

Report of Examiners

MSt/MPhil in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology 2017

1. Examination Arrangements

Following the withdrawal from the examination of one MSt candidate and the switch of three candidates from the MPhil to the MSt course (one of them returning from a suspension year), there were 12 second-year MPhil candidates (HGLP), 15 MSt candidates (KGLP), and 13 first-year MPhil candidates (Paper A only: HGLO). Special examination arrangements were made for two candidates: one of them sat Paper A in the Clarendon Institute Building, another sat one option paper in their college.

The final Examiners's meeting was held on 27 June 2017.

Examiners:

Prof. Andreas Willi (Chair)

Prof. Ash Asudeh

Prof. Deborah Cameron

Prof. Kersti Börjars (University of Manchester, External)

The following papers were examined by written three-hour examination:

A: Linguistic Theory (12 MSt, 13 MPhil first-year)

B(i): Phonetics and Phonology (2 MSt, 2 MPhil)

B(iv): Historical and Comparative Linguistics (3 MSt)

B(vi): History and Structure of French (1 MSt)

B(vi): History and Structure of German (2 MSt)

B(vi): History and Structure of Italian (2 MPhil)

B(vi): History and Structure of Polish (1 MPhil)

B(vi): History and Structure of Russian (1 MSt)

B(xi): Morphology (1 MPhil)

B(xi): Comparative Romance Linguistics (2 MSt, 2 MPhil)

C(i): Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin (1 MPhil)

C(i): Comparative Grammar of Greek and Indo-Iranian (1 MPhil)

C(i): Comparative Grammar of Armenian and Greek (1 MSt)

C(ii): Historical Grammar of Greek and Latin (1 MPhil)

C(ii): Historical Grammar of Greek and Indo-Iranian (1 MPhil)

C(iii): Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Greek and Latin (1 MPhil)

C(iii): Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Greek and Indo-Iranian (1 MPhil)

C(iii): Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Armenian and Greek (1 MSt)

D(i): History of Italian (1 MSt)

The following papers were examined by written submission:

B(ii): Syntax (4 MSt, 8 MPhil)

B(iii): Semantics (2 MSt, 5 MPhil)

B(v): Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics (2 MPhil)

B(vii): Experimental Phonetics (3 MSt, 2 MPhil)

B(viii): Sociolinguistics (5 MSt)
B(ix): Computational Linguistics (2 MPhil, assessed in 2016)
B(xi): Computational Morphology (2 MPhil)
B(xi): Quantitative Linguistics (1 MSt)
B(xi): Aspects of Rioplatense Spanish Morphosyntax (essay) (1 MPhil)

The following MSt thesis was submitted:

- “The semantics of pre- and post-nominal adjectives in Romance: a diachronic study”

The following MPhil theses were submitted:

- “Inflectional periphrasis in LFG”
- “Processing tenses for the living and the dead: a psycholinguistic investigation of lifetime effects in tensed and ‘tenseless’ languages”
- “Genericity and the human conceptual system: on the morphosyntax of generic subjects”
- “Diminutives, augmentatives, and intensifiers in Cruceño Spanish”
- “A comparative study of postverbal negation in Romance”
- “An acoustic and articulatory study of syllable-internal processes and their consequences in varieties of Mandarin Chinese”
- “Left-headed vs right-headed: decomposition of morphologically complex English words”
- “Appraisal of the vitality of the Tatar language in the Perm region”
- “Expressive modifiers, intensification, and predicates of personal taste”
- “Polish gerunds in copular constructions”
- “Pre-Greek suffixes in the Greek lexicon a case study on the suffix -ακ-”
- “Tense and aspect uses in Pindar’s mythical narrative”

2. Results

2.1. General remarks

In most cases marking was unproblematic, although some of it had to be done to a very tight schedule due to a number of extensions granted by the Proctors’ Office without consultation with the Chair of Examiners (cf. below). In the case of one candidate who had (late-)submitted an extended essay only by midday before the day of the final Examiners’ meeting it was not possible to finalise the marks, nor was this possible in the case of another candidate who had not submitted two late pieces of work even by that point. Since the deadline had been extended by the Proctors for both of these candidates, the Examiners had also been given permission to deliberate on these candidates separately.

All the scripts and submissions were marked by two assessors. In one case where the assessors did not agree, third-marking was arranged. The External Examiner also looked at all the scripts and theses and gave an opinion on a selection of them, notably all the borderline cases. In no case did she feel a mark should have been awarded that was outside the mark range of the initial two marks.

The Examiners had to make minor adjustments (impose penalties) to agreed marks in two cases where a thesis had been received late on the day of the submission deadline, and in two cases where a thesis and an extended essay had been received several days (though only one working day) after the submission deadline but the Proctors had eventually allowed them to be assessed

subject to an appropriate penalty being imposed. After some deliberation the Examiners decided to impose a penalty of 1 point in the case of same-day late submissions, and a penalty of 5 points for every working day in the case of late submission not received on the regular submission day.

