A Lengthier Treatment of Length

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A Lengthier Treatment of Length

Brian D. Stubbs

Abstract: Book of Mormon language frequently contains lengthy structures of rather awkward English. Some may consider these to be instances of poor grammar, weakness in writing (Ether 12:23–26), or the literary ineptness of a fraudulent author; however, I see them as potentially significant support for a translation from a Near Eastern language in an ancient American setting. Many of these lengths of awkward English parallel Semitic (and Egyptian) patterns, particularly the circumstantial or *ḥal*-clause. In response to critics of my previous proposal to that effect, this article is a lengthier treatment of these lengthy structures found in the Book of Mormon.

In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, I authored a three-page article entitled "Book of Mormon Language,"[1] to which Edward Ashment referred in his article in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*.[2] Ashment took to task my suggestion that certain lengthy, awkward sentence structures containing strings of subordinate clauses and verbals, as found in the Book of Mormon, are more typical of Hebrew than English. In contrast to Ashment's

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[1]   Brian D. Stubbs, "Book of Mormon Language," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:179–81.

[2]   Edward H. Ashment, "'A Record in the Language of My Father': Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent L. Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 329–93. Ashment discusses my article on pages 363–66.

assessment, John Gee's excellent article, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," devotes space to a better explanation of part of what I was trying to say.[3]

Regarding the article in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, parameters of size did not allow in-depth discussions, and since the subject has been brought up, a fuller explanation or lengthier treatment of this matter of length is in order. The paragraph in question contained the following:

> Sentence structures and clause-combining mechanisms in Hebrew differ from those in English. Long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions . . . are acceptable in Hebrew, though unorthodox and discouraged in English: "Ye all are witnesses . . . that Zeniff, who was made king, . . . he being over-zealous, . . . therefore being deceived by . . . king Laman, who having entered into a treaty . . . and having yielded up [various cities], . . . and the land round about—and all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people . . . into bondage" (Mosiah 7:21–22).[4]

This Book of Mormon excerpt (or sentence) contains eight clauses or verbals, most of which feature *-ing* participial verb forms. The Book of Mormon is replete with similar examples. Tvedtnes notes instances of parenthetical departures in the Hebrew Old Testament as well.[5] In response to Ashment's rebuttal and claim that Hebrew sentential patterns are simple and concise—which they certainly can be—John Gee discloses a choice example from the Jewish Publication Society's translation of Genesis 1:1–3:

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[3]   John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 51–120. In reviewing Edward Ashment's article, "'A Record in the Language of My Father,'" Gee discusses Ashment's arguments and examples concerning my article on pages 92–94.

[4]   Stubbs, "Book of Mormon Language," 181, ellipses in original.

[5]   John A. Tvedtnes's review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1994): 8–50. Tvedtnes discusses and lists several such examples on page 38 and in note 49.

> When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. [6]

In the Hebrew text, everything between the dashes consists of three *ḥal*-clauses (also known as circumstantial clauses) that begin with *wa-* (and) + noun/pronoun; the three nouns heading the three *ḥal*-clauses are *earth*, *darkness*, and *wind/spirit*, respectively. Ignoring semantic disagreements, the above is *structurally* a nice translation of *ḥal*-clauses: three verses into one sentence, no less. In stark contrast, the King James Version makes separate sentences or independent *and*-clauses of the three parenthetical *ḥal*-clauses:

> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis 1:1–3 KJV)

Tvedtnes has twice cited renderings of Genesis 1:1–3 similar to the Jewish Publication Society's translation. He quotes verse 2 as a string of three *-ing* participles for the three *ḥal*-clauses—"the earth being waste and uninhabited and darkness being upon the face of the deep and a wind from God blowing on the face of the waters"—and he adds that "this translation, which is a departure from the traditional rendering, is, nevertheless, one that has gained wide acceptance by modern Hebrew scholars, both Jewish and Christian. Verse 2 must be understood to be a parenthetical addition to the main thought, which is given in the conjoined sentences in verses 1 and 3 ."[7] The contrast between these translations, pre-

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[6]   Gee in "La Trahison des Clercs," 94, cites this example of a Jewish view of how Genesis 1:1–3 might be translated into English, as opposed to the King James Version.

