁸ on the part of its presumed author/translator. One could always attempt to argue in this case that Joseph Smith was overdoing the biblical, the notion being that he was trying too hard to be scriptural. But did Smith overuse {-th} inflection in the wrong places because of biblical influence and in order to make the text sound scriptural? Hypercorrection is a valid linguistic explanation that holds in many instances. But the approach fails in the case of the Book of Mormon, since {-th} plural syntax in particular, and the entire book in general — given the extensive, principled, nonbiblical Early Modern English usage in many contexts — would have to be viewed as a *sophisticated* hypercorrection, which is an oxymoron.

There are a few arguments to be made against viewing the {-th} plural in the Book of Mormon as an error of Joseph Smith's. Three of these are general in nature and four are specific. The general arguments have to do with the LEXIS, the SYNTAX, and the SYNTACTIC SYSTEMS found in the Book of Mormon.⁹ Skousen has written about various instances of lexical usage that are old and extrabiblical (or barely found in the King James Bible). These are not amusing or trivial pieces of evidence, but

7. This has been mentioned before, but in less detail, and without reference to what precisely searchable databases can tell us — see Stanford Carmack, “A Look at Some ‘Nonstandard’ Book of Mormon Grammar”, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 234–35.

8. A hypercorrection is a linguistic construction “falsely modelled on an apparently analogous prestigious form” (definition taken from the Oxford English Dictionary).

9. See Stanford Carmack, “The Case of Plural *Was* in the Earliest Text”, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 136–37 for relevant references.

powerful and significant. Semantic shifts in sense are unpredictable and not recoverable for later speakers when prior usage has become obsolete.

Examples of nonbiblical syntax include, but are by no means limited to, “it supposeth me that”, “a more part of it”, “nor no manner of”, “with our/your/their mights”, “of which hath been spoken”, and barely biblical syntax such as “it sufficeth me”. Syntactic systems include *did* usage (nearly 2,000 instances) and *command*, *cause*, and *suffer* complementation syntax (nearly 500 of these in the text, patterning very differently from what is found in the King James Bible, but reflecting well-formed older usage), as well as *exceeding* with adjectives. There are others. That is only a glimpse of the extensive textual evidence found in the Book of Mormon which, taken together, indicates that the book is not a faux Early Modern English text. It is not a book that is full of hypercorrections. The abundant linguistic evidence (from English) cannot be reasonably dismissed as mere artifacts of apologetic investigation. And how are all of them to be accounted for naturalistically? By numerous plagiarisms of largely inaccessible texts? By scores of analogical bull’s-eyes? By *ad hoc* stipulation that all these forms were part of Smith’s dialect, without any evidentiary support for the view?

Before presenting specific arguments, I provide additional examples of unexpected {-th} inflection and we look at possible cases of the {-th} plural in the King James Bible. It is little known and discussed, but we can find all persons with {-th} inflection in Early Modern English, even 1sg *I* and 2sg *thou*:

1 Nephi 22:2

And I Nephi **saith** unto them:

1639 EEBO A09971 John Preston [1587–1628] *Grace to the humble: As preparations to receive the Sacrament*

Thus Paul argues this, I **saith** that every one of you saith,
I am Paul, I am Apollo, I am Cephas, & I am Christ:

■ ■ ■

Mosiah 26:23

For it is I *that* **taketh** upon me the sins of the world, for it is I *that* **hath** created them. And it is I *that* **granteth** unto him that believeth

Ether 4:19

And behold, it is I *that* **hath** spoken it.

1583 EEBO A67926 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*

O Israel, it is I, it is I, *which* **forgeveth** thee thy sinnes.

1598 EEBO A08550 R.P., tr. *The sixth booke of the Myrroure of knighthood*

It is I *that doth* profit thereby

1630 EEBO A09950 John Preston [1587–1628] *The breast-plate of faith and love*

It is I (saith the Lord) *that doth* sanctifie you: It is I *that doth* act every Grace; it is I *that do* put your hearts into a good frame:

1682 EEBO A45630 Sir James Harrington [1607–1680] *Horæ consecratae, or, Spiritual pastime*

it is I, *that worketh* in thee both to will, and to do, of my good pleasure:

■ ■ ■

1 Nephi 12:9 [MANUSCRIPTS & EARLY EDITIONS]

THOU **remembereth** the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The critical text reasonably takes this to be a scribal error for original *rememberest*; ultimately we cannot be sure of the original reading.

1560 EEBO A10245 tr. | Pythagoras *A brefe and pleasaunte worke, and sience, of the phelosopher*

He is sycke that THOU **asketh** after.

A discussion of 1sg and 2sg {-th} is left for another time.

Lass (1999:166) mentions that there was approximately 20% usage of the {-th} plural in a corpus of early 16th-century eastern correspondence (letters). He also states that in the 16th century “the southern {-th} plural is always a minority form, though it persists (if decreasingly) in the standard well into the seventeenth century”. Here are three instructive examples, two taken from the Book of Mormon, and one from EEBO:

2 Nephi 7:2

I make the rivers a wilderness and their fish to stink
because the waters are dried up and THEY **dieth** because of thirst.¹⁰

Moroni 7:17

for he persuadeth no man to do good — no, not one —
neither **doth** his ANGELS,

Examples of inverted {-th} plural syntax with *doth* are provided below.

10. Here is the corresponding Isaiah passage:

Isaiah 50:2

I make the rivers a wilderness: their FISH **stinketh**,
because there is no water, *and dieth* for thirst.

The noun *fish* is treated as singular throughout the King James Bible (see below).

1566 EEBO A06932 Thomas Becon [1512–1567] *A new postil conteinyng most godly and learned sermons vpon all the Sunday Gospelles*

[And the ANGELS **giveth** him such honor, as CHRIST **giveth** to us all.]

And the Angels **geueth** hym suche honour, as Christ **geueth** to vs al.

The King James Bible does not have the {-th} plural with the pronoun *they* as used in 2 Nephi 7:2, a passage that is a substantial and interesting alteration of biblical language. Indeed, there is no {-th} inflection directly associated with *they* in that biblical text. Likewise, there is no {-th} certainly associated with plural noun phrases in the biblical text, even in inverted constructions, as seen in Moroni 7:17 (compare “which things the ANGELS **desire** to look into” [1 Peter 1:7]).