In one case, where a thesis was considerably (almost 20%) longer than the permitted maximum length of 25,000 words, the Examiners imposed a penalty of 4 points.

2.2. Distinctions

2 MSt candidates and 4 MPhil candidates were awarded a Distinction. The George Wolf Prize was jointly awarded to two MPhil candidates: one of them had achieved marks over 70 in all the option papers as well as a high thesis mark, while the other had a slightly higher average mark next to a slightly lower (but still Distinction-level) thesis mark. Among the MSt students with Distinction, there was also one whose average stood out positively.

2.3. Theses

For the most part the quality of the MPhil theses was high; 7 out of 12 received a mark in the Distinction range (> 70). One MPhil thesis was judged by the assessors to fall short of what is required at the MPhil level, and the Examiners concurred with that judgment.

2.4. Vivas and Failures

2 MSt candidates and 1 MPhil candidate failed in the examination. One of the MSt candidates was viva'ed by the Examiners, but following the viva the Examiners still felt that the marks given were appropriate; the other MSt candidate's marks were such that a viva could not have remedied them. These candidates may of course resit the papers in which they failed next year. One MPhil candidate failed because of an insufficient thesis mark; unless this candidate chooses to resit next year, they will be offered an MSt degree instead of the MPhil degree since the examination performance was otherwise satisfactory and clearly sufficient for the award of an MSt.

2.5. Outstanding material

At the point when this report is finalised, the assessment of two candidates' material that had not been submitted by a deadline immediately before the Examiners' meeting was still outstanding. If the Proctors grant permission for this material to be assessed, the appropriate penalties will be imposed according to the standards explained above, and the Examiners will confirm the final result by confidential correspondence.

3. General comments

For a number of reasons the Examiners feel dissatisfied with the examinations process this year. Primarily these relate to (a) the way in which requests for deadline extensions for theses and presubmitted coursework can be made and (b) the way in which these requests were handled in this particular year by the Proctors.

ad (a). Requests for deadline extensions for theses and presubmitted coursework can be made by candidates either before or after the regular deadline. In either case such requests are submitted through the candidates' college. While sensible in the case of undergraduate examinations where personal and senior tutors in colleges are familiar with their students and follow their academic

work closely, this system is inappropriate at the graduate level where departments have the academic oversight over students' courses: the equivalent of an undergraduate's personal tutor is *de facto* the course supervisor, and the equivalent of the senior tutor the Director of Graduate Studies. Against this background to allow requests for deadline extensions to be put in without *any* departmental input – most naturally from the DGS – is counterintuitive.

ad (b). In this year's MSt/MPhil exams, nine requests for the extension of deadlines for a presubmitted essay were made; in addition there was one such request for the extension of a thesis deadline. All of these requests were granted by the Proctors. They came from 4 different candidates (1 MSt, 3 MPhil), and they concerned 4 different option papers (Syntax; Semantics; Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics; one B(xi) special subject).

Now, the Examiners would like to highlight the fact that, in making their rulings on these applications, this year's Proctors have acted in breach of Part 14.5 of the University of Oxford's *Examination Regulations*:

"Where the candidate wishes to be permitted to present such thesis (or other exercise) later than the date prescribed by any statute, or regulation, the procedure shall be as follows:

- (1) the candidate shall include this request in the submission made to the Proctors under 14.3 above;
- (2) in cases where a significant extension of time is requested, or where the proposed new submission date is beyond the date by which the thesis (or other exercise) may reasonably be assessed for consideration at the relevant meeting of the examiners, or where the request is made after the original date for submission, *the Proctors shall consult the chair of examiners about any such application and shall then decide whether or not to grant permission.*"

In not one of the nine requests received was the Chair of Examiners consulted in accordance with this regulation. If he had been consulted, he would have been able to point out that it is not reasonable to grant several month-long extensions for substantial pieces of technical work with a new deadline of 12 noon on the day before the final Examiners' meeting. When notified of the first of these extensions, the Chair of Examiners immediately wrote back to make this point, but received no reply. Only at a much later stage, when the Chair of Examiners had to contact the Proctors' Office on another matter (as no ruling had been forthcoming for several weeks on a regular late submission whose release by Schools for assessment had to be approved), and when he took this opportunity again to underline the organisational problems caused by the extensions, was permission given to consider the pieces with a new deadline just one day before the final Examiners' meeting only *after* that meeting (in order to allow more time for assessment); but at that point several colleagues had of course already been forced to adjust their personal schedules in order not to derail the examination process even further.

The Examiners would like to recommend that these matters be brought to the attention of the Division's Humanities Graduate Studies Committee since they may not be isolated within the Division (or indeed beyond). They hope that, in the medium term, appropriate adjustments to the examination process can be made which will prevent a repeat of this year's experience. The additional burden which the issues outlined above have placed on the Chair of Examiners and the Faculty's Graduate Studies Administrator has been considerable.

(signed: Andreas Willi, Ash Asudeh, Deborah Cameron, Kersti Börjars)

Oxford, 27 June 2017