[7]   John A. Tvedtnes, "The Medieval Hebrew Grammarians in the Light of Modern Linguistics" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 1971), 114; he offers a similar example and discussion in John A. Tvedtnes, "Science and Genesis," in *Science and Religion: Toward a More Useful Dialogue*, ed. Wilford M. Hess, Raymond T. Matheny, and Donlu D. Thayer (Geneva, Ill.: Paladin, 1979), 2:42.

ferred by Jewish and Hebrew scholars, versus the King James translation serves to illustrate that the same narrative in a Semitic language can feasibly be viewed or translated either way: dissecting the lengthy, un-English-like structure into simpler segments more suitable to English sentences as the King James Version does, or more accurately retaining the original Semitic structure, although this results in awkward English.

Hal-clauses (or circumstantial clauses) typically relate an accompanying state, circumstance, or condition, often expressed in English by subordinating conjunctions such as *when, while,* or *after* or by participial phrases. However, in both Hebrew and Arabic the same accompanying conditions are often structurally featured by "*and* + noun + the rest of the clause." For a noun, rather than a verb, to follow the word *and* is significant, because Hebrew and Arabic are verb-initial languages; that is, the usual order of constituents is verb-subject-object: created God the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). So "*and* + noun" usually signals a *hal*-clause (though *and* is not absolutely necessary). Furthermore, the *-ing* participles are, in my opinion, the best translation of most *hal*-clauses, and it should be noted that *-ing* forms are exactly what we see in the Jewish Publication Society's translation of a string of *hal*-clauses in the original Hebrew of Genesis 1:1–3. Likewise, strings of *-ing* participles are a prominent feature of Book of Mormon narrative style, as exemplified by Mosiah 7:21–22. In fact, Alma 2:1–2 provides a clearer example of *hal*-clauses:

> a certain man, *being* called Amlici, he *being* a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he *being* after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him.

The three *being* participial phrases add background information or accompanying circumstances and are thus a prime language environment for *hal*-clauses in Semitic, and the English translation suggests that that is what the original Near Eastern language probably contained: clauses beginning with Hebrew *wə-hûʾ* or some synonymous circumstantial structure. The string of *hal*-clauses evident in Alma 2:1–2 is perfectly acceptable in Hebrew,

yet an editor or English teacher would not spare red ink on a similar structure found in written English. An interesting study may be to measure the frequency of -*ing* participles in the Book of Mormon versus their frequency in Joseph Smith's other writings.

English, of course, also employs participial phrases: Exercising daily and eating well, he remained healthy. However, the Book of Mormon's use of these participial expressions differs in three ways from typical English. First, Book of Mormon language uses them much more frequently, and some strings of these verbal expressions reach lengths not typical of English, for instance the thirteen consecutive *having* phrases in Alma 9:19–23—a sentence four verses long; the six consecutive -*ing* participles in 3 Nephi 7:15–16; or the stretch of similar structures in Alma 13:5–8, where four consecutive verses end with dashes.[8] Second, English grammar discourages the use of understood subjects in participial expressions (i.e., he exercising daily), but would normally require a finite verb if the subject is to be expressed: he exercised daily, and (he) remained healthy. Book of Mormon language, on the other hand, very often has the subjects appearing with the participles, as we see twice in Alma 2:1 (*he being*) and in Alma 19:16: "Abish, *she having* been converted unto the Lord," which is a typical translation of both Hebrew and Egyptian circumstantial clauses. Third, English more often features -*ing* on the verb itself (exercising daily), while Book of Mormon language more often employs -*ing* on the auxiliary verb (having or being) plus past participle of the primary verb (he remained in good health, having exercised daily and having eaten well), which latter pattern again parallels *hal*-clause or circumstantial clause translations.

