

Regulations of the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)

Whereas the faculty of using language is one of the most prominent defining characteristics of the human species, and curiosity towards language is natural and universal,

and whereas linguistic research is one of the foremost ways of learning about mankind and the language technologies are among the leading industries in a world intent to maintain its diversity in this age of global communication,

and whereas the popularisation of linguistics increases prestige of everyone's mother tongue and linguistic pluralism in general,

and whereas the sciences of language are but scantily represented in the curricula of secondary schools, yet the genre of the self-sufficient linguistic problem has shown a great capacity to attract the interest of secondary school students and recruit able young minds for careers in theoretical, mathematical and computational linguistics,

and whereas the art of running contests in solving such problems has, after decades of experience, reached a mature stage in several countries, and the potential for international co-operation in this field has been demonstrated by several visits of contestants, organisers and experts from Bulgaria to linguistic olympiads in Russia and vice versa,

and whereas international science olympiads are now organised in many fields and universally recognised as an outstanding method for discovering, encouraging and challenging talented young people, the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL) was devised and instituted on the twenty-second day of the month of December in the year two thousand and two.

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1 Introduction

This document contains the regulations of the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL). The name of the organization in each language shall be agreed by countries where that language is spoken officially. The abbreviation “IOL” is explicitly chosen so as not to reflect the name of the Olympiad in any particular language.

1.1 What Is the IOL?

The IOL organises an annual international competition (an Olympiad) for students of schools for secondary education in solving, individually and in teams, self-sufficient linguistic problems. The competition requires no special knowledge, only familiarity with such fundamental concepts from the study of language and languages as are typically present in school curricula, as well as general culture and logical thought. Problems can be related to all branches of linguistics, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, pragmatics, formal methods, corpus linguistics, etc.

1.2 Aims of the IOL

The IOL pursues the following aims:

- To promote awareness of language, of the world’s linguistic diversity, and of the essence of linguistics among secondary school students and the general public.
- To foster adolescents’ skills in logical thinking and the creative application of general knowledge in problem solving.
- To acquaint students with the nature of the professions in the sciences and technologies of language and advertise these professions as a career choice.
- To encourage friendly relations, international understanding and a spirit of sporting competitiveness between young people interested in linguistics from all countries.
- To enhance the co-operation between teachers and experts involved in school linguistics and to motivate the launching of new linguistic contests worldwide.
- To stimulate the development and growth of the genre of the self-sufficient linguistic problem.

2 Organisation of the IOL

2.1 Time and Schedule

The Olympiad is held annually, traditionally between late July and mid-August. A typical schedule is as follows:

Day 1: arrival, opening, briefing;

Day 2: individual contest;

Day 3: cultural programme;

Day 4: team contest;

Day 5: discussion of the problems, awards ceremony, closing;

Day 6: departure

2.2 Delegations

Teams invited to participate will consist of no more than four contestants and a team leader.

The contestants must be students of a school for secondary education or have graduated from one in the year of the Olympiad. Eligibility may be extended to students attending an affiliated school in another country or registered as home educated. They should be chosen on the basis of participation in a country-wide contest in linguistics or a related field held by a recognised national organisation (including that of another country), open to any citizen of the country obtaining high-school-level education in the country.

Teams seeking to participate for the first time should seek accreditation from the International Board. Accreditation can be sought at any time, but the deadline of January 1st must be met to guarantee participation in the next Olympiad. An accredited national association will have set up a web page (not just a page on a networking site or email address), and sent the link to the IOL webmaster. The webpage must include the following features:

- set out eligibility requirements
- give dates and locations of contest in reasonable time
- give instructions on how to register
- cannot be prevented from being searched for

When a new country seeks accreditation, their application will be submitted to the International Board who will respond within one month. Responses can be “accept”, “accept subject to minor modifications”, “decline”: in the latter two cases, clear indications of what needs to be changed/fixed will be given.

