

M.St. and M.Phil. in Linguistics, Philology, and Phonetics
Examiners' Report for the academic year 2023–2024

Part I

A. STATISTICS AND EXAMINATION ARRANGEMENTS

50 candidates were examined this year: 35 for the M.Phil. (with 18 of these sitting the first-year Paper A exam and 17 taking the second-year exams) and 15 for the M.St. The second-year M.Phil. examinees and 2 of the M.St. (Research Preparation) candidates submitted a thesis.

At the final examiners' meeting on 2 July 2024, award decisions were made on 33 M.Phil. candidates (including all first-year M.Phil. candidates) and on 14 M.St. candidates; several of these had extended submission deadlines but could nevertheless be considered because of the hard work and commitment of the assessors of the respective submissions. Award decisions on the remaining candidates who had even longer extended submission deadlines were made at an additional examiners' meeting on 4 October 2024. The latter meeting took place online, again with the full Board of Examiners present, and with Mrs Camilla Rock (Academic Administrator) and Ms Liberty Braddyll in attendance.

Classification statistics for this year and the past two years are given in the following table. At the final examiners' meeting the examiners considered this year's outcome in comparison with that of recent years and noted that it appeared to be broadly in line with these; in particular, the unusually high number of Fail classifications and relatively low number of Distinctions last year was not repeated.

Category	Number			Percentage (%)		
	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Distinction	9	3	6	28%	9%	25%
Merit	11	8	9	34%	24%	38%
Pass	9	15	7	28%	45%	29%
Fail	3	5	0	10%	15%	0%

The following units of assessment were examined by a written three-hour examination:

- Paper A: Linguistic Theory
- Phonetics and Phonology
- History and Structure of German
- History and Structure of French
- History and Structure of Japanese
- History of Italian
- History of Indo-Iranian
- Structure of Italian
- Structure of Indo-Iranian
- Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Indo-Iranian
- Comparative Grammar of Indo-Iranian and Hittite
- Comparative Grammar of Italic and Celtic
- Comparative Grammar of Celtic and Germanic
- Historical Grammar of Indo-Iranian and Hittite
- Historical Grammar of Italic and Celtic
- Historical Grammar of Celtic and Germanic
- Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Indo-Iranian and Hittite
- Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Italic and Celtic
- Translation from, and linguistic comment upon, texts in Indo-Iranian and Hittite

The following units of assessment were examined by a written submission:

- Syntax
- Semantics and Pragmatics
- Computational Linguistics
- Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics
- Experimental Phonetics
- Sociolinguistics
- Morphology
- Historical Pragmatics
- Corpus Linguistics

The following M.St. (Research Preparation) and M.Phil. theses were examined:

- Prosodic contact in varieties of Canadian French (M.St.)
- Unpacking additivity biases reveal the class of sampling algorithm for word predictability (M.St.)
- The infinitive in the *Atharvaveda*: a post-Rgvedic analysis
- Warlpiri WH-questions and the PIVOT function: an evaluation
- Counting on the verb: a study of aspectual effects on nominal structure in Lithuanian
- Relative and absolute gradable nouns: aspects of scale structure and processing
- The relevance of corpora in generative linguistics and a corpus-based examination of generative contemporary Japanese syntax
- Quantifying political polarization in the context of UK parliamentary debates
- Aspect and evidentiality: the case of Mandarin Chinese *guo*
- “What rains?”: subjecthood in English meteorological expressions
- A diachronic study of the syntax and semantics of Welsh CPREPs

- Categorical perception of Mandarin Chinese tones by advanced learners of Mandarin Chinese: potential influence from tone-bearing-vowels
- Documenting the systematicity of vowel shifts in Tsat
- The resolution of silence: towards an Attention-Coherence approach to Mandarin pronoun resolution
- When a generic becomes normative: complex speech acts and the normative assumption
- Optimising XML annotation of phonological corpora to aid in the machine learning of speech synthesis models
- The poetics of obfuscation: linguistic riddles and enigmas in the *Rigveda*
- Towards a unified account of the Old Irish verbal complex

Examination conventions

Candidates are made aware of the examination conventions to be followed by the examiners by means of an email sent to them individually, to which the conventions were attached. A copy of those conventions is attached. Exam conventions are also made available via the Graduate Linguistics Overview tile on Canvas.

Marking of scripts

All scripts were double-marked. In one case where the initial markers did not reach agreement, a further opinion was sought and all the examiners also considered the piece of assessment carefully to before a final decision was made. Scaling was not employed.