Returning to Genesis 1:1–3, we have seen that most Jewish translations into English contain lengthy, awkward, un-English-like structures and thereby demonstrate a degree of concatenation in the Hebrew that various translators have tried to preserve in translation; otherwise, why would they take the supposed concise, simple structures of Hebrew and create out of simplicity something so horribly awkward in English? There would be no reason to do so.

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8   Orlo Ryan Knight brought these examples to my attention.

Though the Jewish translations retain a more literal translation by means of more awkward English, in many instances English translations (especially the King James Version) smooth the real complexities that exist in the original Hebrew. For example, not counting "And it shall come to pass," the King James Version of Genesis 44:30 and part of verse 31 shows a stretch of seven clauses, five with finite verbs in English, while the original Hebrew has only one finite verb. The King James Version reads thus:

> Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die. (Genesis 44:30–31)

The Hebrew, on the other hand, reads literally thus:

> And now as (when/at) my coming to your servant my father, the lad not (being) with us, his soul (being) bound to his soul, it shall be as (when/at) his seeing that the lad (is) not, he shall die.

The Hebrew lines contain two *hal*-clauses of attending circumstances: one is "the boy not being with us" and another relevant circumstance is "his [Jacob's] soul (being) bound to his [Benjamin's] soul." The first and third lines contain nominalized clauses (whose verb is made a noun with the subject as possessor of that verbal noun) in Hebrew ("my coming"; "his seeing") rather than the finite verb forms found in the English translation ("I come"; "he seeth"). English allows nominalized clauses also in certain structures:

> The teacher came and the students quieted.
> > The teacher's coming quieted the students.

However, Hebrew uses verbal nouns more often than English and in structures not possible in English; thus a translator must denominalize many of Hebrew's nominalized verbs for an English translation, as in the example above; otherwise, the flow of language would not make sense in English: "as my coming to him and as his seeing the lad not with us, he will die" versus "as I come to him and as he sees the lad not with us, he will die." I left

out two intervening *ḥal*-clauses to simplify matters from extremely complex to merely complex. In short, Ashment's claim that the sentences of biblical Hebrew are simple and concise is unclear in light of the fact that much biblical Hebrew is made up of complexly interwoven strings of *ḥal*-clauses, nominalized verbs, and *waw*-consecutive clauses, which create structural sequences that are not allowable in English if translated literally, and they are anything but simple or concise.

The linking mechanisms of consecutive clauses or verbal elements in Hebrew and Arabic are very different stylistically than English. Arabic tends even more toward concatenation than Hebrew. In fact, in the original version of the encyclopedia article, I mentioned Arabic as the best example of this kind of syntactic behavior, but I was editorially encouraged to cite only Hebrew and not Arabic, since presumably Arabic had nothing to do with the language(s) of Lehi, though comparative research in Native American languages may eventually force an adjustment to that view.[9] From observations in Native American languages, I would guess that the Lehi-Ishmael party spoke a very Arabic-like dialect of Hebrew.

While teaching English as a second language to native speakers of Arabic, my peers and I affectionately termed the endless strings of subordinate clauses typical in the writing of many Arabic speakers as "incorrigible subordination" (as opposed to behavioral "incorrigible insubordination," which was not a problem; they were wonderful students).

They were simply transferring the narrative styles of their native language (Arabic) into their English compositions. It was difficult to convince them that English composition needed a more balanced ratio of independent clauses to subordinate clauses.

Having viewed the first three verses of the Hebrew Old Testament in translation as a single sentence, let us consider the first several verses of the Arabic Quran. In the first chapter or sura, "The Opening," we do not actually find a verb until the fifth

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9   See Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let's Void the Void," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 33; and Hugh W. Nibley, "Lehi and the Arabs," in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 71–83.

verse. The first verse would be a fragment in English. The second verse requires an understood copula, as is typical of Semitic languages. Three of the first four verses are lists of appositives or names of God, and the fifth verse contains the first actual verb.

