A Short Addition to Length: Some Relative Frequencies of Circumstantial Structures

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Abstract: In previous articles I have discussed the nature and prominence of certain linguistic structures in the Book of Mormon that are typical of *ḥāl*-clauses translated from Hebrew or Egyptian. This article compares the frequencies of those structures in three works produced through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, only the first of which is a translation from an ancient Near Eastern language. The results of this preliminary investigation into styles and these linguistic structures as found in these three works are worth noting.

In an earlier issue of this journal, I discussed certain structures that occur frequently in the Book of Mormon and that are typical of translations of Hebrew or Egyptian circumstantial or *ḥāl*-clauses. I refer the reader to that article for a more complete discussion of these structures.[1] There I also rhetorically suggested that a comparison of the relative frequencies of such structures in the Book of Mormon with Joseph Smith's other writings may prove worthwhile.[2] This preliminary study to that effect provides

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1 Brian D. Stubbs, "A Lengthier Treatment of Length," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 82–97.

2 Ibid., 86.

some statistical support for the presence of *ḥāl*-clauses in the Book of Mormon translation.

Circumstantial or *ḥāl*-clauses denote an accompanying state or circumstance that has previously come into existence, yet is still applicable to the time of the main clause. Two structures in English that structurally best illustrate the presence of Hebrew or Egyptian *ḥāl*-clauses include the following:

1. *being + past participle/adjective/noun*:

> I, Nephi, *being grieved* for the hardness of their hearts . . . (1 Nephi 7:8)
>
> I, Nephi, *being* exceedingly *young* . . . (1 Nephi 2:16)
>
> I, Nephi, *being a man* large in stature . . . (1 Nephi 4:31)

2. *having + past participle* (to denote a previous happening as background):

> I, Nephi, *having been* born of goodly parents, . . . and *having seen* many afflictions . . . *having been* highly favored of the Lord . . . *having had* a great knowledge . . . I make a record. (1 Nephi 1:1)

The background information or accompanying circumstance quite naturally precedes the featured event in order for it to be an attending circumstance or background. For example, Nephi's having been born of goodly parents, having seen afflictions, and having had knowledge of the goodness of God were all prior events that created a background still in effect when he made his record.

English more often employs structures like *after/since I have/had eaten*, while Hebrew and Egyptian often employ *ḥāl*-clauses, for which the structure *having eaten* is the most efficient translation, since a *ḥāl*-clause does not need conjunctions like *after/since* and is tenseless, showing only its relative time as preceding the featured event or as a perfect aspect (past) relative to the main event. Therefore, *having eaten* is a more accurate translation of *ḥāl*-clauses than finite tenses such as *have/had eaten.* Likewise, some state or accompanying circumstance being in

force before the featured event is also well expressed by a participial *being* phrase. We shall not count gerundive nouns whose syntactic functions are clearly nominal rather than participial, such as subjects of verbs (*being* hungry is normal) or objects of prepositions (without *being* able to eat). Nor shall we count *having* when it is a main verb indicating possession (*having* many flocks) rather than an auxiliary verb (*having* scattered the flocks).

We shall consider three written works that arose through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and Joseph Smith's *History of the Church.* The primary means by which each of these three works was produced are translation, inspiration, and authorship respectively. The original language of the Book of Mormon was either Hebrew or Egyptian or some of both; either language would provide an abundance of *ḥāl*-clauses. The language of the Doctrine and Covenants, on the other hand, was English from its inception; and even though its language exhibits a rather biblical flavor at times, the Doctrine and Covenants does not contain nearly the frequency of the proposed *ḥāl*-clause structures found in the Book of Mormon.

With the assistance of *Eldin Ricks's Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works*,[3] I was readily able to identify and count the number of *having + past participle* structures in both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants:

	having + p.p.	no. of pages
Book of Mormon	167	531
Doctrine and Covenants	14	294

The Doctrine and Covenants is 55.37% the length of the Book of Mormon (294/531). Yet the Doctrine and Covenants has only 8.38% as many *having + past participle* structures (14/167). In other words, the Book of Mormon has 6.6 times greater the frequency of that structure than does the Doctrine and Covenants (55.37/8.38 = 6.6), taking into account the number of pages.