In the above 16th-century excerpt, the Protestant reformer Thomas Becon (or Beccon) used *giveth* in both instances, whether the subject was plural *angels* or singular *Christ*. This example is thus analogous to “brethren rebelleth” ~ “he confoundeth”, as shown at the outset of this study.

Interestingly, the {-th} plural is a minority usage both in Early Modern English and in the Book of Mormon. Still, Lass notes that the {-th} plural was standard use into the 17th century. As a result, in this domain (and in many others) the earliest text of the Book of Mormon offers us a wider glimpse of Early Modern English than the King James Bible does.

In that influential scriptural text, {-th} was consistently singular. Nearly dispositive of this issue is the fact that verbs whose explicit subject is *they* never take {-th} inflection in the biblical text:

Psalms 41:8

An evil DISEASE, **say they**, *cleaveth* fast unto him:

1635 EEBO A20987 Scipion Dupleix [1569–1661] *The resolver; or Curiosities of nature*

A[nswer]. The cause is (**saith they**) that the Fever proceeding f[r]om a sweete Phlegme in those which have great drouth or thirst,

The string “saith they” (and spelling variants) appears to be rare in the print record.

The {-th} plural is not even found in the King James Bible when *they*, *them*, or *those* precedes a relative pronoun, syntax that seems to have favored the use in the Early Modern period:

Psalms 50:5

Gather my saints together unto me; THOSE *that* **have** made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Revelation 2:9

I know the blasphemy of THEM *which say* they are Jews,

The following verse may contain the most likely case of the {-th} plural:

John 7:49

But THIS PEOPLE *who knoweth* not the law **are** cursed.

Yet even here we cannot be sure that the language doesn't switch from singular to plural construal, since it reads "**this** people", not "these people" (cf. Deuteronomy 20:16), and *people* is used with *was* elsewhere:

Isaiah 23:13

THIS PEOPLE **was** not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness:

Mark 11:18

for they feared him, because ALL THE PEOPLE **was** astonished at his doctrine.

Again, this next one could well be a case of singular construal followed immediately by resumptive plural reference:

Jeremiah 5:23

But THIS PEOPLE **hath** a revolting and a rebellious heart;
THEY **are** revolted and gone.

The following biblical examples are also ambiguous on their face as to whether they involve the {-th} plural. An ordinary reading doesn't tell us, one way or the other, what the real syntax is:

ANTECEDENT AMBIGUITY

Numbers 21:15

And at the STREAM of the BROOKS *that goeth* down to the dwelling of Ar, *and lieth* upon the border of Moab.

Other English translations indicate that KJB *stream* is the antecedent of *goeth* and *lieth*.

Micah 5:7

as a DEW from the Lord, as the SHOWERS upon the grass,
that tarrieth not for man, *nor waiteth* for the sons of men.

Either *dew* or *showers* can be viewed as the subject on an ordinary reading; the underlying Hebrew verb forms are singular.

CONJOINED ABSTRACT NOUNS USED WITH 3SG {-TH}

1 Kings 10:7

thy WISDOM *and* PROSPERITY **exceedeth** the fame which I heard.¹¹

Matthew 6:19

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,
where MOTH *and* RUST **doth** corrupt,¹²

1 Corinthians 13:13

And now **abideth** FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, these three;
but the greatest of these is charity.¹³*FISH* WAS CONSISTENTLY CONSTRUED AS SINGULAR

Exodus 7:18

And the FISH that **is** in the river shall die,

Exodus 7:21

And the FISH that **was** in the river died;

11. Lack of number resolution with abstract nouns is still the case in modern English. See Lass (1999:166), where lack of number resolution is mentioned and exemplified in the context of animate nouns. The underlying Hebrew verb forms support this view.

12. In Matthew 6:19, two singular nouns convey roughly the same meaning with a figurative sense. A singular verb here is unsurprising, *following the underlying Greek*, as is also seen in the following verse with “neither moth nor rust”. Again, an ordinary reading of the King James Bible here does not tell the non-specialist that there was such a thing as the {-th} plural.

13. The syntax of 1 Corinthians 13:13 is quite different from “Nephi’s brethren rebelleth”. The complex subject — “faith hope charity” — is postverbal and consists of three singular, abstract nouns. Both things work together to prevent the resolution of this complex subject as plural. The use of {-th} in 1 Corinthians 13:13 may reflect the Greek, which reads in the singular, *menei* (in Kurt Aland’s critical text). The Latin Vulgate (also the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft’s version) has singular *manet* as well, but a footnote for the plural variant *manent* is to be found in the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate of 1592, 1593, and 1598. Therefore, we see that the singular form of the verb was preferred in Greek and Latin, and thus Tyndale 1534 and the 1611 KJB understandably have *abideth*.

This study is primarily concerned with simple, plural **preverbal** grammatical subjects, as in “mine eyes **hath** beheld great things” (2 Nephi 4:25; emended to *have*) and “mine eyes **hath** beheld the things of the Jews” (2 Nephi 25:5; never emended). (Cf. 2 Nephi 16:5 [a biblical Isaiah passage] “For mine eyes **have** seen the King, the Lord of Hosts”; the King James Bible has three instances of only “mine eyes **have**.”) Following Lass (1999), abstract number resolution is not assumed in this discussion.

Deuteronomy 4:18

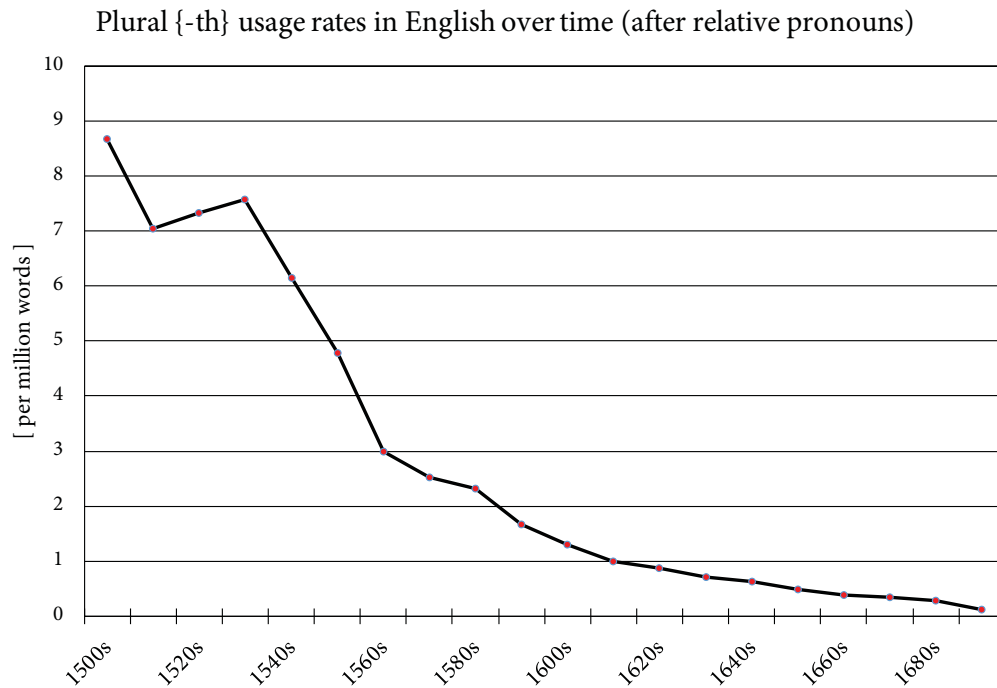
the likeness of any FISH that **is** in the waters beneath the earth:

