

GSAS IE Workshop
Department of Linguistics, Harvard University

Wednesday, April 12 5:00 pm
Boylston Hall Room 103

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Dating (Classical Hebrew) Texts Linguistically: A Bayesian Approach

This presentation addresses the following question: can we construct a statistical model that would allow us to infer the date of composition of a text from linguistic data? While widespread statistical techniques are well-suited for inferring linguistic features from dates, models that would allow us to infer dates from linguistic features are much less developed. I introduce a model for performing the latter task and discuss its relationship to the former techniques.

I apply the model to a text in the Hebrew Bible known as the Joseph Story (Gen 37-50) whose date is controversial and deal with a number of complications that arise for this particular corpus. Although I focus on this particular application, the model is capable of addressing the same question of date of composition elsewhere. Indeed, the Joseph Story is a particularly difficult case and the ability of the model to deal with this case suggests the potential for even better results on other corpora.