The minutes of the dissertation defence

Student: Mgr. Slavomír Čéplö
Date of Birth: October 4, 1979
Study Programme: philology
Branch of Study: mathematical linguistics

Language of the dissertation: English
Language of the defence: English
Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Petr Zemánek, CSc.
Reviewers: RNDr. Daniel Zeman, Ph.D., Prof. Raymond Fabri
Date of defence: 27. 6. 2018
Place of defence: Institute of Comparative Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Charles University
Chair of the Board: doc. RNDr. Vladimír Petkevič, CSc.
Members of the Board: prof. PhDr. Jarmila Panevová, DrSc.; RNDr. Hana Skoumalová, Ph.D.; doc. Mgr. Václav Cvrček, Ph.D.

Persons present: According to the attendance list

11:00 The chair of the board doc. Petkevič started the defence, introduced himself, members of the board present and opponents present. Then he introduced the student to the persons present.

11:01 The supervisor doc. Zemánek introduced briefly his evaluation of the student's study and dissertation to the persons present, his evaluation being contained in his written report. He expressed his appreciation of the candidate's ability to design and conduct his research independently and briefly concluded that both the formal aspects of the dissertation and its scientific content were more than satisfactory.

11:04 The student presented the propositions of his dissertation to the persons present. He emphasized that his research was data-driven, relying on authentic data from Maltese. He mentioned his typological motivations going back to Greenberg and Dryer, as well as his familiarity with generative approaches or those based on pragmatics. Then he outlined the main research questions concerning the constituent order in Maltese. He pointed to the conflict of different conclusions present in previous research. Then he presented his own approach, aimed at discovering the dominant word order of Maltese and its variation.

He presented the corpus of written Maltese and commented on its characteristics. Then he introduced the Maltese Universal Dependencies Treebank as the main source of material for his research. Then he commented on the annotation of the treebank and related problems, including for example the classification of clause types used in the treebank. Then he presented the preliminary findings of his research, beginning with quantitative results. He stated his conclusion

that Maltese is dominantly SV, except in relative clauses. He also mentioned the hypothesis that Maltese is a discourse configurational language and his decision to test it by means of a comparison with Hungarian and other languages considered typically discourse configurational. His conclusion was in conflict with the hypothesis, since Maltese turned out to be the least discourse configurational of the languages concerned.

He considered the main contributions of his thesis to be the conclusion that Maltese has dominant SV and VO word order, and the conclusion that Maltese cannot be classified as a discourse configurational language.

11:26 The opponent prof. Fabri presented the main points of his report and the conclusion, recommending the submitted dissertation for defence. He raised several problems concerning particular aspects of the research; they are all written in his report. Prof. Fabri noted that while reflecting the results of the dissertation he was also taking into consideration his own intuition based on his native command of Maltese.

11:44 The opponent Dr. Zeman presented the main points of his report and the conclusion recommending the submitted dissertation for defence.

He raised several problems and objections concerning particular aspects of the research, mainly the syntactic annotation of the corpus. They are all written in his report.

11:51 The student reacted to prof. Fabri's comments, stating that he tried to apply some statistical methods to deal with the problem of the arbitrariness of dominant word order definition. He agreed that the various notions concerning constituent order like *dominant* and *basic* word order deserve further discussion.

Concerning the problem of word tagging in annotation of English words in the Maltese corpus, the student discussed the issue of code switching. Prof. Fabri suggested that many expressions of English origin should be considered parts of Maltese vocabulary rather than English words used ad hoc within code switching.

The student also discussed the problem of morphological tagging of certain forms like *msiefer*, which carries a passive marker, although its meaning is not passive.

In response to prof. Fabri's question concerning the syntactic flexibility of certain lexemes like the verb *seyyer*, the student presented particular examples from the corpus and provided a detailed discussion of the issue.

Prof. Fabri commented on the syntactic variation of Maltese clauses depending on topicalisation. He mentioned that his native intuition concerning Maltese does not always match the results coming from the corpus. However, this is naturally not to be concerned a flaw of the corpus.

12:12 The student reacted to Dr. Zeman's comments and questions.

Concerning the core/oblique distinction, the student stated that the problem relates to differential object marking in Maltese. He also pointed to the problem that bare nouns can serve as adverbials in Maltese. He presented examples with the verbs *sema'* 'to hear', which can take a bare noun complement, a prepositional complement or a complement clause, and the verb and *nduna* 'be noticed', which can only take a prepositional complement or a complement clause. By means of these examples he supported his argument that the core/oblique distinction cannot always be easily applied.

Concerning the problem of the *xcomp* tag appearing in verb chains, the student argued that often the subject cannot be attached to the first verb in a chain for semantic reasons, showing an example with a modal verb followed by a passive verb, in which the subject could only be interpreted as the subject of the passive verb. However, the student agreed that in some cases the items labeled *xcomp* could be relabeled.

Concerning the question about including parliamentary debates in the corpus, the student argued that there is no reason to exclude them even though they include a lot of code switching to English.

Then the student also commented on particular examples, about which Dr. Zeman asked. Later the student, Prof. Fabri and Dr. Zeman discussed the optimum ways for labeling certain items in syntactic tagging.

12:40 The chair of the board opened the discussion.
These persons spoke in the following discussion:

Dr. Skoumalová asked about the possibilites of further annotation of the data. The student briefly commented on some particular options for further research.
Prof. Petkevič asked about the student's general plans for further development of the research. The student presented the possibilities of further elaboration of the corpus and his scientific plans regarding the Maltese corpus.

12:42 The chair of the board ended the defence itself and the board initiated a private meeting on classification of the dissertation defence.

The chair of the board announced to the student and persons present the result of the defence: The board voted by raising hands with the following results:

number of the members of the board: 4

number of the members of the board present: 4

positive votes: 4

negative votes: 0.

Thus the dissertation defence was classified: **pass**.

Recorder: Adam Pospíšil

Name and signature of the chair of the board: doc. RNDr. Vladimír Petkevič, CSc.

Name and signature of another member of the board: RNDr. Hana Skoumalová, Ph.D.