Isaiah 50:2

their FISH **stinketh**, because there is no water, *and* **dieth** for thirst.

■ ■ ■

THE KING JAMES BIBLE may lack the {-th} plural in part because the majority of the decrease in use occurred before the year 1600. Barber (1997:169) wrote that “[i]n the later sixteenth century, plural {-eth} is very rare.” Lass observed that the {-th} plural decreased during the Early Modern period, but doesn’t give many details. Corpora made from



EEBO texts tell us that much of the decrease took place during the second half of the 16th century. (Textual data from the beginning of the era is intermittent.) The peak period of syntax like “ANGELS **hath** ministered unto him” (1 Nephi 16:38) appears to have been during the first half of the 16th century. It was certainly employed at a much higher rate in the year 1500 than it was 200 years later.¹⁴

14. The chart was derived from a 500-million-word corpus and from contexts with nouns ending in {-es} as well as *people*, *men*, *things*, and *words* followed by a relative pronoun and *hath*, *doth*, and words of at least six letters ending in {-eth} (to limit the number of false positives). The following smoothing was applied to

In relation to this discussion, the relative rates are important in the chart, not the absolute numbers. From this data set we learn that the {-th} plural — which was verb inflection from the Middle English period — was **relatively** frequent in the first half of the Early Modern period, especially during the early 1500s. But it was never the dominant form, and neither is it in the Book of Mormon. By the year 1600 a large drop-off in usage had occurred, partially elucidating its absence in the King James Bible. By the 1690s the syntax was rare, and still in a downward trend. By the 1800s it is virtually nonexistent (3sg {-th} inflection having all but dropped out of the language, with formulaic and religious use remaining).¹⁵

Now we consider specific arguments against taking the {-th} plural in the Book of Mormon to be 19th-century usage. They are that the earliest text:

- does not **underuse** the {-th} plural
- does not **overuse** the {-th} plural
- exhibits VARIATION typical of the Early Modern period
- employs the {-th} plural at a significantly higher rate after relative pronouns than it does after pronouns

The Book of Mormon does not underuse the {-th} plural. The text has more than 100 instances of the morphosyntax. The usage is neither biblical nor like the early 19th century. It occurs with many more verbs besides high-frequency auxiliary verbs, and in many more contexts besides conjoined singular, abstract noun phrases. If the usage were similar to biblical usage, then it might be claimed reasonably that it was done in imitation of it. But the earliest text contains {-th} plural syntax that goes well beyond the following examples, in which {-th} could be singular:

Mosiah 8:12

Or perhaps they will give us a knowledge
of this very PEOPLE *which hath* been destroyed.

the chart: the decade itself was weighted 70%, and the two nearest decades were weighted 15% each; end decades were deleted (data is intermittent in the early years of the period). The search gives a reasonable approximation; it is difficult with current database coding and search limitations to achieve a good approximation of this syntax with a global search. Related searches that I have performed corroborate this chart as generally accurate.

15. See Lass (1999:162–63); at pages 164–65 he mentions that *hath* and *doth*, from about the 1650s, probably did not reflect pronunciation.

Helaman 15:7

which FAITH *and* REPENTANCE **bringeth** a change of heart unto them

Ether 12:28

And I will shew unto them
that FAITH, HOPE *and* CHARITY **bringeth** unto me,

As mentioned, the King James Bible has no examples of *they* with {-th} inflection. The Book of Mormon has four of these, one inverted (here I exclude five instances of historical-present “they saith”, which is semantically equivalent to ‘they said’):

2 Nephi 7:2

and THEY **dieth** because of thirst.

2 Nephi 26:10

for because THEY **yieldeth** unto the devil
and **choose** works of darkness rather than light,

The inflectional variation — *yieldeth* ~ *choose* — is addressed below.

Alma 55:8

Behold, we have escaped from the Nephites and THEY **sleepeth**.

Moroni 7:17

neither **doth** THEY which subject themselves unto him

Here are some relevant examples from the print record of English:

1557 EEBO A21119 Roger Edgeworth [d.1560] *Sermons very fruitfull, godly, and learned*

yet THEY **sprinkleth, boileth and welleth** up.

1565 EEBO A07396 Thomas Stapleton, tr. [1535–1598] | Venerable Bede [673–735] *The history of the Church of Englande*

the ship drawing nere unto the land, as sone as they ar towched wyth the smell of the ayer, THEY **dieth** owt of hand.

...

and their possessions THEY **kepeth** for them,

1583 EEBO A67922 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*

Other mens fields THEY **repeth**,

1664 EEBO A28337 Stephen Blake *The compleat gardeners practice*

There be double and single flowered ones,
and BOTH OF THEM **yeeldeth** seed;

■ ■ ■

c 1540 GOOG George Cavendish [Singer, ed.] *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey*, p.252 (1827)

there **doth** THEY in likewise displeas the contrary party,

c 1550 GOOG Richard Lant *The Harleian Miscellany* (1813)

All THESE but for a time **doth** serve,
Soone come, soone gone, so **doth** THEY fare:

1601 GOOG Arthur Collins *Letters and Memorials of State in the Reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, King James, King Charles the First, Part of the Reign of King Charles the Second, and Oliver's Usurpation* (1746)

nether **doth** THEY much Harme ours;

So *they* used with {-th} inflection is another instance — that we may add to many others — of the Book of Mormon containing extrabiblical Early Modern English.

