

M.St. and M.Phil. in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology
Examiners' Report: Trinity Term 2009

There were nine candidates for the M. Phil and four for the M. St.

In addition to the three internal Examiners, Prof. Louisa Sadler (University of Essex) served as External Examiner. Nineteen assessors were also appointed: Dr. Peter Barber; Prof. Deborah Cameron; Prof. Thomas Charles -Edwards; Prof. John Coleman; Prof. Mary Dalrymple; Dr. Jan Fellerer; Dr. Maria Goldbach; Prof. John Hawthorne; Prof. George Hewitt; Dr. Kerstin Hoge; Dr. Mary MacRobert; Dr. Louise Mycock; Dr. Stephen Parkinson; Dr. John Penney; Dr. Biljana Scott; Mr. John Charles Smith; Dr. Rosalind Temple; Dr. Elizabeth Tucker; Dr. Ian Watson.

Examiners and assessors set 23 different papers as follows (the number of candidates for each paper is indicated.)

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| A | Linguistic Theory | 13 (9 M Phil & 4 M.St.) |
| Bii | Syntax (examined by coursework) | 7 (4 M.Phil and 3 M.St.) |
| Biii | Semantics | 3 (2 M.Phil. and 1 M.St.) |
| Biv | Historical and comparative linguistics | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Bv | Theory of translation | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Bvi | History and structure of Polish | I (M.Phil.) |
| Bviii | Sociolinguistics | 4 (2 M.Phil. and 2 M.St.) |
| Bx | Pragmatics | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ci | Comparative grammar of Greek with elements of Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Cii | Historical grammar of Greek with elements of Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ciii | Translation from and linguistic comment upon texts in Greek with elements of Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ci | Comparative grammar of Italic and Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Cii | Historical grammar of Italic and Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ciii | Translation from and linguistic comment upon texts in Italic and Anatolian | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ci | Comparative grammar of Indo-Iranian and Germanic | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Cii | Historical grammar of Indo-Iranian and Germanic | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ciii | Translation from and linguistic comment upon texts in Indo-Iranian and Germanic | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ci | Comparative grammar of Romance with elements of Italic philology | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Cii | Historical grammar of Romance with elements of Italic philology | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ciii | Translation from and linguistic comment upon texts in Romance with elements of Italic philology | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ci | Comparative grammar of Italic with Old Irish | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Cii | Historical grammar of Italic with Old Irish | 1 (M.Phil.) |
| Ciii | Translation from and linguistic comment upon texts in Italic with Old Irish | 1 (M.Phil.) |

The titles of the nine M.Phil. theses were:

- An optimality-theoretic analysis of Lachmann's Law.
- The information structure and syntax of a long-distance dependency construction in □Georgian.
- Urban Hijazi and Yafi Arabic: focusing on focus.
- The particles zhe, le, guo in Chinese.
- The function of preverbs in late Latin.
- Aspect in Sophocles: an analysis of the Reinhart-Borik theory of Reference time aspect.
- Grammaticalization and future reference in the Italic/Romance verb.
- The syntax and semantics of present participles in Books Two and Three of the Rgveda.
- The influence of French on Breton morphosyntax

Two of the M.St. candidates elected to submit a dissertation in lieu of a written paper.

The titles of these were:

- Question-formation in the Romance varieties of Val di Fassa and Val di Non.
- Factors affecting L2 accent acquisition

A spreadsheet giving the detailed results of the examination is attached to the master copy of this report submitted to the Faculty Board. All four of the candidates for the MSt. passed on all papers; two M.St. candidates achieved Distinctions on the strength of having two papers with a mark of over 70% (including marks of 80% or over). Of the nine M.Phil. candidates, eight passed, three attaining distinctions. One M.Phil. candidate deserves special mention for meeting the criterion for distinction on all written papers but one (which achieved a near-distinction mark), and an outstanding thesis mark of 80%.

The Examiners conducted a viva voce examination of two of the M.Phil. candidates, whose marks for the written papers fell below the level required for a pass. In one case, the Examiners were of the opinion that the candidate's performance in the viva was sufficient to allow him to be awarded the M.Phil. degree. In the other, while it was found possible to raise the mark on one paper, that paper remained a fail, and no change could be made to the mark for a second failed paper. This candidate had, however, even without the viva, met the criteria for an M.St., and the M.St. degree was accordingly awarded.