Each participating country is entitled to send one team whose accommodation and full board for the duration of the Olympiad, as well as participation in the social and cultural programme, is covered by the host. Exceptionally, a small charge not exceeding an amount to be agreed by the International Committee from time to time may have to be made to supplement costs. Each team will be accompanied by a legal adult (adult in both the team’s country and the host country). The team leader must have a common language with which to communicate with the local Organisers. A second team may participate at their own expense. Additional (non-competing) participants, as well as deputy leaders, coaches, observers and accompanying persons, may be received, if the local arrangements allow it, at the discretion of the Local Organising Committee.

All participants are responsible for the cost of their travel to the venue of the Olympiad, visa fees (where applicable), medical insurance and sundry expenses, as well as accommodation and board for any extra days spent in the host country. Teams from countries which have not yet completed the accreditation process may be invited to attend the Olympiad as guests at the discretion of the Local Organisers, for

a maximum of two consecutive years. Guests will be liable for all their own expenses, including costs of accommodation, and participation in the social programme.

2.3 Definitions of countries

Under exceptional circumstances, two entities (“territories”) from the same country may apply to the International Board to be permitted to send separate teams to the IOL. As a guideline, the following are examples of the conditions under which such a request may be considered, but the final decision rests with the International Board in consultation with the Local Hosts:

- The two territories are recognised as separate “countries” by other acknowledged bodies, including those for other competitions (e.g. educational or sporting)
- The two territories have separate and independent governments or education systems, with independent Education Ministries, or potential funding bodies which treat the two territories separately
- The two territories have a historical linguistic divergence which makes participation under the “one language per team” rule difficult or impossible.
- The two territories should either
 - hold mutually exclusive qualifying competitions which are justified on clear linguistic, geographical or political grounds. Any students in the country who are eligible for both qualifying competitions must choose one or the other, and should not be permitted to enter both; or
 - share the same qualifying competition, but if so for each contestant it must be clearly identified in which territory they are competing.

If two or more applications for accreditation are received independently from the same country, the International Board will facilitate negotiations between the parties and encourage them to resolve the issue among themselves. If they are unable to do so, the International Board will decide which applicant to recognize.

2.4 Contests

The Olympiad includes an individual and a team contest, held on different days. At the individual contest a set of five problems is assigned; the duration is six hours (the former may be altered by the Problem Committee, and the latter by the Jury, under compelling circumstances). There is no break, although it is customary for refreshments to be provided.

At the team contest the members of each team work jointly on a single problem set, sharing the work as they choose, and hand in a single script. The time allowed for this is three or four hours, at the discretion of the Problem Committee.

The problems are handed out to the contestants on paper and remain their property after the contest. Writing paper is provided by the Local Organising Committee; no other paper shall be used. Contestants are urged to bring their own pens or pencils, although the invigilators should have a supply to help out those whose pens run out of ink in mid-contest. Artificial aids such as pocket calculators and calendars should

not be used. All mobile phones or other communication devices or devices with access to the WWW are strictly prohibited. Any equipment that is essential for solving the problems must be made available to all by the Local Organising Committee.

The contests are not anonymous.

During the individual contest all participants are asked to fill out a brief questionnaire containing (but not necessarily limited to) the following questions:

- What problems did you work on?
- What problem did you find hardest?
- What problem did you find easiest?
- What problem did you like best?

The information from this questionnaire is intended to assist the Jury in the marking or be used for statistical purposes. The author of the best-liked problem receives a Solvers' Choice Award at the end of the Olympiad.

2.5 Languages

Contestants receive the statements of the problems and write the solutions in a language of their choice. By default all contestants use the same working language at the individual contest that their teams have chosen for the team contest, but a contestant may opt for a language requested by another team. Team leaders must notify the Local Organisers which language(s) they wish to use no later than ten weeks before the Olympiad. -Each contestant may have access to only one version of the problem set during the contest.