“They sayeth/saith”, which occurs five times in the Book of Mormon as a verb in the historical present (Mosiah 12:18; Alma 9:4, 6; Alma 18:9; 3 Nephi 27:3), is hard to find in the textual record. I found one late Middle English example in Google books (accidentals regularized):

c 1365 GOOG Sir Richard Worsley *The History of the Isle of Wight*, p.lxxxii (1781)

Also THEY **sayeth** that in Fithekfield are contained 165 acres of land and every acre is worth three shillings.

Lass(1999:166) notes that the auxiliaries *doth* and *hath* were more robust in maintaining {-th} plural syntax after the 17th century. Frequency would have played a role in this retention. Consequently, if the earliest text **primarily** contained plural *doth* and *hath*, then it could be classified as an 18th- or 19th-century text in this regard.

When we examine the **modern** English textual record leading up to 1829, we find occasional examples of *they* (and *those*) used with high-frequency *doth* and *hath*.¹⁶ Wading through many OCR errors, I found the following 1705 phrase written by a Quaker from Warwick, England: “he or THEY *that doth* his Will shall enter into his Kingdom”. This can be legitimately interpreted as agreement with either *he* or *they*. In addition, I encountered a mid-16th-century quote with the string “they that hath” from the author Andrew Boorde, whose writings have plenty of varying inflectional usage:

16. Unfortunately, when using Google books one must examine each search hit because 18th-century searches yield many false positives, as well as reprints of older language (and duplicates). I performed searches in early May 2015, limiting them to the period 1700 to 1830. I looked for “they/those <RELATIVE PRONOUN> doth/hath”, as well as instances of “they doth/hath”, and inverted “doth/hath they”.

1542 ANDREW BOORDE *Introduction of Knowledge* EETS Extra Series No. X (1870) 178, 185

Whan THEY **do** heare masse, & se[e] the sacrament,
THEY **do** inclyne, & **doth** clap theyr hand on theyr mouth

...

THEY **doth** begyn *and do* reken

...

the VENYSCIONS **hath** great prouision of warre,
for THEY **haue** ever in a redyness tymbre.

Searches for “they which doth/hath” and “they who doth/hath” resulted in false positives, but I did find the following quote that seems to be taken from a much earlier translation of a work by Louis Ellies Du Pin (d.1719):

1784 GOOG Owen & Johnston *A new and general biographical dictionary*, p.153

Theodoret is one of THOSE *who* **hath** succeeded the best in every kind.

There are also early 18th-century instances (often with later date-stamps) of “those that doth/hath”.

Picking through many false positives and duplicates, I found eight actual examples of “they hath” and “hath they” — only two were on point:¹⁷

1811 GOOG T. B. Hughes *A report of the case of the King against Bebb and others*, p.9 (London)

or at any time since, nor had or **hath** THEY, or either of them, or any person

1828 GOOG *The Collateral Bible* (Philadelphia) [cf. John 15:24]

but now **hath** THEY both seen and hated both me and my Father.

Therefore, we do find modern instances of inverted “hath they” (but none in the earliest text), consonant with what Lass (1999:166) asserts: “plural *is, hath, doth* are commoner than inflected plurals of other verbs, **and persist longer**” (emphasis added).

I encountered four legitimate instances of “doth they”, one modern (Scottish):

1707 GOOG Walter Steuart *Pardovan*, p.52 (Edinburgh: 1770)

How **doth** THEY observe the Lord’s day?

17. Five search hits were reprints of 16th- and 17th-century language, and one was a typo from a 1746 King James Bible printed in Leipzig: “and they gave them wives which they hath saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead” (Judges 21:14); other editions have “they had” in this verse.

This syntax is found once in the Book of Mormon (at Moroni 7:17 — see above).

As for “they doth”, there were four legitimate hits, three from modern English (two American):

1735 GOOG William Mitchel *The Tinklarian Doctor’s Fifteenth Epistle*, p.8
THEY **doth** not so commonly curse and swear,

1813 GOOG *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, p.307
Resolved, That this HOUSE **doth** recede from their disagreement to the amendment insisted upon by the Senate, and that THEY **doth** agree to the residue of the report

1828 GOOG *The Works of Aristotle: The Famous Philosopher*, p.245 (New-England)
When they are burned by physicians THEY **doth** assume another kind of shape.

The second example illustrates how the formulaic bled into a rare use of “they doth”. House reports from this era commonly had “this House doth . . . and doth . . . and doth”. The last example is American-published, no author given.¹⁸ There is no example of “they doth” in the Book of Mormon.

Finally, searches for some high-frequency main verbs with *they* yielded old language except for one interesting case discussed in the next section. In particular, I found 14th-century instances of “they taketh” and “they sayeth” (the latter shown above). These searches also verify what Lass (1999:166) asserts (see above quote). As a result, we must conclude that by the year 1830, the {-th} plural was rare, in both American and British English, and confined to use with *doth* and *hath*.

In summary, we have seen that the {-th} plural, as contained in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon, is neither biblical (covert singular use) nor 19th-century in character (confined to rare use with high-frequency auxiliary verbs). So by using syntax of the type “Nephi’s BRETHREN rebelle**th**” somewhat frequently throughout the dictation, Smith went against both his own American English and biblical language.

■ ■ ■

The Book of Mormon does not overuse the {-th} plural. An overuse of this construction might have been an order of magnitude higher in rate of use. I found an example of such overuse from the 1820s, quite by

18. The book was first published anonymously in England in the late 1600s. This is the only edition of this oft-printed book that I have seen with this syntax. Other editions have “they assume” or “they do assume” here.

accident. Searching for “they maketh” in Google books, I encountered one from the late 14th-century poem *Piers Plowman*, another from Trevisa’s version of Higden’s *Polychronicon* (1387), and a third from 1823. The last one naturally caught my eye.