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3 Eldin Ricks with Charles D. Bush, Junola S. Bush, and L. Kristine N. Ricks, *Eldin Ricks's Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1995).

Participial phrases containing *being* yield another significant difference in frequency; the numbers are 243 and 33 for the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, respectively. Adjusting for the latter being 55.37% of the former in length, the frequency of *being* participles is more than four times (4.08) greater in the Book of Mormon than in the Doctrine and Covenants. The totals for the two types of participial phrases combined are as follows:

	having + p.p.	*being*	total	pages	ave./ page
B of M	167	243	410	531	.772
D&C	14	33	47	294	.160

The results are that these two structures, which stylistically match translations of Hebrew or Egyptian *ḥāl*-clauses, are nearly five times more frequent in the Book of Mormon than in the Doctrine and Covenants (.772/.160 = 4.8). In round numbers, the Book of Mormon has approximately nine times as many structures of these two types, even though the Doctrine and Covenants is about 5/9 as large; thus the ratio of frequencies in the Book of Mormon compared with the Doctrine and Covenants is about 5 to 1 (9/1 x 5/9 = 5/1). Keep in mind that this study and these numbers do not include other translations of circumstantial clauses, such as *-ing* participles on main verbs rather than on auxiliary verbs, so more circumstantial clauses exist than these numbers represent. Nevertheless, these numbers are likely to approximate the relative ratio.

The hypothetical supposition that Joseph Smith knew the prominence of *ḥāl*-clauses in those ancient languages, that these English structures are usually the most effective translation of *ḥāl*-clauses, that he could produce two separate works with very different frequencies for typical *ḥāl*-clause structures, and that he could get the heavy ratio on the right work, all by his own design, seems extremely improbable. The existence of five times as many *ḥāl*-clause structures in the Book of Mormon is significant, considering that Joseph Smith gave us both bodies of scripture—one from a translation of an ancient Near Eastern language rich in *ḥāl*-clauses and the other through direct revelation into English. This striking data seems to provide favorable support for regarding the

Book of Mormon as a translation of an ancient Near Eastern language, in contrast to the Doctrine and Covenants.

Dealing with Joseph Smith's *History of the Church (HC)* is more difficult statistically. I considered the first 120 pages of each of the first five volumes, totaling 600 pages. In these 600 pages, I counted 53 instances of *having + past participle* and 32 instances of *being* participial phrases.[4] Not only does the frequency differ markedly, but different participles are more common in each of the two works: in the Book of Mormon *being* phrases are 45% more numerous than *having* phrases (243/167), while in *HC* the *having* participials are 65% more numerous than *being* phrases (53/32). Nevertheless, the 410 occurrences of these participials in the 531 pages of the Book of Mormon as opposed to the 85 occurrences in 600 pages of *HC* may initially appear to be five times as frequent in the Book of Mormon. However, two facts require an adjustment. First, much of Joseph Smith's *History of the Church* consists of other people's words: minutes of meetings, letters and affidavits from other persons, and many pages of revelation that later became sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. All such portions were not counted in the statistics, only Joseph Smith's personally composed lines. Second, the Book of Mormon type is smaller, allowing more letters or characters per page than in the *History of the Church.* In light of these two facts, I counted the lines of Joseph Smith's words in the 600 pages of *HC*, calculated the average number of characters per line, and estimated the total number of characters.[5] The *HC* statistics are as follows:

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4 Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), vols. 1–5; herein cited as *HC.*

5 The average number of character spaces (letters and one space between words), not counting punctuation space, was about 55 spaces per line; however, shortened lines at the ends of paragraphs would put that average at 50 or less. On the other hand, many portions (Joseph's letters, etc.) were in a smaller print that averaged 70 or more spaces per line. So 55 spaces per line is a conservative estimate. Thus, for *HC*, 55 characters per line times 9,362 lines equals 514,910 characters approximately.