The first chapter, called "The Opening," is something of a short introductory vocative. The real narrative of the Quran might be considered to begin with the second sura. Consider the first three verses of this Arabic narrative:

> This is the scripture wherein there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off [evil], who believe in the unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them; and who believe in that which is revealed unto thee and that which was revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter.[10]

Similar to the first three verses of the Hebrew Old Testament, the first three verses of this Quranic narrative are translated as one English sentence, containing a string of subordinate clauses; such a string also undeniably exists in the original Arabic.

In English, the distinction between independent (or main) clauses and dependent (or subordinate) clauses is clear-cut by definition—as English grammar defines them. However, in some languages the distinction is not so clear. In some Ute dialects, for example, consecutive subordinate clauses can multiply to such unwieldy lengths at times that a translator must choose, from among them, a new starting point for an independent clause when translating into English, or else the narrative would hardly make sense in English.

The Arabic (or Hebrew) *hal*-clauses that contain the conjunction *and (wa-)*, if literally translated into English, would constitute an *and* conjoined coordinate clause or independent clause. However, they are rarely translated as such from Arabic to English, because, as alluded to previously, the best sense or translation of the *hal*-clause is usually a subordinate clause or participle in English translations.

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10   Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Glorious Quran: Text and Explanatory Translation* (New York: Muslim World League, 1977), 2–5.

qāma Zaid wa-huwa bākin
Zaid rose weeping. (literally: rose Zaid and-he (is) crying.)

ʾinqaraḍa fi waqti-hi qarnāni mina an-nāsi wa-huwa ḥayyun.
Two generations of men passed away, whilst (literally: *and*) he still lived.

wa-qad ʾaġtadiy wa-ṭ-ṭairu fī wukunāti-ha
And sometimes I go forth early, whilst (literally: *and*) the birds are in their nests.

jāʾa Zaid yaḍḥaku
Zaid came laughing (literally: Zaid came; he laughs.)[11]

In short, subordinate clauses in Arabic (as well as Hebrew) are often not marked by any overt subordinating conjunction, but the subordinate sense is so strong that they are translated as subordinate clauses in English. In certain structures, English can also dispense with overt subordinators, though a subordinate clause is irrefutably involved:

Mr. Jones bought the house (that) she wanted.

"That" is optional, yet its absence does not make "she wanted" an independent clause.

In addition to clauses of subordinate sense containing no overt subordinator, Arabic is rich in conjunction-like particles that begin clauses and sentences, often creating a concatenation that, if translated literally, would horrify a traditional English teacher. More rare in older Arabic narratives are independent clauses that begin with a noun or verb rather than with a conjunction or one of these particles that relate some sense of continuation and connection to all narrative before it. (This may not be as applicable to modern Arabic, which appears to be more subject to European influences of syntax and punctuation.) For example, Arabic has two words for *and*—*wa* and *fa*—each with separate shades of meaning, as well as three different kinds of *if*—*ʾin, ʾidā,* and *law*—and a bag full of particles not always translatable into English, like

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[11]   William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 2:330–31.

the Arabic intensifying particles *la, la-qad,* etc. In *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* in the original Arabic, almost every sentence begins with an *and* or another particle. If all initial *and*s at the beginning of sentences in Arabic narratives were counted as joining coordinate clauses together, as we generally consider they do in English, one would have little use for periods in punctuating many Arabic narratives, except at the end of the story. Thus the narrative style in Arabic, and to some lesser degree in Hebrew, reflects much more concatenation than is typical of English.

Consider also how often the distinction between dependent and independent clauses can be quite arbitrary. For example, in English three levels of conjunctions exist which can often create rather synonymous sentences: coordinating conjunctions (*but*); adverbial conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs (*however*); subordinating conjunctions (*although*). A translator could feasibly use any of the three in translating a non-English text into English, and his or her choice from among this fairly synonymous trio would quite arbitrarily determine whether the English translation would have a subordinate clause or independent clause, regardless of the original. So one cannot always determine by a translation whether a clause in the original language was subordinate or independent; in fact, sometimes even when the original language is available, subordinate and independent clauses may be difficult to differentiate, as in Ute, and to a lesser degree in Hebrew.