The early 19th-century instance turned out to be from a play written by the Jewish-American dramatist Samuel B. H. Judah (b.1799): *A Tale of Lexington: a National Comedy, founded on the opening of the Revolution. In three Acts.* (New York, 1823). A London review of this play included a curious exchange between two characters, exhibiting a remarkable amount of “quaker-dialogue and burlesque of scripture phraseology”.¹⁹ In the space of about 350 words, Grimalkiah manages to say “men returneth”, “they maketh”, “men prevaileth”, “we crieth”, “we sacrificeth”, “we putteth”, “they layeth”, “legs and spirit rumbleth”, “bowels yearneth”, “limbs quaketh”. Modern instances include “we wax/lament/melt”. In addition, he utters nonbiblical *smited*, “exceedingly wroth” (biblical would have been “exceeding wroth”), as well as the odd query “sayeth **it** that Sampson moaneth?” (odd because we’re not sure what *it* refers to). In the whole of the Book of Mormon — about 270,000 words — there is one instance of the {-th} plural with *we*:

Helaman 13:34

Behold, **WE layeth** a tool here and on the morrow it is gone.

This is attested usage from the past:

1540 EEBO A10769 Lancelot Ridley [d. 1576] *A commentary in Englyshe vpon Sayncte Paules Epystle to the Ephesyans*

WE **thynketh** the Apostle dothe speake
these wordes to stoppe the vngodly mouthes

1574 EEBO A69056 Arthur Golding, tr. [1536–1606] | Jean Calvin [1509–1564] *Sermons . . . vpon the booke of Iob*

when WEE **suffereth** vs not to bee deafe too his doctrine,
but **giueth** it enterance into vs

In addition, we have seen that there are only four examples of *they* + {-th} in the earliest text (excluding the aforementioned “they saith”). That is a far cry from Grimalkiah’s rate: two instances in 350 words. His overall rate of use of the {-th} plural is greater than 70%. The Book of Mormon’s {-th} plural rate appears to be less than 10%. Thus one can reasonably argue that the {-th} plural of the earliest text is not a case of consciously overusing the construction.

19. *The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, Etc.* 366 (24 January 1824): 49–50.

■ ■ ■

There are four cases of “ye hath/doth” in the Book of Mormon (but no examples of the {-th} plural with *ye* and a main verb). Because some may think that this is a misuse of language, we consider it briefly here. Three cases of *ye* + {-th} actually involve **singular** *ye*:

Alma 41:9

do not risk one more offense against your God upon those points of doctrine which YE **hath** hitherto risked to commit sin.

Alma 41:15

For that which YE **doth** send out shall return unto you again and be restored.

Alma 61:9

And now in your epistle YE **hath** censured me, but it mattereth not.

Here is an example of singular *ye* + {-th}:

1507 EEBO A03936 Walter Hilton [d.1396] *Scala perfectionis*

If THOU loue moche god YE **lyketh** for to thynke vpon hym moche /
& yf thou loue lytyl / thenne lytyl thou thynkest vpon hym

So we see singular *ye* + {-th} in both the Book of Mormon and earlier English (and we see close *thou* ~ *ye* switching in the 1507 example, as we see in various places in the Book of Mormon as well).

Both Alma 41:9 and the next example have “ye hath hitherto”:

Mosiah 2:31

I would that ye should do as YE **hath** hitherto done; as YE **have** kept my commandments, and also the commandments of my father,

Mosiah 2:31 is an instance of plural *ye*, and therefore the {-th} plural. The following passages exemplify and elucidate the Book of Mormon usage:

1681 EEBO A38821 Edmund Everard *The great pressures and grievances of the Protestants in France and their apology to the late ordinances made against them*

Hitherto the CLERGY **have** done nothing else but contradict the Edicts,

1680 EEBO A97353 Richard Baxter [1615–1691] *The nonconformists plea for peace*

The worst Magistrates almost were like to use the sword more harmlesly, than the Secular CLERGY **hath** hitherto done, through most of all the Christian world.

The first example shows that *clergy* can be construed as plural; the second example contains the morphosyntax of Mosiah 2:31.

Here are three examples of plural *ye* + {-th} from three different centuries:

1485 EEBO A23591 *Saint Albans chronicle*

sires YE **hereth** all what he has said

1583 EEBO A17698 Arthur Golding, tr. [1536–1606] | Jean Calvin [1509–1564] *Sermons vpon the fifth booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*

as if he had said, although YE **eateth**:

1655 EEBO A90622 John Pain *A discovery of the priests*

the anointing which YE **hath** received of him abideth in you

The last example has “ye hath + <PAST PARTICIPLE>”, as in various Book of Mormon passages.

■ ■ ■

The Book of Mormon exhibits variation in this domain that is typical of the Early Modern period. We have seen that {-th}/{-s} variation after a singular subject is attested 17th-century language:

1 Nephi [HEADING]

NEPHI **taketh** his brethren

and returns to the land of Jerusalem after the record of the Jews.

1652 EEBO A57652 Alexander Ross [1591–1654] *The history of the world*

HE **taketh** divers Towns, *and returns* to Spain;

The above is a syntacto-lexical match. When we read the earliest text, we are reading Early Modern English:

1607 EEBO A02841 Thomas Hayne [1582–1645] *The times, places, and persons of the holie Scripture. Otherwise entituled, The generall view of the Holy Scriptures*

Let us behold the Sunne, IT **riseth** and **setteth**, and **returnes** againe to his place,

1633 EEBO A09833 Edward Grimeston, tr. | Polybius *The history of Polybius the Megalopolitan*

In the meane time PHILIP **razeth** his Campe, *and returnes* to Corinthe,

1638 EEBO A08025 Henry Isaacson, tr. [1581–1654] | Saint Bellarmino [1542–1621] *Iacob's ladder*

in the grave IT **dryeth** up, *and returnes* to dust.

1640 EEBO A13752 Daniel Featly et al. *Thrēnoikos. The house of mourning*

The body is of the dust, and **returneth** to dust, the SOULE **commeth** from God, *and returnes* to God againe.

▪ ▪ ▪

1604 EEBO A09442 William Perkins [1558–1602] *Lectures vpon the three first chapters of the Reuelation*

HE **sheweth** his feruencie, *and repeates* the same againe

1607 EEBO A11931 Edward Grimston, tr. | Jean de Serres [1540?–1598] *A general inuentorie of the history of France*

He **assureth** the Citties, *and levies* men with all expedition.

He **pincheth** some, *and ruines* others:

He **raiseth** the siege, *and retires* in good order, fearing a charge.

He **dislodgeth** without Trumpet, *and seemes* rather to flie, then retire.

He **dischargeth** two pistolls, *and seekes* to force the house.

He **chargeth**, *and overthrowes* the first he encounters.

This order of inflectional variation was apparently favored by the translator Edward Grimston in 1607.

