

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

M.St. in GENERAL LINGUISTICS AND COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY

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| 1. Awarding institution/body | University of Oxford |
| 2. Teaching institution | University of Oxford |
| 3. Programme accredited by | not applicable |
| 4. Final award | M.St. |
| 5. Programme | Linguistics and Philology |
| 6. UCAS code | not applicable |
| 7. Relevant QAA benchmarking groups | Linguistics |
| 8. Date of programme specification | February 2006; amended October 2008 |
| 9. Educational aims of the programme | |

The M.St. is a one-year degree, assessed by examination and, for some combinations of options, coursework or extended essays. It would be called an M.A. or M.Sc. elsewhere. It is intended to cater both for candidates who have already studied some linguistics or comparative philology and wish to pursue some particular interests beyond what would be available at undergraduate level, or for those who are prepared and able to transfer into linguistics and comparative philology from some related area at a relatively advanced level. Candidates can shape the M.St. course to their interests by selecting from a wide range of options. Candidates each have a supervisor to advise on and monitor progress, and to recommend choices of lectures and seminars appropriate to the candidate's interests.

The M.St. is suitable for candidates who are applying for a one-year grant and expect later to apply for a three-year grant for the D. Phil., but also for those who want to study in Oxford for one year before continuing their studies elsewhere or going on to a career outside the academic world, with a self-contained qualification that can lead on to further study, but is also valuable in its own right.

10. Programme outcomes

A. Knowledge and understanding

Students should understand:

- < the nature of a theory and what constitutes an explanation;
- < the central analytical concepts and methods of enquiry of linguistics and comparative philology; data collection and presentation;
- < for linguists, current theories of the nature and organisation of the different 'levels of analysis' of language: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse etc.
- < for philologists, current approaches to the history, structure and relationships of the relevant Indo-European languages;
- < for the relevant options (e.g. experimental phonetics, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, etc.), how to apply practical techniques or experimental methods appropriately; how to work collaboratively as part of a research group.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Our teaching for mainstream courses for graduates consists of lectures reinforced by tutorials and classes. Core material is presented in lectures, often with accompanying practical exercises. Tutorials and classes give the opportunity for further clarification or elaboration, via written essays or analyses of linguistic phenomena. For more specialised options, teaching will be delivered through tutorials, with prescribed reading and written work. Both in tutorials and classes, students are required to give presentations of their own work. Dissertations are written independently, but supervisors are involved at every stage.

Assessment

Tutorials and classes provide for verbal and written feedback on progress to students so that they can assess what strengths and weaknesses they may have. Formal assessment is for the most part by written examinations, although questions may take the form of textual or linguistic commentary, or practical analysis of linguistic phenomena, as well as the more traditional essay. One option paper is assessed wholly via coursework, and proposals for changes to regulations are currently being developed to permit all option papers to be assessed by a wider variety of assessments methods (as appropriate to the subject in question) rather than solely by final examination. It is possible to offer a short dissertation of up to 15,000 words in lieu of one of the two option papers.

B. Intellectual skills

We aim to produce students who can:

- < think, write, and give presentations clearly and logically;
- < critically evaluate and compare different theoretical positions and claims;
- < assess the accuracy of theoretical predictions by careful analysis of data;
- < retrieve, organise, and assimilate different kinds of information from a variety of sources in an effective and scholarly manner;
- < recognise the relevance of findings in linguistics or philology to other related disciplines, and *vice versa*.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

These skills are learned through writing essays which are discussed in detail with supervisors, by giving class presentations and sustaining the consequent discussion, by practical analysis of linguistic data, and by attendance at and participation in graduate/staff seminars, often given by eminent visiting speakers representing a variety of different viewpoints and approaches. If the dissertation is offered, conducting research for and writing the dissertation gives students experience of a piece of work that is considerably more extended, and involves more linguistic analysis, than an essay.

