

# **M.PHIL AND M.ST IN GENERAL LINGUISTICS AND COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY**

## **EXAMINERS' REPORT 2018**

### **1. Examination arrangements**

The members of this year's Board of Examiners were Prof. Deborah Cameron (Chair), Dr Wolfgang de Melo, Dr Sandra Paoli and Prof. Kersti Börjars (External Examiner, Manchester University). The internal examiners met twice during the year: they held a first meeting to agree on the appointment of assessors for each paper, and a second meeting to check draft examination papers (the External Examiner, though not present, had also looked at the draft papers and sent comments to this meeting). The final Board meeting took place on 3 July 2018 with all examiners (internal and external) present, and Silke Zahrir (Graduate Studies Administrator) in attendance.

At the final meeting the Board considered 9 1<sup>st</sup> year M.Phil (HGLO) candidates taking Paper A, 12 2<sup>nd</sup> year M.Phil (HGLP) candidates and 11 M.St (KGLP) candidates, including one resit candidate. Special arrangements had been made for two M.Phil candidates who required extra time or particular facilities because of a documented disability. There were also three candidates (2 M.St and one M.Phil) who were not considered because they had suspended their studies on medical grounds, and one resit candidate who received permission to defer their papers until next year.

The following elements were examined by 3-hour paper:

A: Linguistic Theory (11 M.St, 9 M.Phil first-year)  
B(i): Phonetics and Phonology (2 MSt, 2 MPhil)  
B(iv): Historical and Comparative Linguistics (1 MSt)  
B(vi): History and Structure of French (1 M.Phil)  
B(xi): Morphology (3 MPhil)  
B(xi): Comparative Romance Linguistics (1 MPhil)  
B(xi) Computational Linguistics (1 M.Phil)  
C(i): Comparative Grammar of Slavonic and Germanic (1 MPhil)  
C(ii): Historical Grammar of Slavonic and Germanic (1 MPhil)  
C(iii): Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Slavonic and Germanic (1 MPhil)

The following elements were examined by written submission:

B(ii): Syntax (3 MSt, 3 MPhil)  
B(iii): Semantics (3 MSt, 6 MPhil)  
B(v): Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics (4 M.St, 3 MPhil)  
B(vi): History and Structure of Armenian (1 M.Phil)  
B(vii): Experimental Phonetics (1 M.St, 4 M.Phil)  
B(viii): Sociolinguistics (4 MSt, 7 M.Phil)  
B(xi): Theoretical Phonology (1 M.Phil)  
B(xi): Writing systems (1 M.St)

11 M.Phil theses and 2 M.St theses were submitted. (One M.Phil thesis remained outstanding at the time of the final Board meeting, since the candidate had been granted an extension by the Proctors.)

A list of the titles of all theses and written submissions for all regular options appears in Appendix A.

All examination scripts, written submissions and theses were marked by two internal assessors. This year there were no cases where a significant disagreement between the internal markers necessitated a third reading. Nor were there any cases in which the examiners were obliged to impose penalties for work that came in late without permission or exceeded the permitted length. There was one case where the External Examiner found a significant degree of overlap between a candidate's thesis and the same candidate's written submission for one option. She declined to impose a penalty, but recommended that in future supervisors should ensure that students are aware of the non-duplication rule and of the penalties examiners may impose if it is not adhered to.

The External Examiner was asked to look at all cases where the internal markers had agreed on a mark below 60, at the scripts and submissions which had received the highest marks (in the 76-85 range), and at borderline cases. She also read a large sample of work where the marks fell within the 60-75 range and were not borderline.

As recommended in the University's Policy and Guidance documents, the Board appointed a small subcommittee to consider cases where candidates had submitted Factors Affecting Performance (FAP) applications. This Medical and Special Circumstances Subcommittee consisted of Sandra Paoli (chair) and Kersti Börjars (external examiner). It held a pre-meeting to consider FAP applications in detail and agree recommendations which were then fed into the discussion of individual cases at the full Board meeting. There were three FAP applications: for reasons of confidentiality the recommendations made by the subcommittee and the actions taken by the Board in these cases are set out in a separate appendix to this report (Appendix B).

## **2. Results**

### **2.1. Summary**

In the M.Phil, 8 candidates were awarded Distinctions and 3 candidates gained a Pass. (One candidate still has work outstanding and will be considered by the Board at a later date.) In the M.St, 5 candidates were awarded Distinctions and 5 candidates gained a Pass. One resit candidate failed.

Among the first year M.Phil students who took Paper A, 3 candidates earned marks above 70, 4 candidates passed with marks between 60 and 69, and 2 candidates had marks below 60 (under the regulations for the M.Phil they will have the opportunity to re-take the Paper next year, but the mark will be capped at 60).

### **2.2. Distinctions and Prizes**

Because of the high number of candidates (13 out of a total of 23) gaining Distinctions this year, the Chair asked the External Examiner to pay close attention to whether our criteria for awarding marks of 70+ had been appropriately and consistently applied. Prof. Börjars reported at the meeting that in her view the criteria had been applied appropriately, and that the marks awarded to candidates were an accurate reflection of the standards they had achieved. There were a number of individual marks at the top of the range (between 76 and 85), all of which Prof. Börjars confirmed. The examiners commend these candidates for the

very high standard of their work. They also offer their congratulations to the recipient of the George Wolf prize for the year's most outstanding performance, an M.St candidate who had achieved two marks of over 80 and one in the mid-70s.