The Book of Mormon also has passages that have verbs carrying {-th} plural inflection followed by bare verb stems, under ellipsis. Here are two with that pattern:

2 Nephi 26:10

for because THEY **yieldeth** unto the devil
and choose works of darkness rather than light,

Helaman 7:23

save it be unto THOSE *who* **repenteth** of their sins
and hearken unto my words.

The next three examples exhibit the same syntax:

1565 EEBO A07396 Thomas Stapleton, tr. [1535–1598] | Venerable Bede [673–735] *The history of the Church of Englande*

THEY **maketh** them bowers about their churches,
and feasting together after a good religious sorte, **kill** their oxen

1646 EEBO A92138 Samuel Rutherford [1600?–1661] *The divine right of church-government and excommunication*

for we dispute only of THOSE *who* **acknowledgeth** their sins,
and promise amendment.

1648 EEBO A85404 John Goodwin [1594?–1665] *Neophytoperesbyteros, or, The yongling elder, or, novice-presbyter*

he, and many more, speake highly of the Scriptures,
not because THEY **loveth** Truth, or the minde of God, and of Christ,
contained in the Scriptures,
or care much for the propagation or knowledge of these in the world,

We also see inflectional variation in the other order, from unmarked to marked:

Mosiah 3:18

except THEY **humble** themselves *and* **become** as little children
and **believeth** that salvation . . .

1582 EEBO A05237 Stephen Batman [d.1584] | John Trevisa, tr. [d.1402] |
Anglicus Bartholomæus [13th cent.] *De proprietatibus rerum*

and glad when THEY **have** the masterie, *and* so **feelet** *and* **knoweth**
theyr enemies in battaile,

But we also often see consistent inflection in the textual record:

1557 EEBO A21119 Roger Edgeworth [d.1560] *Sermons very fruitfull, godly,*
and learned

for THEY **spotteth** *and* **defouleth** them selues by ebrietie and surfets,

These next three passages contain examples of repeated {-th} plural
inflection:²⁰

Mosiah 8:21

Yea, they are as a wild FLOCK
which **fleeth** from the shepherd *and* **scattereth**,
and **are** driven *and* **are** devoured by the beasts of the forest.

Mosiah 15:14

these are THEY *which* **hath** published peace, *that* **hath** brought good
tidings of good, *that* **hath** published salvation, *that* **saith** unto Zion:

Helaman 8:19

ever since the days of Abraham
there **hath** been many PROPHETS *that* **hath** testified these things

Here are three 16th-century excerpts that are the same, from a syntacto-
lexical standpoint, as Helaman 8:19:

1509 EEBO A16638 Sebastian Brant [1458–1521] *The shyppes of fooles*

there **hath** ben but FEWE *that* **hath** edefyed grete places and houses

20. The following are probably not examples of consistent {-th} plural usage,
since the antecedents of the relative pronoun *which* are probably the closest nouns,
which are singular:

1 Nephi 12:17

And the mists of darkness are the TEMPTATIONS of the DEVIL, *which* **blindeth**
the eyes and **hardeneth** the hearts of the children of men and **leadeth** them
away into broad roads

Alma 34:15

this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the BOWELS of MERCY,
which **overpowereth** justice and **bringeth** about means unto men that they may
have faith unto repentance. And thus MERCY can satisfy the demands of justice.

1545 EEBO A02886 John Bale [1495–1563] *A mysterye of inyquyte*
There hath bene POPES which hath bene poyseners

1583 EEBO A67926 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters*
most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church
there hath bene MANY, that hath sclaundered you,
and the Gospell of our Saviour Christe.

So the syntax of Helaman 8:19 was not Smith overdoing the biblical. Instead, it was Early Modern English usage not to be found in the King James Bible.

Here are some further examples of close variation:

2 Nephi 6:17

I will contend with THEM *that* **contendeth** with thee. And I will feed THEM *that* **oppress** thee with their own flesh.

1534 EEBO A00387 William Marshall, tr. | Desiderius Erasmus [d.1536] *A playne and godly expositio[n] or declaratio[n] of the co[m]mune crede*

And the name of theft / whiche in Latyne is called furtum / is a generall worde unto THEM / *that* **stealeth** out of the commune treasurehouse / which are called peculatores / and unto THEM *that* **committe** sacrilege / by takyng away halowed or holy thynges

1626 EEBO A11058 Alexander Ross [1591–1654] *An exposition on the fourteene first chapters of Genesis, by way of question and answer*

Fourthly, hee will blesse THEM *that* **blesseth** him,
 and curse THEM *that* **curse** him;

▪ ▪ ▪

Mosiah 15:11

all THOSE *who* **hath** hearkened unto their words and believed that the Lord would redeem his people *and* **have** looked forward to that day

1548 EEBO A16036 Nicholas Udall, tr. [1505–1556] | Desiderius Erasmus [d.1536] *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the Newe Testamente*

Therefore equitie would, and no lesse becummeth our bounteousnesse, that THOSE *whiche* **hath** forsaken the worlde to come to us, *and* **have** commit and credite themselves wholly to us,

▪ ▪ ▪

Moroni 7:28

and he claimeth all THOSE *that* **hath** faith in him. And THEY *that* **have** faith in him will cleave unto every good thing.

1655 EEBO A89817 Philiatros *Nature unbowelled*

This is a present remedy in burning Agues, and to THOSE *that* **hath** a hot Liver, or heart, and it helpeth also THOSE *that* **have** any roughness in the wind pipe or throat,

■ ■ ■

2 Nephi 26:10

And THEY **sell** themselves for naught, for for the reward of their pride and their foolishness they shall reap destruction; for because THEY **yieldeth** unto the devil . . .

1557 EEBO A21119 Roger Edgeworth [d.1560] *Sermons very fruitfull, godly, and learned*

And brookes, although neither man nor beast drinke of them, yet never the lesse THEY **kepe** their course and **floweth**.

...

while they be full, yet THEY **desire**, Therefore THEY **desireth** to see,

1583 EEBO A67922 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*

THEY **plucke** away the grapes: THEY **leveth** men naked,

1582 EEBO A05237 Stephen Batman [d.1584] | John Trevisa, tr. [d.1402] | Anglicus Bartholomæus [13th cent.] *De proprietatibus rerum*

The HUMOURS **come** from the head the pipes of the throate, and THEY **maketh** there a postume:

All of the above language clearly varies between the {-th} plural and the unmarked state.