Consider also the *waw*-consecutive clauses of Hebrew. In view of our English definitions for dependent and independent clauses, the *waw*-consecutive clauses of Hebrew are something of an enigma. The King James Version translates them both ways, though more often as independent *and*-clauses. A case can be made in either direction for the *waw*-consecutive of Hebrew; it does not easily fit the English molds of either dependent or independent clauses. The *waw*-consecutive is a very common syntactic structure of biblical Hebrew narratives in which the initial verb is followed by a series of verbs or clauses prefixing *wa-* (the same *wa-,* meaning "and," as seen in Hebrew and Arabic *hal*-clauses above) to a jussive verb for several consecutive imperfect verb forms that are usually translated as past tense. (This is its most common use, but not its only use.) Though these strings of consecutive clauses are not often translated as such (which indeed

would be difficult), they are, in a sense, strings of dependent clauses, being dependent upon the initial verb or clause. The nature of a dependent (or subordinate) clause is its dependence on another clause (an independent clause). Similarly, the *waw*-consecutive clauses depend on that initial verb, i.e., cannot exist independently of that initial independent verb. Furthermore, the word consecutive means that these forms follow in a series and cannot be first, or in other words cannot stand alone, and standing alone is what an independent clause is supposed to be able to do. So one could question whether *waw*-consecutive clauses *are* independent clauses, even though the scholars of King James often translated them as such.

The verb form of these consecutive verbs in Hebrew (when imperfect) is the jussive, and in Arabic, the jussive is rather associated with a subordinate sense or with subordinate clauses:

'in yasriq, fa-qad saraqa 'aḫ-un la-hu min qablu
If he steals (jussive), a brother of his has stolen before.[12]

Likewise, in Hebrew the jussive is used in subordinate clauses that are sentential objects to a higher or main clause—I would that/wish that (someone verb [jussive])—whether the "I would/wish" is expressed or not, i.e., whether in surface structure or deep structure.[13] In fact, linguistically, even simple imperatives, cohortatives, and jussives without overt subordinators can be argued to be sentential objects of such underlying phrases in deep structure, and therefore subordinate: (I want/wish/order that you) Clean your room! Similarly, in Spanish as well as many other languages, imperative verb forms employ a subjunctive or other form typical of subordinate clauses with the subordinate sense being strongly felt: (Yo le pido/mando a usted que) llame a los otros; and sometimes partially expressed: Que llame a los otros! That you call the others! Therefore, the fact that the jussive is used in the verbs of a *waw*-consecutive series also argues that, in some very real ways, they are clauses not very independent and constitute a Semitic concatenation that can hardly be duplicated in English, since a

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12   Ibid., 2:37.

13   For uses of the jussive in Hebrew, see William Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), 321.

translation into English forces a clear choice one direction or the other—independent or dependent.

Returning to the first chapter of Genesis, we might note that in the five verses following the first sentence of the Jewish Publication Society's version, that Genesis 1:4–8 contains fifteen main verbs, thirteen of which are *waw*-consecutive verb forms. It is not uncommon at all for strings of *waw*-consecutive verb forms to run several verses in length. In fact, rare is the chapter that does not have one or more strings of *waw*-consecutive forms. The *waw*-consecutive for relating consecutive events in narrative, the more frequent use of verbal nouns, and the *ḥal*-clause for adding attending circumstances are all very common features of Hebrew narrative. Together they easily fill most of the Hebrew Old Testament text, and the complex interplay between these syntactic structures of biblical Hebrew produces little that is simple and concise. In fact, one could question whether the concept of a sentence, as perceived in English grammar, should apply to biblical Hebrew narrative.

