# Introduction to the Rezetko and Young report:

## *Currents in the Historical Linguistics and Linguistic Dating of the Hebrew Bible: Report on the State of Research as Reflected in Recent Major Publications*

Martin Ehrensvärd
Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen Søndre Campus
Religious Roots of Europe MA programme
meh@teol.ku.dk

As a participant for more than twenty years on both sides of the scholarly discussion, first for and then against the conventional linguistic dating approach of some Hebraists and biblical scholars, I have observed our field grow and mature. When I first started out, we barely used computers for diachronic linguistic research, and now many people are applying data science and computational linguistics to ancient Hebrew.

My journey is one I share with the two authors of this volume. Robert, Ian and I all grew up in the secure knowledge that all was well and that we would for the foreseeable future keep linguistically dating Hebrew texts just as Wilhelm Gesenius and his scholarly descendants taught us during two centuries. And we all independently felt increasingly uneasy with the discrepancy between our received conception of linguistic dating and the data that our research generated. This unease has led to our stomping on a lot of toes during the last couple of decades, not least due to our sometimes impatient wording in our publications. This is not the first nor probably the last time that has happened in biblical studies.

Robert and Ian's work is only the beginning of a whole new approach to the study of ancient Hebrew, one which is being picked up and further developed by a number of scholars around the world, many of them much younger than us. I feel increasingly excited about the advances that quantitative methods generate in our field, and my sense is that we are barely scratching the surface. In 2040 I will most likely be retired and I'm wondering what our field will look like. It seems that artificial intelligence is already revolutionising the most unlikely endeavours, and maybe the time will come even to our time-honoured field. I believe that this volume, in conjunction with Robert and Ian's 2014 book (*Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*), adds significantly to our understanding and that quantitative work like theirs and others' will prove foundational for literally unimaginable advances in the coming decades.

Taken together with some of their other insights on the relationship between textual and literary criticism and historical linguistics, and on language periodisation, Robert and Ian are thus, in my view, setting the stage for future research.