The following late 15th-century example shows three different inflectional possibilities after *they*, as discussed by Lass (1999:165):

1482 EEBO A03319 William Caxton [ca.1422–1491] | John Trevisa, tr. [d.1402] | Ranulf Higden [d.1364] *Polychronicon*

THEY **woneth** in celles and **lyven** under a pryour . . .
but THEY **take** leude men . . .

Barber (1997:169) wrote that “in [Middle English], broadly speaking, {-es} was Northern, {-en} Midland, and {-eth} Southern. There was an alternative Midland plural form in which the final /-n/ had been lost, and from this descends the normal plural of Modern English.” The above examples provide evidence that Early Modern English was full of inflectional variation, which we also see in the Book of Mormon (except for the old {-en} Midland plural).

Here are examples where the subject is *ye* (and *they*) and the {-th} plural only occurs under ellipsis (in the conjoined predicate):

Helaman 13:21

YE **have** set your hearts upon them
and hath not hearkened unto
 the words of him who gave them unto you.

1660 EEBO A50450 Sir George Mackenzie [1636–1691] *Aretina*

YE **have** disarmed my tongue of complement,
and hath turned the edge of my own weapon against me

▪ ▪ ▪

1607 EEBO A19504 William Cowper [1568–1619] *A preparatiue for the new Passeouer*

THEY **haue** found a treasure,
and hath felt the sweetnes of this Manna

1659 EEBO A44800 Francis Howgill [1618–1669] *Mistery Babylon*

THEY **have** come sick and weakly, *and have* gone away so,
and hath found your promises and assurances of no effect at all.

1660 EEBO A44802 Francis Howgill [1618–1669] *One of the Antichrists voluntiers defeated and the true light vindicated*

THEY **have** ordained one another, *and hath* set up a trade of preaching,
and . . . hath fill'd the world with darknesse

These examples may be evidence of an Early Modern English tendency to employ *hath* more readily in conjoined predicates or less readily after pronouns.

In the next group of examples we see *hath* after noun-phrase subjects, but not after closely preceding *they*:

Mosiah 8:11

And again, THEY **have** brought swords;
 the HILTS thereof **hath** perished

1623 EEBO A01554 Thomas Gataker [1574–1654] *Two sermons tending to direction for Christian cariage, both in afflictions incumbent, and in iudgements imminent*

especially when THEY **have** been of long continuance,
 and much PAINES **hath** beene taken for the recovery of it againe.

1651 EEBO A30575 Jeremiah Burroughs [1599–1646] *An exposition . . . of the prophesy of Hosea*

that THEY **have** prevail'd over their consciences,
 that their CONSCIENCES **hath** given them leave to do such a thing;

There seems to have been a tendency in Early Modern English to employ the {-th} plural more readily after noun-phrase subjects than after *they*. Further study is required.

In summary, we have encountered ample evidence that various kinds of inflectional variation found in the Book of Mormon are, syntactically speaking, examples of attested/acceptable Early Modern English usage. The overall matching is solid, suggesting implicit knowledge of particular syntactic tendencies of earlier English. What on its face seems to be questionable grammar, actually turns out to be attested variation patterns.

▪ ▪ ▪

The Book of Mormon employs the {-th} plural at a significantly higher rate after relative pronouns than after pronouns. To facilitate and properly constrain this study, I narrowed the range of inquiry to third-person plural (3pl) pronominals: *they*, *them*, *those*. I found that the earliest text prefers the use of the {-th} plural in relative clauses, whose antecedents are 3pl pronominals, to the use in simple predicates after *they* ($p \cong 0.001$). This same syntactic preference is noticeable in the Early Modern period. For convenience, I refer to these two types of {-th} plural syntax here as RELATIVE {-th} and PREDICATE {-th}. (Again, the {-th} plural is the clear minority usage in all texts.)

In present-tense contexts (in the Book of Mormon), excluding language using a form of the verb *be*, there are about half as many relative-clause contexts as simple (non-conjoined) predicate contexts. Nevertheless, there are more cases of relative {-th} even though there are fewer potential constructions. All told, I counted 11 instances of relative {-th} with 3pl pronominals in the earliest text:²¹

2 Nephi 6:17

I will contend with THEM *that* **contendeth** with thee.

2 Nephi 9:26

upon all THOSE *who* **hath** not the law given to them,

Mosiah 15:11

all THOSE *who* **hath** hearkened unto their words

Mosiah 15:14

these are THEY *which* **hath** published peace,

Alma 32:16

blessed are THEY *who* **humbleth** themselves without being compelled to be humble.

21. There is also one interesting case of “them which has”, treated later in this section.

Alma 60:1

all THOSE *who* **hath** been chosen by this people to govern and manage the affairs of this war.

Alma 60:27

even until THOSE *who* **hath** desires to usurp power and authority shall become extinct.

Helaman 7:23

save it be unto THOSE *who* **repenteth** of their sins

Helaman 13:19

And cursed be THEY *who* **hideth** not up their treasures unto me,

3 Nephi 9:14

And blessed are THEY *which* **cometh** unto me.

Moroni 7:28

and he claimeth all THOSE *that* **hath** faith in him.

I have estimated that relative {-th} with 3pl pronominals occurs about 8.5% of the time in the earliest text. In contrast, predicate {-th} with *they* occurs less than 1.5% of the time in the earliest text.²² I haven't estimated these two rates for the Early Modern period, but I have verified the existence of the same differential with 3pl pronominals. It is also a statistically significant difference. Evidence from a 500-million-word corpus suggests that in Early Modern English, the relative {-th} with 3pl pronominals was used at a little more than four times the rate of the predicate {-th} with *they*. In the Book of Mormon, it is used at a little more than five times the rate. As a result of this inquiry, we find that the arcane differential usage rate tendencies of Early Modern English with 3pl pronominals and the {-th} plural are found in the Book of Mormon.

This is akin to the Early Modern English tendency to favor the use of *was* after plural relative pronouns over the use of *was* after plural noun-phrase subjects, a tendency that is also found in the earliest text (exemplified at the end of this section). Both of these basically involve singular ~ plural morphological variation. Generally speaking, verb forms that are singular in shape were used at a higher rate after plural relative pronouns than in predicates with plural noun-phrase subjects. Occasionally overt expression (close variation) exhibiting this underlying tendency is found.