In all our considerations, we should not overlook the various stages of the Egyptian language. Coptic, in particular, has a variety of circumstantial verb forms or conjugations, usually translated like the Hebrew and Arabic circumstantial or *ḥal*-clauses (as *-ing* participles in English), which occur very frequently in narrative.[14]

Having noted the frequency of strings of *-ing* participles in Book of Mormon language and, similarly, strings of subordinate clauses and participles in Ute, let us consider examples from yet another Native American language exhibiting syntax and narrative structures quite suitable to strings of *-ing* participial expressions in English translation. Tewa has one primary subordinating conjunction that creates many more subordinate clauses than is typical of English. This subordinator (*-di; -ri* after vowels) is suffixed to verbs, which are then best literally translated into English as *-ing* participial phrases:[15]

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[14]   Ariel Shisha-Halevy, ed., *Coptic Grammatical Chrestomathy* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 182–87, 189, 191, 194.

[15]   Even though the Tewa subordinating conjunction happens to be quite identical to Aramaic *di,* that, which, etc., we cannot assume a connection unless a multitude of other factors were in place, which they are not. In other words, coincidence is the best assumption at present.

na-t'õ-ri i-mayæ-whahónde-ri hæ'ændi-anho i-piví-yawende-ri i-k'o'[16]

Hearing that, he unsheathed his claws, ripped off big pieces of meat, and ate them.[17]

literally: Hearing that, unsheathing his claws, ripping off big pieces of meat, he ate them.

dêe-wé'ge-'an-di dêe-t'a'

They would gather it and grind it.[18]

literally: Having gathered it, they grind it.

i múusa'ee na-hah-sêndi-bo na-mæn-di i-mû'-ri óo-tu'an

The kitten was hungry and when he saw it, he said . . .[19]

literally: The kitten being hungry, going along, seeing it, he said.

Note in the first example that for purposes of English stylistics, the translators use one dependent clause and three independent clauses in English, while the original Tewa has the reverse—three dependent clauses and one independent clause. Likewise, in all three examples more dependent clauses exist in Tewa than in the English translations:

	Tewa		English translation	
Clauses	dep.	indep.	dep.	indep.
	3	1	1	3
	1	1	0	2
	3	1	1	2
Totals	7	3	2	7

The translators obviously molded the Tewa into English stylistics, the two languages having very different syntactic styles for narrative and very different ratios of independent to dependent clauses. While the syntax of Tewa when translated literally may be uncomfortable English, it is not unlike the many strings of parti-

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[16] The underlined vowels are nasalized.

[17] *Tewa Pehtsiye: Tewa Tales* (San Juan Pueblo, N.M.: San Juan Bilingual Program, 1982), 30.

[18] *Tewa Tuukannin Ta'nin: A Tewa Reader* (San Juan Pueblo, N.M.: San Juan Bilingual Program, 1984), 17.

[19] *Tewa Tales*, 28.

cipial structures found in the Book of Mormon. I am not suggesting that Tewa parallels Hebrew in very many ways, but Tewa does illustrate that a translator must sometimes choose between one of two alternatives: (1) a major overhaul of clausal patterns to better suit English structures or (2) a more literal translation that would be very unorthodox English. For that reason, I personally find the lengthy, awkward structures in the Book of Mormon to be both fascinating and significant.

Another factor to keep in mind is that Mormon and Moroni were writing the majority of the Book of Mormon text in their language, which was 1000 years removed from Lehi's Hebrew or about midway between Lehi and European contact. Therefore, in whatever ways Mormon's language had changed from Lehi's, it was likely in the direction of some Native American languages, which may suggest that Book of Mormon language was even more inclined toward subordination than Hebrew, since many, if not most, Native American languages, in narrative, employ subordination more than either English or Old World Hebrew.