Since there were also some excellent performances on the M.Phil (notably one candidate whose profile included a mark of 85), the Board did wonder whether it would be possible in future to award a prize for the best performance in each of the two degrees (provided that there had been performances of a sufficiently high standard in both). The view was expressed that when we judge the two together we are not comparing like with like: if 'outstanding performance' is defined by a candidate's overall profile, there is a strong probability that an outstanding M.St candidate will rank above the corresponding M.Phil candidate, simply because the latter's profile includes more elements, making it less likely s/he will have achieved stellar marks across the board. It was also suggested that there is a material difference between a degree that requires a thesis and one that does not. The candidate ultimately selected by the Board had an exceptional profile, and is clearly a worthy recipient of the prize, but we still found it difficult to discount the claims of the best M.Phil candidate, whose performance we thought was exceptional in other ways. We would therefore like to suggest that the Faculty consider awarding an annual prize in each category in future.

### **2.3. *Theses***

The standard of this year's theses was high: of the 13 theses submitted, nine received marks of 70 or more, and five of those earned marks over 75. All other theses (leaving aside one which has not yet been submitted because its author has been granted an extension) met the standard required to pass.

### **2.4. *Failures***

Only one candidate failed to meet the standard required for the award of a degree: this was a candidate re-sitting two M.St papers that the examiners had failed in 2017. On one paper the candidate improved the original mark to a pass (since it was a resit the mark was capped at 60), but on the other paper the resit mark was lower than the original failing mark. Since in the case of a resit the examiners are obliged to base their final decision on the most recent marks obtained by the candidate there was no argument for holding a Viva (the failure was not a borderline case) and the Board had no option but to record an overall fail.

Among the first year M.Phil candidates who were not being considered for the award of a degree, two received marks under 60 for Paper A. In one case the mark did not justify holding an oral examination, and in the other (where there were factors affecting performance, as detailed in Appendix B) there were reasons to believe that a Viva would not be in the candidate's interests. These two candidates will have the opportunity to resit Paper A in 2019, and since in both cases the mark was over 50, the regulations also give next year's examiners discretion to offset it against a strong performance in the thesis (so long as the candidates do not fail any other element of the examination).

### **2.5. *Paper A***

Most of the 20 candidates who sat Paper A (11 M.St and 9 1<sup>st</sup> year M.Phil) achieved an overall pass, and seven of them earned marks of 70 or over. But three candidates failed (the two mentioned above and one other—a candidate who was nevertheless able to satisfy the requirements for the award of the M.St), and about a third of the candidates (7 out of 20)

received a failing mark for at least one question. Since Paper A tests candidates' understanding of the core areas of linguistics, the examiners did feel that these marks gave some cause for concern. It was noted that candidates can prepare for Paper A by taking a mock exam and receiving feedback on it, but that many do not take up that opportunity. In the examiners' view it might be helpful if all students were actively encouraged to do so. The External Examiner commented that in her view the Paper was not unduly difficult; it was a fair test of the knowledge and skills candidates were meant to have acquired in the first part of the first year. We believe it would be worth considering whether anything can be done to reinforce this early Foundations teaching (whether through the mock exam or through other measures) and so raise the standard of performance at the lower end.

### **3. Procedural Matters**

Last year's examiners' report expressed concern about the way the Proctors' Office had dealt with candidates' requests for extensions to the official submission deadlines: in a number of cases the Proctors had approved new deadlines which made unrealistic demands on markers, often without consulting the Chair of the Board. We are happy to report that this problem was not repeated in 2018. The Chair was consulted about all extension requests, and the extensions granted by the Proctors either left sufficient time for marks to be agreed before the final Board meeting, or else accepted that decisions on the candidate would have to be taken by the Board at a later date.

This year's examination process did however draw attention to a problem with the Faculty's own internal communications. Approving students' proposed thesis topics and their requests to take special subjects under option B(xi) is the responsibility of the Faculty Board, but since their decisions have implications for examining (in particular, for the appointment of suitable assessors), they ought as a matter of course to be communicated to the Chair of Examiners. At the moment they are not. There were several cases this year where the Chair only learned by chance of a decision that necessitated a change to the appointed assessors (e.g., some candidates who had proposed special topics were told to address their particular interests under the heading of an existing option instead, and one or two were given permission to change their thesis topic). If this problem has not arisen before, that may be because previous Chairs of Examiners were also members of Faculty Board, and as such were automatically privy to its decisions. This year's Chair of Examiners, however, is not a Faculty Board member, and it cannot be assumed that all future Chairs will be. To avoid any repetition of this year's problems, therefore, we recommend that the Faculty adopt procedures to ensure that its current Chair of Examiners will automatically receive the information s/he needs from the Faculty Board. If the Faculty Board intends to delegate decisions with implications for examining, such as the approval of thesis topics and special subjects, to the new Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) which will come into being in 2018-19, we recommend that whoever currently serves as the Chair of Examiners for the M.Phil/M.St should also serve *ex officio* as a member of the GSC.