The external examiner sampled a wide range of scripts and submissions and paid particular attention to all cases where there was more substantial disagreement between initial marks or where the internal markers had not awarded a pass mark; markers' comments were made available to her.

Use of vivas

On the day of the final examiners' meeting (2 July 2024), no viva was held. One viva was held online on the day of the additional examiners' meeting (4 October 2024), with all the examiners present and one specialist assessor leading the interview; no change in the classification of the candidate was made as a result of the viva.

B. NEW EXAMINING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were no new methods or procedures operated for the first time in the current academic year.

C. RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Given the new possibility of self-certified extensions by one week, the timescale allowed for marking submissions becomes even shorter in many cases. The Faculty might therefore consider whether the official submission deadlines should be moved forward accordingly. (The examiners are of the opinion that the impact of the new policy on Faculty marking operations etc. should have been more carefully considered by the Proctors' Office before introducing such an unusual, and potentially unfair, innovation.)

The Faculty may also wish to remind assessors that finding suitable people for third assessments is difficult, especially in smaller areas; every effort should therefore be made by the initial assessors even in controversial cases to come to some agreement.

Part II

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

As noted above the outcome of this year's results are in line with earlier years and the number of Distinction and Merit classifications awarded is healthy. The overall standard in Paper A, which is shared between all candidates, was also good (with only one narrow Fail result in the paper).

There was one relatively limited disruption by student protesters to one of the three-hour written exam sessions held in Exam Schools. The relevant exam session therefore started and ended with a slight delay. Any possible effect of this on the results of the scripts affected were considered by the Examiners, but the outcomes were in line with the affected candidates' (good) performance in other parts of the examination.

B. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES AND BREAKDOWN OF THE RESULTS BY GENDER

Category	Number (M)				Percentage (%) of M			
	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	2	1	1	2	14%	6%	5%	29%
Merit	5	3	5	1	36%	19%	23%	14%
Pass	6	6	4	4	43%	38%	18%	57%
Fail	1	4	0	0	7%	25%	0%	0%

Category	Number (F)				Percentage (%) of F			
	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
Distinction	7	2	5	3	41%	11%	23%	12%
Merit	6	5	4	8	35%	28%	18%	32%
Pass	3	9	3	7	18%	50%	14%	28%
Fail	1	1	0	0	6%	6%	0%	0%

Differences in the modes of assessment do not seem to reveal any major or significant differences in candidates' overall or individual performance.

C. DETAILED NUMBERS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN EACH PART OF THE EXAMINATION

The most popular optional assessment units this year were Phonetics and Phonology; Psycholinguistics and Neurolinguistics; Sociolinguistics; Syntax; and Semantics and Pragmatics. In all of these areas, the spread of marks was unremarkable. In other assessment units, numbers were too small anyway to make meaningful observations on overall performance levels. More detailed figures are given in the performance table in a separate attachment for the privacy of candidates.

D. COMMENTS ON PAPERS AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

In connection with Paper A, the Examiners discussed the divergent question types in different sections, and in particular the fact that the nature of some questions on Semantics and Pragmatics may lead to marks that are considerably higher than the usual marks on other questions and sections. Since all candidates are allowed to answer all questions this is not a problem in itself, but the Faculty might still consider to what extent similarity of question type across and within sections is desirable.

E. COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS AND OTHER MATERIAL WHICH WOULD USUALLY BE TREATED AS RESERVED BUSINESS

See separate attachment.

F. NAMES OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Professor Kathryn Allan (University College London, External Examiner)
Professor Colin Phillips
Professor Andreas Willi (Chair)
Professor David Willis

Conclusion

The Chair of Examiners would like to express his great gratitude to all colleagues who contributed to the smooth running of this year's examinations by setting papers, assessing scripts and submissions, answering questions, etc.; he is also extremely grateful for the support and notable responsiveness of all the examiners throughout the process (including during vacation periods). The external examiner, in particular, is thanked for her great engagement and constructive input into all aspects; this was her third and final year and her contribution will be really missed in the future. Last but definitely not least, it cannot be stressed enough how much tremendous help comes from our administrators Camilla Rock and Liberty Braddyll, who are always well ahead of the game and constantly provide patient guidance well beyond anything that can be reasonably expected.

Andreas Willi (Chair of Examiners)
4 October 2024