22. As discussed earlier, there are three non-inverted instances — “they dieth/yieldeth/sleepeth”. If we include inverted “doth they”, then the rate is between 1.5% and 2% and $p \cong 0.003$ (here I exclude historical-present “they saith”, whose use is formulaic and whose tense is covert).

Lass (1999:165–66) discusses the {-s} plural (in addition to the {-th} plural), noting that this “(Northern) East Midlands” usage is “common throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a minority alternant of zero, and persists sporadically into the eighteenth century.” Analogous to plural *hath*, plural *has* would have persisted longer than plural {-s} with lower frequency verbs. (Lass mentions only *is* and {-th} forms in this regard: *hath*, *doth*.) Plural *has* is what we see in the following passage:

Alma 57:36

and I trust that the souls of THEM *which has* been slain
have entered into the rest of their God.

Reading this can be a bit of a shock, but the *has* ~ *have* alternation is attested in Early Modern English. First, here are six examples of the relative {-s} plural with *has* from the latter half of the 17th century:

1653 EEBO A70988 F.G., tr. | Madeleine de Scudéry [1607–1701] *Artamenes*
 it must be an entire heart, and none of THOSE *that has* been pierced
 with a thousand Arrows;

1658 EEBO A40227 George Fox [1624–1691] *The papists strength, principles,
 and doctrines*
 and strike down all THOSE *that has* got the words but not the power,
 and reach to the life and immortality
 . . .
 are not they THEM *that has* set up all these outward things,

1659 EEBO A85769 William Guild [1586–1657] *The throne of David, or, An
 exposition of the second of Samuell*
 and leave the persons for their faults to God, and THEM *who has*
 power to punish them.

1668 EEBO A47152 George Keith [1639?–1716] *Immediate revelation*
 And now a few words by way of tender advice,
 to THOSE *who has* been long seeking a pure Church,
 not a mined confused Rabble of godless Atheists,

1678 EEBO A30130 John Bunyan [1628–1688] *Come & welcome to Jesus
 Christ*
 That the Father giveth no such gift to THEM *that has* sinned this sin;
 Is evident,

Second, here is the same, close variation pattern — *has* is used after the relative pronoun, and *have* is used in the predicate after the complex subject:

1681 EEBO A47819 Sir Roger L'Estrange [1616–1704] *The character of a papist in masquerade*

the whole strain of THEM *that* **has** been taken off by the hand of Justice, . . . **have** so behaved themselves at the last cast, as if the whole Schism were upon a vie who should damn bravest.

The matching between the syntax of this passage and that of Alma 57:36 is essentially identical: “[them <RELATIVE> **has** . . .] **have** . . .”

This pattern is similar to the following:

Mosiah 24:15

the BURDENS *which* **was** laid upon Alma and his brethren **were** made light;

The tense and verbs are different, but the singular ~ plural morphological pattern is the same and both passages involve high-frequency verbs. This was an arcane tendency of the Early Modern era:

1591 EEBO A19179 Antony Colynet *The true history of the ciuill warres of France*

the raging FOLLIES *which* **was** committed at T[ou]louse **were** incredible to report,

This next one is notable as well because the syntactic pattern also matches Alma 57:36 — only the verb morphology is different:

1658 EEBO A40227 George Fox [1624–1691] *The papists strength, principles, and doctrines*

which the . . . KINGS . . . *which* **hath** been converted **have** drunk of

I see the blindnesse, and the ignorance, and the rottennesse, and the foundation of the Roman Church to be but rubbish, and sandy, for it stands upon inventions, mens traditions, and devised fables, and lying stories, and is not founded upon the Rock of ages, and stands in the WATERS, *which* **are** moveable and unstable upon which the whore sits, *which* **has** made all Nations drunk, which the great KINGS thou speaks of, *which* **hath** been converted, **have** drunk of,

This example has other interesting variation: “waters which are . . . [waters] which has”. As highlighted, we see here “which hath . . . have”; the Book of Mormon at Alma 57:36 has “which has . . . have”. Both of these are thus instances of the {-th}/{-s} plural of the verb *have* followed by the typical plural (base) verb form *have*. The close singular-to-plural switch mediated by the syntactic context is analogous to “which was . . . were”, shown above.²³

23. Moroni 7:28 (“those that **hath** . . . they that **have**”) has the same order of variation as the above examples, but no change in syntactic context. The next example has the same order of variation as well, but the syntax involves a conjoined predicate:

Conclusion

Plural {-th} syntax in the earliest text is very different from rare 19th-century auxiliary usage and from King James style (with occasional singular {-th} usage that looks to be plural). The systematic use of the {-th} plural in the Book of Mormon falls in the “Goldilocks” zone — it is neither overblown nor underdone. Interestingly, {-th} plural usage in the earliest text is similar to 16th- and 17th-century syntactic patterns, in a number of ways. We have seen that inflectional variation and differential usage rates in the earliest text are a strong match with little-known patterns attested in Early Modern English. In view of the textual evidence, it is reasonable not to attribute Joseph Smith’s dictation of the {-th} plural — as in “whose flames ascend**eth** up” (2 Nephi 9:16; Mosiah 2:38; Alma 12:17) — to a presumed idiosyncratic, quasi-biblical style:

1566 EEBO A19713 William Page [fl.1566] | Celio Secondo Curione [1503–1569] *Pasquine in a traunce a Christian and learned dialogue*

and the smoke of their tormentes, ASCENDE**th** **up** for ever and ever.

Showing the redundant use of *up* with *ascend* in the Early Modern era.

1591 EEBO A01504 William Garrard [d.1587] *The arte of warre*

in the night the FIRES *and* FLAMES **signifieth** the campe to be there

Showing the {-th} plural with *flames* as subject in the Early Modern era.

1597 EEBO A06400 Peter Lowe [ca.1550–ca.1612] *The whole course of chirurgerie*

by the euill VAPORS *which* **ascendeth**, *and* **corrodeth** the gummes,

Showing the verb *ascend* carrying {-th} plural inflection in the Early Modern era.

1635 EEBO A09500 David Person *Varieties: or, A surveigh of rare and excellent matters necessary and delectable for all sorts of persons*

The fourth kind of VAPORS *which* **ascend**, are cold and moyst,

Showing “vapors which” used with the base form of verb.

Mosiah 15:11

those who **hath** . . . *and* [who] **have**

I say unto you that all **THOSE** *who* **hath** hearkened unto their words
and believed that the Lord would redeem his people
and **have** looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins

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