All business of the IOL is conducted in such languages as are best understood, English being the default choice when a multinational audience is addressed. All diplomas and certificates must be written in English, but may also contain some text in the language(s) of the host country.

2.6 Awards

At each of the two contests the numbers of gold, silver and bronze medals awarded shall be approximately in the ratio 1:2:3, and the total number of medals shall be between one quarter and one third of the number of contestants (or teams). The actual number of medals awarded shall depend on the allocation of gaps in the sorted list of scores, which means that the Local Organising Committee must be prepared for adjustments in this scheme.

A contestant who obtains a score higher than the average but does not win a medal will receive an honourable mention.

It is also customary to award a prize for one or two best solutions of each problem of the individual contest. In this, too, adjustments may be made.

Other symbolic or substantial prizes may be prepared and awarded at the discretion of the Local Organising Committee.

All contestants who are not awarded a medal or an honourable mention shall receive a certificate of participation.

3 Bodies of the IOL

3.1 International Board

The International Board shall consist of elected or co-opted members of the International Organising Committee, normally including

- Chairman of the Board
- Secretary
- Local organiser of the current Olympiad
- Local organiser of the previous Olympiad
- Local organiser of the next Olympiad
- Chairman of the Problem Committee
- Chairman of the International Jury
- Funding chair
- IOL web site coordinator
- PR chair

The International Board shall confer at least once between Olympiads, normally in January, to prepare for the forthcoming Olympiad. This may be held electronically, e.g. via an exchange of emails, or with a conference call. Minutes of the meeting, or a summary of the conclusions of the email discussion shall be sent to all current members of the International Organising Committee no less than ten weeks before the forthcoming Olympiad.

3.2 International Organising Committee

The International Organising Committee (IOC) consists of the team leaders and members of the International Jury. At a convenient time during the Olympiad they will hold a meeting to discuss any matters concerning the IOL, including choice of venue of future Olympiads, so that at least the next Olympiad venue can be announced officially at the closing. This meeting is led by the Chair of the Local Organising Committee or their delegate. Each country represented by a full member of the IOC shall have two votes. Members of the International Jury shall be invited to attend the IOC meeting but shall not have a vote unless invited to do so. Leaders of teams attending as guests shall not be considered full members of the IOC: they may attend the meeting, and speak, but they will have no voting rights unless invited to do so. Other persons in attendance at the Olympiad may be invited to attend the meeting of the IOC under the same rules.

Membership of the IOC shall continue at the end of the Olympiad until the deadline for registration for the following year's Olympiad, at which point membership will pass on to the person identified as team leader for the following year; similarly, members of the International Jury will remain members of the IOC until the membership of the Jury for the following year is established. Team leaders of guest teams will become full members of the IOC as soon as their national committee is accredited.

3.2 Local Organising Committee

The Local Organising Committee is composed of representatives of the host country. It elects a Chair who must be experienced in the organisation of contests for secondary school students on a national or higher level.

It is the duty of the Local Organising Committee to:

- advertise the Olympiad well in advance on appropriate forums and publish calls for participation
- design (or commission the design of) a logo for the Olympiad;
- create and maintain a Web site with information on the Olympiad;
- answer expressions of interest from prospective team leaders.
- receive registrations from team leaders and obtain accurate information on the delegations' itineraries;
- assist team leaders in the organisation of their journey by sending official invitations and providing information on the venue and the schedule upon request;
- advise the Problem Committee of the list of teams and working languages requested by them as soon as it is finalised, which must happen no later than ten weeks before the IOL;

The Local Organising Committee is also responsible for the local organisation of the Olympiad, which includes:

- choosing an appropriate venue for the Olympiad in the host country, aiming to ensure equal living conditions for all contestants;
- planning and arranging the social and cultural programme;
- raising funds to cover the cost of
 - accommodation and full board for four contestants and a team leader from each participating country, as well as the Jury, for the duration of the Olympiad,
 - the participation of the abovementioned people in the social and cultural programme,
 - honoraria for the authors of problems and the Jury,
 - honoraria for the invigilators,
 - other technical expenses;
- raising funds to cover the cost of, and arranging or providing as the case may be,
 - halls for the opening, briefing, contests, discussion, awards ceremony and closing,
 - writing paper for the contestants, extra pens, as well as any special equipment required for the two contests,
 - refreshments during the individual contest,
 - medals, prizes, diplomas and certificates;
 - recruiting invigilators for the contests.

3.3 Problem Committee

The Problem Committee of the IOL has the mission of putting together the problem sets for the two contests. It is composed of specialists who have had the experience of doing the same for national competitions.

The Problem Committee is responsible for:

- authoring and soliciting high-quality linguistic problems for the two contests and having them evaluated by experts in strict confidence;
- creating a problem set for each contest, ensuring that the level of difficulty is appropriate and will be the same for all participants regardless of their working language, and keeping the problems secret until the contests;
- editing a handout containing the statements of the problems for each contest, and another with the solutions, in each working language, ensuring the equivalence of all versions;
- advising the Local Organising Committee as early as possible of any special equipment that might be needed for the two contests.

The work of the Problem Committee for each Olympiad is led by a Chair elected at the start of the season.

3.4 International Jury

Members of the International Jury are recruited from among the members of the Problem Committee and affiliated experts who have the experience of working in juries of national linguistic contests or earlier Olympiads. Members of the Jury who have not served on the Problem Committee should familiarise themselves with the problems as early as possible, and likewise keep them secret.

It is the duty of the Jury to:

- explain the rules of the contests to the students and their leaders during the briefing;
- answer any questions that contestants may have on the statements of the problems during the contest;
- mark the scripts after each contest and
 - produce a sorted list of scores, on the basis of which medals are awarded,
 - nominate recipients of prizes for best solutions of individual problems and other special awards;
- compose an unofficial ranking of teams by the average score in the individual contest;
- arrange a discussion of the problems and their solutions after the contests.

The work of the Jury is directed by a Chair elected prior to the beginning of their work. Usually the same person chairs both the Problem Committee and the Jury.

4 Other People

4.1 Team Leaders

The Team Leader shall be a legal adult in both the team's country and the host country, and shall have a level of ability in a common language (usually English)

sufficient to allow them to communicate at the Olympiad, and to relay instructions and information to their team members.

The duties of team leaders include:

- communicating to the Local Organising Committee their intent to bring a team to the Olympiad at the earliest possible date and no later than the announced deadline;
- confirming this intent by the deadline and informing the Local Organising Committee no less than ten weeks before the competition of the language(s) their students wish to work in;
- helping the invigilators, if deemed desirable, during the seating of the contestants before each contest;
- assisting the Jury, if need arises, in reading illegible handwriting or, in the most extreme of cases, translating some passages from the scripts;
- functioning as invigilators during the team contest, if necessary;
- taking care of their students' well-being and good behaviour throughout their entire journey and acting as mediators between them and the organisers during the Olympiad.

Team leaders must not have taken part in the work of the Problem Committee for this Olympiad as members or experts, nor may they be on the Jury.

4.2 Invigilators

Invigilators are appointed for the duration of the individual contest, during which time they are responsible for:

- taking care that the contestants can work through the allotted time in peace, without anyone distracting their attention (except the Jury, if absolutely necessary, and then for the shortest time possible), and that they are provided with writing paper and pens;
- preventing and suppressing any attempts at
 - communication between a contestant and anyone other than the Jury (in accordance with the established procedure) and the invigilators themselves,
 - use of unauthorised tools and sources of information;
- contacting the Jury, should a contestant so require or any unforeseen situation arise;
- assisting the Jury in collecting the scripts and questionnaires and ensuring that all paperwork is in order.