In addition to all the above, I also like Tvedtnes's suggestion:[20] Unable to erase a misdirected sentence on metal plates, an author must tack on clarifying components, realized in mid-sentence, and pull it together as best he can. No doubt, something along those lines is probably the explanation for some of the lengthy awkward sentences. Nevertheless, even misdirected sentences speak for the text's authenticity, since a fraudulent effort in concert with fairly educated scribes would be less likely to contain them.

Aside from misdirected sentences, a number of the Book of Mormon passages fit Semitic patterns of topicalization and *ḥal*-clauses so nicely that I must conclude that they are translations of a language whose grammar and structural patterns differ significantly from those of English—either nineteenth-century English or modern English—yet quite nicely parallel Semitic patterns. Other lengthy passages seem to be instances of a deliberate or emphatic oratorical mode of some sort. For example, the thirteen consecutive phrases of *having* + past participle in Alma 9:19–23

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20 Tvedtnes, review of *New Approaches*, 39. In a personal communication Tvedtnes has given me to understand that others before him had noted such instances termed "no erasures."

appear to be deliberate oratory. It seems that a verse or two would be sufficient room to repair a misdirected sentence, so when a sentence or length of narrative continues four verses without a period, it may suggest that the Nephite language allowed lengths and structures that do not parallel English structures. Alma 13:5–8, for instance, may be a "no erasure," or it may be another demonstration that the Nephite language of the time had patterns very inconvenient to the grammatical conventions of modern English.

Another matter meriting attention is that sequences of circumstantial or *ḥal*-clause structures (*-ing/having/being*) in the Book of Mormon are sometimes lengthier and more frequent than in the King James Version, though not necessarily more frequent than in Hebrew. There are two reasons for this: (1) The *ḥal*-clauses of the Hebrew Old Testament are often translated as independent *and*-clauses in the King James Version (as in Genesis 1:1–3), which disguises the *ḥal*-clause structures in English and makes them appear much less frequent than they really are in Hebrew. (2) The style of narrative for some Book of Mormon authors (such as Alma) yields longer strings of these circumstantial structures than is typical even of Hebrew, though Hebrew does so more than English and more than is apparent in the King James translation. Such expansions (or reductions) in the use of a given structural pattern are common modulations in language change through the centuries.

The fact that the King James translators left many of the Hebrew circumstantial clauses inconspicuous by translating them as *and*-clauses quite undermines the accusation that Joseph Smith was simply mimicking the King James biblical style, because the Book of Mormon employs *-ing* participial expressions much more frequently than does the King James Old Testament. Furthermore, the fact that some Book of Mormon authors amplified the use of circumstantial clauses even beyond lengths typical of Hebrew removes Book of Mormon language even further from the King James frequency. (Keep in mind that the frequency of circumstantial structures in the Book of Mormon and Hebrew both exceed what is typical of English.) Thus the relative frequencies, if anything, would tend to support the text's authenticity further, since if Joseph Smith was imitating King James English, he missed the diminished King James frequencies considerably,

coming nearer to and possibly exceeding frequencies typical of Hebrew. In any case, the abundance of *-ing* participial expressions in the Book of Mormon is very consistent with a translation of either Hebrew or Egyptian circumstantial clauses.

In conclusion, whether an author repairs a misdirected sentence, or a translator breaks down a lengthy Semitic concatenation into segments more suitable to English or maintains the flavor of an un-English-like Semitic narrative when it exists, is all inconsequential to the message. Nevertheless, the latter has potential to provide parallels peculiar to the original language, and the fact remains that Semitic mechanisms of narrative allow structural lengths of language in Hebrew and Arabic that are different from and hardly typical of English. In light of patterns inherent to Hebrew, Arabic, Egyptian, and many Native American languages, the copious presence of certain long, awkward structures in the Book of Mormon, in my opinion, speaks much more for the text's authenticity than would a lack. The lengths of awkward English might be deemed by some as poor grammar or weakness in writing (Ether 12:23–26, 40); but as a linguist and student of Semitic and Native American languages, I find these lengthy structures to be quite intriguing, significant, and reassuring.