

Battle of Minds at All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad

Secondary School scholars test their problem-solving and linguistic skills with novel language challenge

Dublin, Ireland, 9 February 2011 – More than 300 students from 23 counties across Ireland are putting their logic, language and problem-solving skills to the test as the All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO) gets underway this week. The international contest sees young scholars test their minds against the world's toughest puzzles in language, logic and linguistics.

43 secondary schools across the country will host qualifying rounds this week, with the top performing students progressing to the National Finals at Dublin City University on 9 March 2011. There, students will battle it out for the national title and the opportunity to represent Ireland at the International Linguistics Olympiad World Finals in the USA in July 2011.

The All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad challenges students to develop their own strategies for solving problems in fascinating real languages from around the globe. Students must use their ingenuity to solve puzzles such as deciphering ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics; interpreting Tenji, the Japanese equivalent of Braille; and writing the names of football teams in Chinese. No prior knowledge of linguistics or languages is required: even the hardest problems require only logical ability, patient work, and a willingness to think around corners.

The AILO competition aims to introduce students to linguistics (i.e. the study of human language) and to the application of logic to problems of language understanding and translation. Finalists will be tutored by experts from the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL), a major multi-disciplinary academia-industry research centre funded by Science Foundation Ireland and based at Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and University of Limerick. Researchers at CNGL are producing advances in how computers adapt and personalise software and digital content, including computer games, to different languages and cultures.

"In today's increasingly global business world, it is ever more important for our young people to have language and problem-solving skills and cultural awareness", says Professor Harold Somers, co-ordinator of the AILO competition. "There are a whole range of career opportunities that draw on skills at the intersection of computing and languages. Ireland has for many years been a global leader in 'localisation', the process by which multinational companies adapt their products and product-related content to foreign markets and languages, and we're now witnessing huge growth in jobs related to global customer support operations that draw on language and problem-solving skills."

"I particularly enjoyed deciphering the Chinese and Japanese puzzles. It created a challenge to understand the characters but this was also incredibly rewarding to feel that I could understand these different complex languages", says Clodagh Herron Rice, Fifth Year student at St Joseph's Secondary School, Navan. "I really feel that these activities assist me in how I approach learning languages. They help create a newfound understanding of how languages work."

"I believe studying languages is an exciting and interesting task, studying how they are formed is really challenging. I am considering studying a degree in languages and linguistics in the University of Limerick", says Conor Costelloe, Fifth Year student at Coláiste Chiarain in Croom, Co. Limerick.



By generating interest in the study of human language, AILO is helping to ensure that there is an adequate supply of talented graduates to continue the success of localisation and other export-focused activities in Ireland and to cement the country's leadership position in this growing segment.

Do you think you have a knack for languages, logic and lateral thinking? Do you think you could decipher an ancient script, or deduce the logical patterns of Swahili or Aymara? Visit the AILO website to test your own linguistics skills with some sample problems at www.cngl.ie/ailo

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Notes for Editors:

The All-Ireland Linguistics Olympiad (AILO) is a contest in which secondary school students solve linguistic, language and logic puzzles. In solving the problems, students learn about the diversity and consistency of language, and how to apply logic to problems of language understanding and translation. No prior knowledge of linguistics, computing or second languages is necessary, but the competition has proven very successful in attracting top students to study in fields at the intersection of computing and languages. The All-Ireland Linguistics Olympiad is run by the Centre for Next Generation Localisation, a dynamic academia-industry research centre based at Dublin City University, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and University of Limerick. Transition-year, 5th- and 6th-year students in Ireland and Northern Ireland participate in this fun competition, with a view to representing Ireland in the International Linguistics Olympiad in USA in July 2011. For full details, see www.cngl.ie/ailo

The Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL) is a dynamic academia-industry partnership that conducts ground-breaking research into next-generation localisation (i.e. the process of adapting digital content to culture, location and linguistic environment) by addressing key challenges in information volume, access and personalisation. Co-funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and nine industry partners, CNGL is a world leading research centre seeking not only fundamental scientific advances but also translational economic and societal impact. Close collaboration between the localisation industry and the Centre's four academic partners helps to move CNGL innovations out of the academic laboratory and into the marketplace, thereby reinforcing Ireland's word leadership position in localisation and helping to create high-tech, high-quality employment opportunities for the future. For further information, visit www.cngl.ie.

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THE CENTRE FOR NEXT GENERATION LOCALISATION IS FUNDED BY SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND (AWARD NUMBER 07/CE/11142) AT DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN, UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK, AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN.