

This year proved very successful for Methody in terms of linguistics, as eight students qualified for the final of the All Ireland Linguistics Olympiad. Impressively, each finalist scored well within the top 100 participants, with William Zhang and Anhukrishna Karthikeyan scoring sixth and seventh in the Junior Competition, and Zara Watson (myself) achieving the highest score overall. The setup was unusual this year; due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the final did not take place in Dublin as planned, but each school did the paper remotely, and there was no Team Round in order to minimise contact between competitors. However, the questions and languages demonstrated were as intriguing and thought-provoking as ever – who knew that languages existed in which complex sentences could be communicated with a single word?

Having participated in the Olympiad the previous year, I knew what to expect in terms of the format of the paper (although you can never really know what to expect as the languages come from all over the world and the grammatical structures, vocabulary and scripts vary wildly), and entered with some degree of confidence. I was delighted to make the final, and after the experience of winning the Team Round in 2019, I was excited to solve more linguistic problems in the same way. Even though we missed out on the trip to Dublin, the experience was replicated by Miss Moore, who brought greatly appreciated snacks and drinks for us to enjoy while we were participating. Afterwards, we took a fun team photo outside McArthur Hall.

A few days later, when I was informed that I had achieved the highest score in the final, my first thought was that it must have been an April Fool's joke (the fact that it was the middle of March failed to dawn on me). I couldn't believe it – while I enjoyed answering the questions and solving the mysteries of the various languages, the news that I had won was an unexpected and pleasant surprise.

My experience of AILO has been an incredibly positive one; it is an excellent opportunity to develop skills such as logical analysis, and appreciate the beauty and variety of languages worldwide, as all the languages used are rare and have relatively few speakers, such that the participants are unfamiliar with them – AILO is an excellent test of problem solving skills because you must determine the grammatical rules or decipher vocabulary of languages previously unseen to the majority of entrants. For those reasons, AILO has been a remarkably exciting experience and I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in languages.