

MPhil and MST in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology

External Examiner's Report

I report on the examination session of June 2007, for which the examiner's meeting was held on Tuesday 24th June 2008.

Academic Standard of Programmes: From what I have seen, the academic standards set for candidates on these two degree programmes are appropriately high and consistent with the standards required at other institutions with postgraduate Linguistics programmes. The scope and coverage of the examination papers is impressive.

Assessment Processes: The assessment procedures were rigorous and based on well articulated descriptors. There was evidence of careful marking of examination scripts and dissertations, and evidence of the operation of a moderation process whereby internal examiners reached an agreed mark. I was involved in adjudicating the mark in the case of internal disagreement on one dissertation. Communication with the Department via the Chair of Examiners were very smooth and the Departmental administrator was once again an extremely efficient and helpful point of contact.

Standard of Student Performance: The examiners considered a relatively small cohort of candidates (7 MPhil candidates and 6 Masters candidates). Overall, the standards achieved by the students are satisfactory, with a couple of really outstanding performances among those students achieving a Distinction. Unusually, this year there were two MPhil students whose performance fell short of the minimum standard required for the MPhil, despite the opportunity afforded to them to demonstrate knowledge and understanding at a viva voce.

Professor Louisa Sadler (Essex)
June 27, 2008

M.St. and M.Phil. in General Linguistics and Comparative Philology
Examiners' Report: Trinity Term 2008

There were seven candidates for the M.Phil. and six candidates for the M.St.

In addition to the three internal examiners, sixteen assessors were appointed: Prof D. Cameron, Dr J. Coleman, Prof M. Dalrymple, Dr J. Fellerer, Dr B. Frellesvig, Dr K. Hoge, Dr J. Kiaer, Dr D. Kölligan, Prof M. Maiden, Dr S. Paoli, Dr E. Payne, Dr J. Penney, Prof S. Pulman, Prof S. Romaine, Dr. R. Temple, Prof A. Willi. Dr Louisa Sadler (University of Essex) served as external examiner.

Examiners and assessors set 15 different papers as follows (the number of candidates for each paper is indicated in brackets):

A	Linguistic Theory	13 (7 MPhil & 6 MSt)
B(i)	Phonetics and Phonology	5 (3 MPhil & 2 MSt)
B(ii)	Syntax (Examined by coursework)	5 (3 MPhil & 2 MSt)
B(iii)	Semantics	2 (2 MPhil)
B(v)	Theory of Translation	2 (1 MPhil & 1 MSt)
B(vii)	Experimental Phonetics	2 (1 MPhil & 1 MSt)
B(viii)	Sociolinguistics	4 (4 MPhil)
B(ix)	Computational Linguistics (Examined by coursework)	2 (2 MSt)
B(ix)	Pragmatics	1 (1 MPhil)
B(ix)	Psycholinguistics	1 (1 MPhil)
B(ix)	Language and Gender (Essay in lieu of paper HGLP 9736)	1 (1 MPhil)
C(i)	Comparative Grammar of Indo-Iranian and Greek	1 (1 MPhil)
C(ii)	Historical Grammar of Indo-Iranian and Greek	1 (1 MPhil)
C(iii)	Translation / comment upon texts in Indo-Iranian and Greek	1 (1 MPhil)
D(i)	History and Structure of Japanese	1 (1 MPhil)

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

1. Sociolinguistic variation in the Waitau dialect in Hong Kong.
2. Metaphors of AIDS in South African media discourse.
3. A comparative study of modality in Tocharian and Buddhist Sanskrit through the Udaanavarga.
4. Categorical Perception of Korean and English minimal pairs by native speakers of Korean and English.
5. Language attitudes and ethnolinguistic vitality in modern Kazakhstan.
6. A sociolinguistic analysis of /u:/-fronting in Greater London.
7. Instruments in LFG's Argument-Structure.

Four of the MSt candidate opted to submit a dissertation in lieu of a written paper. The titles of these were as follows:

1. Politeness requests in English and Bulgarian.
2. Word order in Latin: Demonstrative pronouns in selected Plautine comedies.
3. How is grammatical gender determined?: a sample study of French abstract nouns.
4. Aspects of plural marking in the history of German and English.

A spreadsheet giving the detailed results of the examination is attached to the master copy of this report submitted to the Committee. All of the six candidates for the MSt passed on all written papers; two MSt candidates were awarded a distinction on the strength of having two papers with a mark of over 70%. Of the seven MPhil candidates, three achieved comfortable pass marks and two were awarded a pass with distinction. One MPhil candidate deserves special mention, in having not just met the criterion for distinction of a mark of 76 or higher for the dissertation and for one other paper, but achieved a mark of over 75% on all written papers and a mark of 80% for an outstanding thesis.

The examiners conducted a viva voce examination for two of the MPhil candidates whose marks fell below the level required for a pass. Although both candidates acquitted themselves competently in the viva, in neither case was their performance sufficient to allow the examiners to round up individual marks in such a way as to bring the global mark up to MPhil standard. A compensatory MSt was therefore awarded in both cases.

The examiners were asked by the Committee for Comparative Philology and General Linguistics, as is usual, to make a recommendation about the suitability of candidates for transfer to D.Phil. status. This year not all candidates that had applied for such transfer were considered suitable, and an appropriate recommendation was made to the Committee for all cases. It might be useful to note, for the information of future candidates, that in these deliberations the primary requirement for transfer was a thesis mark at distinction level.

At their final meeting, the examiners discussed a number of matters relating to the overall pattern of the final MPhil and MSt examinations. There was a consensus that Paper A, the General Linguistics paper, was due for an radical review. Although no single recommendation or set of recommendations emerged from these discussions, it was felt worrisome that students appeared to be preparing for the Paper A examination by selecting a small set of essays topics on which to assemble prepared answers. If this indeed is the case, the examination is failing to test general and foundational training in the discipline in way which usefully complements the more specialised option papers. The recent introduction of practical/analytic questions in each section was seen as a welcome development in this light, and the suggestion was floated that the paper might contain one obligatory section consisting entirely of practical/analytic questions, of the sort which preclude the regurgitation of prepared essays. The examiners recommend that this matter be discussed in due course by the appropriate committee.

Dr David Cram (Chair)
Prof Aditi Lahiri
Dr Philomen Probert
Dr Louisa Sadler

25 June, 2008