Assessment

Supervisors, as noted above, provide constant feedback and monitoring of progress. In examinations, all papers are anonymous, all are double marked, all borderline cases are reviewed by the external examiner, and a sample of good, bad, and average answers are also seen by the external examiner to ensure accurate calibration. Dissertations are marked by the supervisor and one other examiner: the external examiner again will read all borderline cases and a sample of good and less good.

C. Practical skills

Other than those practical analytical skills common to all types of linguistics and philology, students pursuing some options will learn a particular set of specialised skills: the techniques of

articulatory and acoustic phonetics (the production, recognition and transcription of the sounds of the world's languages); experimental phonetics (design and conduct of scientific experiments to determine new facts about human speech, often using sophisticated instruments, data capture and signal processing on a computer, and statistical analysis of the data); computational linguistics (learning to programme in an appropriate language; using existing software packages; training statistical models; using logic and formal language theory); or corpus linguistics (learning how to manipulate large text files; using corpus processing tools; linguistic annotation; statistical testing; presenting quantitative data in tabular or graphical form); psycholinguistics (design and conduct of scientific experiments to learn how language is produced and processed in the brain).

Teaching/learning methods and strategies; assessment

These skills are taught, and progress is assessed, via small scale practical classes and associated exercises and experiments.

D. Transferable skills

Other than the knowledge specific to linguistics and philology we aim to impart the ability:

- < to work and think independently, quickly, and accurately;
- < to locate, organise, and assimilate information from a variety of sources relevant to a given topic;
- < to write an argument logically and clearly;
- < to give clear and relevant presentations, and manage subsequent discussion
- < to use relevant technology (e.g. computers, software packages, experimental apparatus).

11. Programme Structures and Features

All students take the general examination in Linguistic Theory, paper A. Students who lean more to linguistics than to comparative philology choose two options from those in list B (below). Philologists take two of the three papers in C or D; students choosing the D options may also offer any paper from the B list other than B(vi) in place of D(iii). All students can replace one of the B, C or D options by an extended essay or small dissertation of 15,000 words. Paper B(ii) Syntax is assessed solely via coursework, and proposals for changes to regulations are currently being developed to permit all option papers to be assessed by a wider variety of assessments methods. The dissertation is submitted at the end of the Easter vacation. All examinations are taken at the end of the year.

A. Linguistic Theory.

B.(i) Phonetics and Phonology.

(ii) Syntax.

(iii) Semantics.

(iv) Historical and Comparative Linguistics.

(v) Theory of Translation.

(vi) History and Structure of a Language.

(vii) Experimental Phonetics.

(viii) Sociolinguistics.

(ix) Computational Linguistics.

(x) Psycholinguistics

(xi) Any other subject which the Faculty Board may consider suitable.

C.(i) The comparative grammar of two Indo-European languages or language groups.

(ii) The historical grammar of the languages or language groups selected.

(iii) Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in the languages selected.

D.(i) The history of one or two languages.

(ii) The structure of the language or languages selected.

- (iii) Either a) Translation from, and/or linguistic comment upon, texts in the language or languages selected, or b) Any examination from B above, except for B (vi) History and Structure of Language.

12. Support for students and their learning

Each student has both a **college supervisor**, who is the first port of call for welfare, pastoral or financial issues, and a “departmental” **academic supervisor**. The academic supervisor will meet the student regularly and help to arrange a suitable set of options and tutorials.

The **Director of Graduate Studies** and the **Faculty Chair** serve as extra sources of advice or as alternatives if for some reason the individual supervisor is not appropriate. A similar role is played within the college by the **Tutor for Graduates** or Senior Tutor.

All graduate students in linguistics and philology are admitted by the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics, and it is this body that has primary responsibility for all aspects of academic matters. In particular, the Faculty ensures that students have up to date information on all aspects of the course, both printed and on-line; that teaching and library provision are satisfactory; and that students have made an appropriate choice of options when designing their course. The Faculty can also provide a small amount of financial help for students who need to learn or improve in a particular language.