vol.	lines	*having* part.	*being* part.	total
1	1758	19	11	30
2	1870	7	7	14
3	2545	13	5	18
4	1110	7	4	11
5	2079	7	5	12
totals	9362	53	32	85

I then calculated the average number of characters per page in the Book of Mormon and estimated the total number of characters in the Book of Mormon.[6] The Book of Mormon is 2.66 times the amount of language penned by Joseph Smith in the specified 600 pages of his history, while the number of participial expressions is 4.82 times as great in the Book of Mormon (410/82). Thus the Book of Mormon has nearly but not quite twice the frequency of those structures in Joseph Smith's writings (4.82/2.66 = 1.81).

In reading these three works with a consciousness of style foremost in my mind, I was struck by the three very different styles evident in these three works. Joseph Smith's personal writings are prone to the rather typical nineteenth-century oratorical mode, which might be described as laden with rhetorical embellishment. This is more evident in his formal communications, less so in his journal entries. But that being something of a cultural or societal norm of the times, and not peculiar to him, is evident in the similarly extravagant language penned by his contemporaries in their letters to him. The Doctrine and Covenants, on the other hand, is of a style quite pristinely simple, clear, and direct—in many ways different from nineteenth-century English. Very different from either of those is Book of Mormon language. Though Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century prose may at times attain lengths and degrees of embellishment discouraged by twentieth-

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6 I examined every page divisible by 15 (15, 30, 45, etc.) to page 300 (a total of 20 samples); the average number of lines was 41 and the average number of character spaces was 63 for the double column. These multiply to 41 x 63 = 2,583 character spaces per page, times 531 pages, or approximately 1,371,573 character spaces. Therefore, the Book of Mormon is approximately 266% longer than the 514,910 character spaces in the 600 pages of *HC* I examined (1,371,573/514,910). The ratio of 410 to 85 participles is 482%. Thus the Book of Mormon has approximately 181% more of the specified participial structures per unit of language as *HC* (482/266), almost double.

century editors, it nonetheless often flows with a peculiar poetic beauty and always with a grammatical cohesiveness; Book of Mormon language, in contrast, is often very awkward in ways that Joseph Smith's personal writings are not. Awkward patterns inconvenient to English grammar, broken sentences, loose ends, and disrupted structures constitute a fairly frequent stylistic pattern in the Book of Mormon—a style not at all similar to *HC* or the Doctrine and Covenants.

A specific example is the use of the dash. In *HC* and the Doctrine and Covenants, the use of the dash to represent structural disruptions is very limited, while in the Book of Mormon the dash is used extensively in temporarily holding together strings of unwieldy structures until a sense of completion can be arrived at. Some of these are likely to be "no erasures," as Tvedtnes and others have suggested,[7] while other instances may simply be allowable patterns in the Nephite language that are very different from those of English. I might also clarify that Joseph Smith's personal writings at times contain long sentences, such that the difference between Joseph Smith's writings and the Book of Mormon is not so much a matter of length as it is the style of those lengths, a pronounced awkwardness inconvenient to English grammar in the Book of Mormon that does not surface in Joseph Smith's personal writings.

In conclusion, the differences between the very different styles of these three works are like salt: they are more clearly experienced than explained, though they can be explained with a considerable amount of further analysis. The styles of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and *HC* are extraordinarily different. These participial expressions are only one feature or aspect of that variety, yet the fact that their frequency in the Book of Mormon is nearly double that in Joseph Smith's personal writings and five times that found in the Doctrine and Covenants, all very large samples, seems stylistically significant in my opinion. The fact that Joseph Smith's writings are between the two, containing considerably fewer participial structures than the

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[7] John A. Tvedtnes's review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 8–50, specifically p. 39; and Stubbs, "A Lengthier Treatment of Length," 95.

Book of Mormon and considerably more than the Doctrine and Covenants, is also worth pondering.