A related issue was raised by Dr Paoli, who observed that in some cases the Board is not given enough information about theses to make sensible decisions on who should be asked to assess them. It is true that at the relevant stage of the year some students may still be unclear about the precise content of a thesis, but the Board feels they should be asked to provide something that looks more like an abstract than a vague statement of intent, and also that they should indicate what subfield(s) they consider the thesis to belong to. That should obviously

inform the choice of assessors, but it is not always clear from the descriptions given to the Board.

The External Examiner reported that from her perspective the arrangements made for examining this year had been unproblematic, and that she was satisfied with the quantity, quality and timeliness of communications received from the Administrator and the Chair of Examiners. The Chair noted that this was Professor Börjars's third year as External Examiner, and that the regulations allowed her to continue in this role for a fourth year if she wished to do so. Prof. Börjars indicated that she was willing to serve for a further year, and the Board expressed its gratitude to her.

Though 32 students is not a large number, the range of options and topics covered by the M.Phil and M.St makes the examination of their work a complex undertaking whose smooth running is heavily dependent on the co-operation of a large number of people. The Chair recorded her thanks to our administrator Silke Zahrir, to her co-examiners Dr de Melo and Dr Paoli, and to the many academic colleagues, in the Linguistics Faculty and other Faculties, who participated in this year's examination as assessors.

Deborah Cameron (Chair of Examiners)  
Wolfgang de Melo  
Sandra Paoli  
Kersti Börjars (External Examiner)  
5 July 2018

**APPENDIX A:**  
**TITLES OF THESES AND WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS**

***M.Phil thesis titles***

Computing Subjectivity: Taste Predicates and Automatic Reasoners

The development of Future Markers in Mauritian Creole

Performance and Authenticity in Accent Challenges on YouTube

The Prosody of Gerard Manley Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm

Metrical Patterns in Arabic

Diachronic analysis of quantity distinctions in West Slavonic

Prosodic units in Mandarin Chinese: From a Perspective of Psycholinguistics

Accounting for double past participle forms in Romance

The relationship of English and German in formal domains in Germany

A study of requests and apologies in Russian

Characterising Plastic Mandarin: A quantitative modelling approach

***M.St thesis titles***

Filling the gap: A new approach to chain shifting in lexical Semantics

An acoustic analysis of the fricative sounds in Eastern Balochi

***Written submissions***

***B(ii): Syntax***

A Lexical-Functional approach to Causative alternations in Siraiki

Modern French and Information Structure: Comparing an LFG and a Cartographic Approach

Asking questions in Hindi/Urdu: WH-Movement and Word-Order Variation

Classifiers in Thai

Ditransitive Constructions in two French-based Creoles

Grammatical features in the history of polite pronouns: an LFG analysis

*B(iii): Semantics*

Affectedness and truth-conditions in grammatical function alternations in English: The benefactive

Complement coercion revisited: Aspectual verbs, incremental themes and distributivity in event semantics

Scalar implicatures of conjunction and disjunction in Mandarin Chinese

Scalarity and assessment sensitivity

Truth, use and assessment: A theory of reclaimed slurs

Revisiting concepts in motion event expressions — Insights from Mandarin

Query responses: Answering a question with a question in dialogue

Microaggressions: A semantic analysis

Expressivity and French pronominal adjectives

*B(v): Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics*

Animacy Selection Restrictions on Instrument and Natural Force Subjects: An ERP Based Analysis

Interpreting cardinal quantifiers online: Ambiguity resolution and antecedent retrieval

Electrophysiological investigations into processing of Latvian vowel length and tone contour

Online comprehension of subjective adjectives: investigating two syntactic sources of adjectives and the Garden Path Model

The processing of semantically opaque morphologically-complex words in German-English bilinguals

Morphological Decomposition in English: Evidence from Rhyme Priming

Acquisition of grammatical gender in German-learning infants

*B(vii): Experimental Phonetics*

Identification and discrimination of synthetic English voiceless fricatives by British and Chinese speakers

The perception of fricatives in monosyllabic English words

Auditory and acoustic approaches to intervocalic /l/-vocalisation in Bulgarian

Categorical Perception of English fricatives: Differences between Mandarin Chinese native

speaker and British English native speaker

Investigation of the perception of English fricatives by native English and native Mandarin Chinese speakers

B(viii): Sociolinguistics

A sociolinguistic case study of motives for language preservation: SIL International and UNESCO

African American English in the golden age of television

Char siu's better than guanxi? Identity in Hong Kong English

Exploring the use of Arabic loanwords to index political stances in Turkey

Forms of address in Germany

'He's your mate, mate!': the indexical field of *mate* as used by Australian politicians

Key features in stand-up comedy: an investigation of AAE use and comedic effect

Modern media consumption and the deceleration of sociophonetic change

Multimodality and embodiment in sociolinguistics

On language shift and language maintenance: the Shamakhi and Karabakh dialects of Armenian

The indexical function of vocal fry in a cross-cultural context