Library provision is primarily via the Taylorian, the Sackler, and the Bodley, with some material also being held by the English and Experimental Psychology faculty libraries. College libraries often hold copies of the most important textbooks. The Library employs a linguistics subject specialist who provides expert advice and practical help for students, and who ensures that the library holdings are kept in step with the courses currently being taught. The Centre for Linguistics and Philology and the Phonetics Laboratory also hold copies of offprints and working papers relevant to current courses. The Bodleian web site provides access to electronic versions of many of the major journals, as well as to computational resources like the British National Corpus.

Computational facilities in the Centre for Linguistics and Philology, the Laboratory for Language and the Brain, and the Phonetics Laboratory are excellent, with both Windows and Unix networks, large collections of on-line materials (corpora, dictionaries, language processing software), and specialist support for languages requiring non-standard fonts or character sets. Several of the academics who supervise students on this degree have considerable expertise in the use of computers in these subjects, and a fairly high level of competence is fostered in students taking the options in computational linguistics, psycholinguistics, or experimental phonetics. Colleges also provide good computational facilities, with most college rooms being connected to a high bandwidth LAN. The primary means of written communication between staff and students is email, with many lecture notes and supporting materials being posted on our web sites. New students, or those with inadequate IT skills, are encouraged to attend some of the many relevant short courses run by the university computing service. The computing service also hosts the Oxford Text Archive, which is a further source of relevant on-line material.

13. Criteria for Admission

- < General intellectual ability, typically demonstrated by achieving at least a 2.1 or equivalent in an undergraduate degree.
- < Ability to write clear, well structured and well-argued prose.
- < Ability to analyse and solve problems using logical and critical approaches.
- < Genuine interest in language, and an ability to observe underlying patterns in linguistic data including, but not restricted to, the sounds and structures of the language studied and of English.

The latter three criteria are assessed via the two pieces of relevant written work that we require to be submitted with an application. Both of these pieces are read by two assessors, who write a short report with a recommendation. Candidates may be interviewed, in person or by telephone, where further information is required.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

Issues concerning the syllabus or methods of assessment are brought first to the Faculty Board, which meets twice each term. The ultimate authority for approval of any changes is the University's Educational Policy and Standards Committee.

External examiners' reports are submitted first to the Vice-Chancellor, and then discussed and, where appropriate, acted upon by the Faculty Board.

The Faculty Board meetings are attended by two graduate student representatives, who attend all the meetings and bring up any issues which arise during the year concerning teaching or other provision.

At the end of each term, students review and comment on their academic progress and research skills training and generic/transferable skills training undertaken; they may also identify training needs to be addressed in the forthcoming term and any concerns with their own progress. At the end of the year, students are asked to complete a detailed form in which they can comment on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the course. These results are summarised for the Faculty Board.

New academic staff, or graduate students new to teaching, are required to attend the training offered within the faculty for graduate demonstrators and teaching assistants, and are also encouraged to attend the various relevant courses offered by the University's Institute for the Advancement of University Learning.

15. Regulation of assessment

Our current examination conventions for M.Phil. and M.St. are reproduced in the appendix. The examinations are marked according to a single scale, but with different pass and distinction criteria for the two degrees. As explained above, all papers are blind double marked, and the external examiner adjudicates disagreements or borderline cases, and treble marks a sample spread of papers.

16. Indicators of quality

Linguistics and Comparative Philology was awarded a 5* in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.

The 2008 external examiner's report states '... the academic standards set for candidates ... are appropriately high and consistent with the standards required at other institutions with postgraduate Linguistics programmes. The scope and coverage of the examination papers is impressive.'

About 50% of M.Phil. candidates are accepted to proceed to a D.Phil. Those who do are encouraged to submit a version of their M.Phil. dissertation for publication, and most of these appear in reputable international journals.

Many of our M.Phil. students go on after D.Phil. study at Oxford to academic positions. Within the last 10 years former M.Phil. students have obtained lecturerships in Beijing, Glasgow, Cambridge, Hawaii, London, Illinois (Chicago), Ulster, San Francisco, Hawaii, Lund, and Oxford.

