

Report of Examiners

MPhil and MSt in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology, 2012

1. Examination Arrangements

There were 5 MSt and 9 MPhil candidates. The final examiners' meeting was held on 26 June 2012. All of the candidates sat their examinations in Schools, with no special permissions requested.

Examiners

Prof. Andreas Willi (Worcester College) (Chairman)
Dr Jan Fellerer (Wolfson College)
Dr Elinor Payne (St Hilda's College)
Dr Adam Ledgeway (University of Cambridge, External)

Assessors

Dr Ash Asudeh (Jesus)
Dr Brian Ball (St Anne's)
Dr Peter Barber (Wolfson)
Dr Alderik Blom (Corpus Christi)
Prof. Deborah Cameron (Worcester)
Prof. John Coleman (Wolfson)
Dr Juan Carlos Conde (Magdalen)
Prof. Mary Dalrymple (Linacre)
Dr Paloma García-Bellido (St Cross)
Dr Kerstin Hoge (St Hilda's)
Dr Howard Jones (Keble)
Prof. Aditi Lahiri (Somerville)
Prof. Martin Maiden (Trinity)
Dr Sandra Paoli (Balliol)
Dr Stephen Parkinson (Linacre)
Dr John Penney (Wolfson)
Prof. Stephen Pulman (Somerville)
Dr Johanneke Sytsema (OULS)
Dr Rosalind Temple (New)
Dr Ilya Yakubovich (Wolfson)

Papers

Paper	MPhil/MSt
Paper A: Linguistic Theory	9/5
B(i) Phonetics and Phonology	4/1
B(ii) Syntax (essay)	3/1
B(iii) Semantics (essay)	2/1
B(iv) Historical and Comparative Linguistics	1/0
B(vi) History and Structure of German	1/0
B(vi) History and Structure of Dutch	2/0

B(vii) Experimental Phonetics (report)	2/0
B(viii) Sociolinguistics	2/2
B(ix) Computational Linguistics	2/0
B(x) Philosophy of Language	2/0
C(i) Comparative Grammar of Germanic and Indo-Iranian	1/0
C(ii) Historical Grammar of Germanic and Indo-Iranian	1/0
C(iii) Translation/commentary, texts in Gmc. and Indo-Iranian	1/0
D(i) History of Old English and Old High German	1/0
D(ii) Structure of Old English and Old High German	1/0
D(iii) Translation/commentary, texts in Old English and OHG	1/0
D(i) History of Spanish and Catalan	0/1
D(ii) Structure of Spanish	0/1
D(ii) Structure of Ancient Greek	0/1

Theses

1. MPhil

West Germanic gemination: linear and hierarchical constraints in Old English and Old High German
Double object constructions and “bill” verbs in English
Reconstruction and background of the Germanic Class III weak verbs
Verbs of speaking in the Scandinavian languages: a diachronic and synchronic analysis of their distribution
Reference to social kinds
Direct object scrambling in Dutch: an information structural approach
Perceiving voice quality
Constraints on discontinuous nominal phrases in Latin from a Lexical-Functional Grammar perspective
Of wine in bondage: a case-study of constraints on metaphor

The standard of the MPhil theses was very good, with seven out of nine obtaining a mark in the distinction range (and three a mark of 80 or above). 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 very clearly failed the compulsory Linguistic Theory paper. According to the Faculty’s assessment guidelines for the MPhil, a pass mark (60 or higher) “should normally be attained in every paper (and the thesis)”, although “a mark below 60% may be regarded as acceptable, at the Examiners’ discretion, if counterbalanced by an outstanding thesis”. Since the thesis was clearly not outstanding, such counterbalancing was not an option for the Linguistic Theory paper, and given the distance between the actual mark of 45 in that paper and the pass mark of 60, it was felt that a viva was not adequately justified. The examiners also discussed whether the candidate should be offered a choice between re-sitting the examination or being awarded an MSt, but came to the conclusion that the Linguistic Theory paper was as essential a part of the MSt as it is of the MPhil, and that therefore no MSt should be awarded either.

2. MSt (optional)

Accentual influence in segmental phonology: an investigation into vocalic loss in Ancient

Greek
The morphology of number on the Occitan noun phrase

One of the two MSt theses obtained a high distinction-level mark, while the other was a respectable pass.

2. Results

All MSt candidates and 8 out of 9 MPhil candidates passed. One MPhil candidate failed (cf. above). 3 MSt candidates and 4 MPhil candidates were awarded a distinction. The George Wolf Prize in Linguistics and Philology was awarded to the best MPhil candidate, who had achieved a comfortable distinction in all of his papers as well as the thesis and amply deserved some form of special recognition.

Marking was fairly unproblematic; as in previous years, markers were provided with mark sheets for dissertations and papers. The external examiner looked at all the scripts and theses and gave a third opinion on a few of them, but this never substantially diverged from those of the first and second markers. None of the candidates was viva'd.

3. Recommendations and general remarks

Overall, the entire examination process went smoothly. In particular, last year's problem of wrongly filled-in examination forms did not occur again this year.

A very minor issue arose with respect to the Computational Linguistics paper. This paper is externally taught and assessed; marks are then communicated to the Chair of Examiners, a process which is convenient and unbureaucratic. Due to a difference in procedure between Linguistics and Computational Science, however, one of the Linguistics candidates was notified of their result in this one paper already ahead of the other (final) examinations. Since this will not have affected their final performance (resulting in a distinction), this does not seem to have constituted a real problem.

Distinctions (cf. above) were awarded according to the criteria communicated to candidates (MSt: two marks above 70, MPhil: thesis and two further marks above 70, and none below 60); minor adjustments to these rules have been agreed by the Faculty, but did not yet come into force this year. (If the new rules had already been in place, the same MPhil candidates as now would have achieved a distinction, but one MSt candidate would not have achieved their distinction, by a narrow margin; since the purpose of the new rules is to (slightly) reduce the number of distinctions, they appear to do what they are designed for.)

Prof. A. J. Willi (Chair)

Dr J. Fellerer

Dr E. Payne

Dr A. Ledgeway (External)

26 June 2012