The Examiners recommended to the Faculty Board of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics that two of the four candidates for the M.St. should be allowed to continue as PRS students. Of the M.Phil. candidates, three were recommended for transfer to D.Phil. status, while of three others it was felt that their performance justified their continuing in the first instance as PRS, rather than D.Phil., students. One candidate who had requested transfer to D.Phil. status was not considered suitable to proceed either to the D.Phil. or as a PRS student.

The Examiners felt that in future it would be desirable that all candidates whose performance in the written examinations was a fail should be given the opportunity of a viva as a matter of course, and that all candidates should be made aware of this. For this to be effective, the present requirement that a maximum of two papers only could be viva-ed would have to be removed (since a candidate might have failed on more than two papers). It should be noted that this might also entail inviting expert

assessors to assist the Examiners in vivas. It should also be made clear to candidates that the Examiners have the power to viva candidates who are being considered for a Distinction.

In the light of concerns expressed in last year's Examiners' report, the Examiners considered whether an appropriate spread of questions had been answered this year on the general paper, Paper A. It was felt overall that the range of attempted answers was satisfactory, and that essays did not this year read simply as regurgitated answers. It was gratifying to see that a number of candidates had attempted the practical/analytic questions in phonology and syntax. There were also a number of candidates prepared to attempt the broad general questions about issues in linguistic theory contained in the final section of the paper. The introduction of a section with questions on sociolinguistics was welcomed.

The Chair had been concerned during the year by the lack of clear arrangements for communicating the content of set texts (in the 'Ciii', and potentially the 'Diii', papers) to candidates. While candidates invariably knew informally on what they were to be examined, it was agreed that it would be prudent to introduce a formal mechanism whereby they could be informed of set texts well in advance of the examinations. This could perhaps be done with minimum disruption if setters could be asked to provide a definitive list of set texts as part of the examination-setting process.

The Examiners felt some concern about the involvement of thesis-supervisors in evaluation of M.Phil. and M.St. theses. Particularly, it was perceived as undesirable that the supervisor could in some cases be assessor of a thesis they had supervised, but not in others. The solution may be to make all supervisors assessors for the theses they have supervised, as a matter of course, or to exclude all supervisors from acting as assessors in such cases. In any case, there is a need for consistency and the issue needs the attention of the Faculty Board. It was also felt that it was desirable for Examiners to consult supervisors when identifying assessors for theses.

The Chair noted that the Junior Proctors had this year come uncomfortably close to causing a breach of examination security by unilaterally deciding that a paper could be postponed (on medical grounds) without incarceration of a candidate, because she was the sole candidate sitting that paper. The Chair had written to them pointing out that they had acted on an unsafe assumption: had almost any other single-candidate paper in Linguistics and Philology scheduled on the relevant afternoon been treated in the same way, security would have been breached, because of the considerable and well-known overlap of questions across the 'C' papers. It might be prudent to ensure in future that the Proctors are aware of this risk, especially where 'C' papers are concerned.

With regard to the same candidate, the Chair received on 3rd July from the Junior Proctors a note dated 2nd July stating that her performance in an examination taken on 18 June could have been impaired by her condition. The Chair wishes to register his perplexity that a note of such potential importance to the candidate's overall result could have been received 15 days after the examination in question, three days after the final Examiners' meeting, and two days after the publication of the results. In his view any possible consequent adjustment to the candidate's mark for the relevant examination would not have affected the overall result - but this is a matter of sheer good luck.

The Chair had received wrong advice from the Junior Proctors' office (corrected in the nick of time by the Examinations Schools, with subsequent confirmation from the Junior Proctors' office) regarding the procedure to be followed in a case where the Examiners wished to award an M.St. degree instead of an M.Phil. It might be helpful if clear information on this point could be provided in the general advice circulated to examinations Chairs.

Professor Aditi Lahiri

Professor Martin Maiden (Chair)

Dr. Philomen Probert

Professor Louisa Sadler (External Examiner)