17. Further information and queries

The faculty website is the best source of information on the Faculty and the programmes offered:

<http://www.ling-phil.ox.ac.uk/>

Queries should be addressed to **enquiries@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk**.

Appendix: Guidelines for assessment in M.St. and M.Phil. (As revised 2004-5):

Examiners and assessors will use the full scale of marks (including from less than 29% to greater than 80%). All scripts will be double-marked independently, and may be re-read or third-read. Candidates may also be called for viva voce examination. While it is important to arrive at a sense of the value of the entire script, examiners and assessors will assess each answer on its merits.

Both examinations are marked according to a single scale (below). The pass mark for the M.Phil. is 60%. This mark should normally be attained in every paper and the thesis, but a mark below this in some papers may be regarded as acceptable, at the Examiners' discretion, if counterbalanced by an outstanding thesis. The pass mark for the M.St. is 50%, to be attained in every paper.

A candidate's thesis mark may be revised upwards as the result of a viva, but not brought down. Any improvement in marks that makes the difference between passing and failing must be agreed by all those Examiners present. A candidate will be viva'ed for a pass on no more than two papers and will have had to attain the pass mark on all papers which are not viva'ed.

For a Distinction in the M.Phil., a mark of 76 or higher must be attained for the dissertation and one other paper, with no fails. For a Distinction in the M.St., two marks of 70 or higher must be attained.

Failure to comply with rubrics, incomplete answers, missing answers, and poor English will be penalised.

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offence, which is penalised by reference to the Proctors, who have powers to instruct examiners to disregard one piece of work or one whole paper, to exclude the candidate from classification, or to expel from the University.

General guidelines on essays and analysis questions

Essays will be assessed on their relevance to the question attempted, on their structure, on the appropriateness of the illustrative material used and, where possible, on their originality. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the structure of their answers: if the question specifically requires "discussion", one-sided answers will be penalised. Answers may show either in-depth knowledge, or breadth of reference, or both. Evidence of knowledge of critical issues will be expected. Arguments should be supported by illustration, but lengthy quotation from texts may not be appropriate. Length of essay is not necessarily a virtue. Where a question calls for analysis of some linguistic phenomena, candidates will be expected to justify their analysis with respect to empirical observations of those and related phenomena. It is not necessary to follow a particular theoretical model for data analysis questions unless this adds clarity.

Addendum 2007: Penalty for late submission of theses and other presubmitted material

As a rule, the Examiners will reduce the mark for late submission by up to ten percentage points; if a candidate has failed to obtain permission from the Proctors for late submission, he or she will be deemed to have failed in the entire Examination.

**M.Phil. and M.St. in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology
Dissertations, Essays and Analysis Papers**

| Numerical Marks | Class | Criteria |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Greater than 83 | D | Work which consistently exceeds expectations and challenges received views. An outstanding performance, which shows remarkable knowledge and understanding of the material. |
| 76-83 | D | Work which is excellent both in the range and command of the material and in the argument and analysis brought to bear. The answer engages closely with the question and typically displays some originality. |
| 70-75 | D (M.St.) P (M.Phil.) | Work which displays high intelligence, some sophistication of argument, an impressive range of relevant knowledge, and occasional originality. |
| 60-69 | P | Work showing good understanding of the question and of relevant material, organised in a clearly-argued and well-illustrated manner. At the lower end essays may show a competent survey of received ideas. |
| 50-59 | P (M.St.) F (M.Phil.) | Work which, though competent and broadly relevant, is lacking in focus, organisation or breadth of reference. Essays may show lack of judgement, lack of relevance, and may contain recycled or "prepared" material. The presentation may also be clumsy. |
| 40-49 | F | Work which shows some knowledge of the subject but lacks understanding and breadth of reference. The essay may have missed the point of the question, be too short, contain irrelevant material, or fail to respect the rubric. |
| 30-39 | F | Largely irrelevant material, which only superficially addresses the question. |
| Less than or equal to 29 | F | Almost totally irrelevant and superficial work, which shows no understanding of the material. |

D = distinction, P = pass, F = fail