

# **Report of Examiners**

## **MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology, 2013**

### **1. Examination Arrangements**

There were 8 MSt and 9 MPhil candidates (1 MPhil candidate was resitting the examination). The final Examiners' meeting was held on 2 July 2013. All of the candidates sat their examinations in Schools, one with special permission granted for extra time.

#### *Examiners*

Prof. Aditi Lahiri (Somerville College) (Chair)  
Prof. Martin Maiden (Trinity College)  
Dr Philomen Probert (Wolfson College)  
Prof. Peter Austin (SOAS, External)

#### *Assessors*

|  |
|--|
| Dr Ash Asudeh (Jesus)                  |
| Dr Peter Barber (Wolfson)              |
| Dr Phil Blunsom (St Hugh's)            |
| Prof. Debbie Cameron (Worcester)       |
| Dr David F Cram (Jesus)                |
| Dr Chiara Cappellaro (St John's)       |
| Prof. John Coleman (Wolfson)           |
| Dr Jan Fellerer (Wolfson)              |
| Prof. Bjarke Frellesvig (Hertford)     |
| Dr Matthew Husband (St Hugh's)         |
| Dr Simon Horobin (Magdalen)            |
| Dr Howard Jones (Keble)                |
| Dr Anna Kibort                         |
| Prof. Aditi Lahiri (Somerville)        |
| Prof Martin Maiden (Trinity)           |
| Dr Wolfgang de Melo (Wolfson)          |
| Dr Lynda Mugglestone (Pembroke)        |
| Dr Louise Mycock                       |
| Dr Stephen Parkinson (Linacre)         |
| Prof. Stephen Pulman (Somerville)      |
| Dr Elinor Payne (St Hilda's)           |
| Dr John Penney (Wolfson)               |
| Dr Philomen Probert (Wolfson)          |
| Dr John Charles Smith (St Catherine's) |
| Dr Rosalind Temple (New College)       |
| Dr Elizabeth Tucker                    |
| Prof. Theo van Lint (Pembroke)         |
| Dr Ian Watson (Christ Church)          |

| <b>Papers</b>   | <b>MPhil/MSt</b> |
|---|------------------|
| Paper A: Linguistic Theory  | 9/8              |
| B(i) Phonetics and Phonology                                      | 2/0              |
| B(ii) Syntax (essay)  | 4/1              |
| B(iii) Semantics (essay)  | 2/1              |
| B(iv) Historical and Comparative Linguistics                      | 1/2              |
| B(vi) History and structure of French                             | 0/1              |
| B(vi) History and Structure of Ancient Greek                      | 1/0              |
| B(vi) History and Structure of the English Language (course work) | 1/0              |
| B(vii) Experimental Phonetics (report)                            | 1/1              |
| B(vii) Psycholinguistics & Neurolinguistics (report)              | 4/3              |
| B(viii) Sociolinguistics (extended essay)                         | 2/2              |
| B(ix) Computational Linguistics                                   | 0/1              |
| C(i) Comparative Grammar of Armenian and Iranian                  | 1/0              |
| C(ii) Historical Grammar of Armenian and Iranian                  | 1/0              |
| C(iii) Translation/commentary, texts in Armenian and Iranian      | 1/0              |
| C(i) Comparative Grammar of Germanic and Greek                    | 1/0              |
| C(ii) Historical Grammar of Germanic and Greek                    | 1/0              |
| C(iii) Translation/commentary, texts in Germanic and Greek        | 1/0              |
| D(ii) Structure of French and Italian                             | 0/1              |

### Theses topics

|       | <b>MPhil Theses</b>  |
|-------|--|
| 1.    | Short vowel movement in colonial Maryland and Virginia, 1630-1830  |
| 2.    | Long domain correlates of gemination in Japanese   |
| 3.    | If...(and Only If): Conditional perfection and completeness  |
| 4.    | Sociolinguistic variation in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas  |
| 5.    | The processing of medial geminate and singleton consonants in Swiss German: Behavioural and ERP evidence |
| 6.    | Hellenistic Greek word order. A minimalist approach  |
| 7.    | Nominal copular sentences in French  |
| 8.    | The Question of 'Classical' Armenian   |
| 9.    | Crosslinguistic speaker sensitivity to first harmonic variability as a cue to voice quality              |
| RESIT |  |

