

ASCS Language Competition Report 2021

Dr Estelle Strazdins (UQ) administered the **ASCS Language Competition for 2021**. Entry numbers were down slightly in Latin but the same in Greek in comparison to the 2020 competition. This year the competition was redesigned by a committee made up of the competition organiser, Dr Estelle Strazdins (UQ), Dr Sarah Lawrence (UNE), Assoc. Prof Trevor Evans (Macquarie), Dr Maxine Lewis (Auckland), and Dr Jonathan Wallis (UTas). The adjustments to the competition were designed to make it more accessible to more students from a variety of backgrounds and to proof the competition from the interference of Covid-19 or any other unforeseen disruption to in-person instruction. Two judges were appointed for both competitions and many of the entries received were of high quality. It was disappointing to see entries across both languages from only 6 universities. This report will first detail the results of the competition and then provide comments on the new competition format.

There were 5 entrants for the **ASCS Greek Competition**, who came from Macquarie (2), the University of Melbourne (1), and the University of New England (2). The Greek paper was set by Assoc. Prof Trevor Evans (Macquarie) and included passages from Isaeus' *On the Estate of Ciron*, *PCairZen II 59270* from the Zenon Archive, and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The judges were Prof Elizabeth Minchin (ANU) and Assoc. Prof Simon Perris (VUW).

The **Greek Winner** was judged to be Thomas Langsford (Macquarie), who studies with Assoc. Prof Trevor Evans.

Congratulations to Thomas!

An **Honourable Mention** was awarded to Bryce O'Connor (Macquarie), who also studies with Assoc. Prof Trevor Evans.

Well done, Bryce!

There were 9 entrants for the **ASCS Latin Competition**, who came from the University of Melbourne (3), University of New England (2), University of Queensland (2), The University of Sydney (1), and the University of Tasmania (1). The competition paper was set by Dr Sarah Lawrence (UNE) and the passages for commentary came from Vindolanda Tablet 344, Tertullian's *de Spectaculis*, and Sulpicia I. The judges were Dr Maxine Lewis (Auckland) and Dr Jonathan Wallis (UTas), who were particularly impressed with the high-quality answers in Part 2.

The **Latin Winner** was adjudicated to be (Jacqueline) Yvonne Chadderton from UNE. Yvonne is studying with Dr Sarah Lawrence.

Congratulations to Yvonne!

An **Honourable Mention** was awarded to Hannah Watson (UQ), who studies with Assoc. Prof Tom Stevenson (UQ). Hannah came a very close second to the winning entry.

Very well done, Hannah!

Congratulations again to Yvonne and Thomas, and to Hannah and Bryce. Thank you to all the entrants, language lecturers, and especially the judges!

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Comments on the new competition format

1. A number of ASCS representatives complained about the timing of the competition and several also appeared to misunderstand the format, believing it needed to be administered in class time. These two issues are connected, since several representatives reported to me that their students could not enter the competition because the semester was over. The competition can be administered completely online. The only responsibility of representatives and language teachers is to distribute the competition documents via email on the correct day. They play no further part in the competition. The main complaint about the timing of the competition was that it was in Swotvac or in the exam period. Last year, however, I received complaints that the competition was held during semester and took up class time. In both years, I was told students do not have time (in semester / after semester) to complete the competition. **I suggest that a vote be taken at the ASCS Annual General Meeting to ascertain the most suitable timing for the competition.**

2. Students of the lecturers who set the competition won both the Greek and Latin competitions. The judges were completely independent and the entries were anonymised, so this was not due to any favouritism. The low number of entries, moreover, make this result less remarkable. One possible explanation is specificity of training – if these students are more used to this type of exercise or have been exposed to a range of canonical and non-canonical texts, their excellent results make sense. This possibility supports the concerns raised about the previous competition format that an unseen translation benefits students of a certain background who have significant practice in the task. For next year's competition, more explicit and detailed instructions will be included to help students who may not have come across such exercises before.

3. The judges reported that they believe the second part of the papers should be weighted more heavily than the first part of the papers in the current format. They also unanimously reported that the translation commentary exercise was very useful in determining the most capable students and is also a suitable task for a 'take home assignment', where students have access to various resources.

4. There was a general consensus that the papers were too difficult overall. Please see points 5 and 6 below for more detail.

5. The judges noted that students took the high value and word count assigned to Part 1 as a sign that their answers needed to be especially detailed. As a result, although they produced the correct answer, they would often then supply extraneous information that was wrong. The judges noted this was a particular issue for questions asking for the 'function of a word'. Suggestions made were for more questions to be included in Part 1, that those questions be more focused, and that they include a range of difficulty. Range of difficulty was stressed because we need to encourage students by making them aware of how much they do know rather than potentially discouraging them by highlighting what they do not know. Some easier questions amongst the harder ones will allow more students to have a sense of achievement. Additionally, specifying a word count per question in Part 1, as well as providing a set format for responding to the questions in this section, might also help guide student responses. Some students understood the word count of 1000 words to relate to the whole paper; others thought that Parts 1 and 2 should be 1000 words each. The instructions need to be clarified. These observations and suggestions will be taken into consideration when setting the papers next year.

6. Relatedly, the judges noted that the syntax of specific passages set for commentary was too

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hard for an open-ended question for second year students designed to test higher-order thinking about translation per se. Because the syntax was so hard, students were making arguments based on their misapprehension of the grammar, so it was hard to assess the level of sophisticated thought about translation. The judges suggested that for next year a passage where the basic meaning is not contested and is clearer would be more suitable.

7. The judges also suggested that, as well as providing more detailed instructions to the students, the marking rubric should be made more detailed to help the judges. The rubric allowed entrants to be ranked and was useful on that front, but it did not assist in assigning marks. One suggestion is to assign marks or a mark range to the rubric categories. The best student across both parts 1 and 2 would then be easier to determine.

8. Another question added to the coversheet might be warranted. It would be useful for the competition organiser and those who set the tests to know whether those who do well have any non-tertiary background in Greek or Latin. This would help us assess whether the papers are successfully leveling the playing field.

9. Feedback from students who sat the papers has been very positive. Some enjoyed the challenge; others were fascinated at the set of texts they encountered. Many had never come across such a range of sources before and were grateful to have had the experience.