Five MPhil theses out of nine obtained a mark in the distinction range, with one mark of 85 for a dissertation which was considered by the Examiners to be almost publishable. It clearly met our criteria: "Work which consistently exceeds expectations and challenges received views. An outstanding performance, which shows remarkable knowledge and understanding of the material."

One of the MPhil theses failed. The case was considered in detail by the Examiners, taking into account the fact that the candidate had also failed three of the four papers including the compulsory Linguistic Theory paper. According to the Faculty's assessment guidelines for the MPhil, "a mark of at least 60 on each paper must ordinarily be attained, with no mark below 50", although "at the discretion of the examiners, marks above 50 but below 60 may be offset by a very good performance in the thesis." Although this thesis was clearly not outstanding and it could not be used to counterbalance the rest of the work, the candidate was called in for

a viva on two papers. Unfortunately, her performance in the viva was such the Examiners felt that no mark could be increased. Since the candidate had failed three papers and the thesis, the Examiners came to the conclusion that she has failed the examination and can only be offered the option of re-sitting it next year.

Two candidates disobeyed the rubric, respectively, of the syntax and semantic exercises, by answering one rather than two questions. Both candidates were called in for a viva. In the case of the semantics exercise the candidate's response did not satisfy the Examiners and the candidate was therefore deemed to have failed that exercise. The candidate for the syntax exercise did satisfy the Examiners of her knowledge of the subject and was therefore deemed to have passed the exercise. In fact, her response raised some concerns about the feasibility of one of the questions, which will need to be investigated in due course.

|    | <b>MSt Theses (optional)</b>  |
|----|---|
| 1. | Cutting and breaking events in Abma, a language of Central Pentecost Island, Vanuatu                  |
| 2. | Italian influences in the Spanish of the Americas   |
| 3. | Baima Tibetan, Standard Tibetan, and Mandarin: A Comparative Syntactic Analysis using Lambek Prgroups |

Two of the three MSt theses obtained high distinction-level marks (above 80).

## **2. Results**

All MSt candidates, and eight out of the nine MPhil candidates, passed, including the candidate who resat the examination. One MPhil candidate failed. Six MSt candidates and four MPhil candidates were awarded a distinction. The MSt results were particularly good this year, with six distinctions out of eight, and four papers receiving marks above 80.

The George Wolf Prize in Linguistics and Philology was awarded to the best MPhil candidate, who had achieved distinction marks in three papers (two above 80) and a very high mark in her thesis. This candidate's performance in the taught modules as well as the thesis amply deserved special recognition.

Marking was fairly unproblematic; as in previous years, markers were provided with mark sheets for theses and papers. The external Examiner looked at all the scripts and theses and gave an opinion on a selection of them; in most cases his opinions fell within the range of the other markers. Three candidates were called in for a viva.

One candidate's marks received minor adjustment in the light of a medical certificate.

## **3. Recommendations and general remarks**

Overall, the entire examination process went smoothly. Distinctions (see above) were awarded according to the criteria communicated to candidates (for MSt an average mark of at least 70 across all papers, for MPhil a mark of at least 70 in the thesis and an average mark of at least 70 across all papers).

The Examiners commented on the fact that the layout of the Semantics exercise could be potentially confusing. As is the case with all examination papers, perhaps both the Syntax and the Semantics exercise questions could be submitted to the Examiners before they are handed out to the students.

Prof. Aditi Lahiri (Somerville College) (Chair)  
Prof. Martin Maiden (Trinity College)  
Dr Philomen Probert (Wolfson College)  
Prof. Peter Austin (SOAS, External)

July 5, 2013