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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The North American Computational Linguistics Open (NACLO) announces the successes of the NACLO teams at the 22nd International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL).

NACLO competitors win nine medals at the 22nd IOL in Taipei, Taiwan, with one contestant placing second overall.



At left: Canada Moose; at right: USA Red and Blue; below: The USA teams act out a scene from Problem #5 in the IOL Individual Round competition.

Between July 20 and 27, 12 secondary students from Canada and the United States of America joined 215 other contestants—representing over 40 countries spanning the globe—at the 22nd IOL.

This year, three teams represented the English-speaking North American territories at the IOL. Peter Dong of British Columbia and Sophia Davis Morris, Elaine Jiang, and Aidan Wang of Ontario formed the team representing anglophone Canada, nicknamed “Canada Moose”. The USA brought two teams: Team “USA Red” was constituted by Devin Joe (New Jersey), Denys Tereshchenko and Nicla Marabito (Massachusetts), and Kyle Zhang (Connecticut); Team “USA Blue” by Jason Liu (Pennsylvania), Ethan Reames (Maryland), Aaron Chai (New Jersey), and Nina Stadermann (California).

We would like to recognize these participants—as well as Darren Su (Idaho), who qualified for the USA Blue team but was unable to attend—for earning their place on the national teams through the testing process. The NACLO competition selects IOL attendees with two annual exams: the three-hour Open Round, taken by approx. 1,700 students this year, and the more challenging four-hour Invitational Round, offered to the top 244 scorers from the Open. The 16 questions between these two problem sets assess participants’ reasoning skills and logical analysis with respect to topics such as writing systems, morphology, semantics, syntax, and phonology, both to spark interest in these linguistic fields and to prepare contestants for their further exploration in the international Olympiad.

The IOL consists of two exams: a six-hour, five-problem individual contest, and a four-hour, single-problem team contest to be solved in groups of four participants. The individual contest featured Dzongkha numerals, Gaahmg possessives, Kuria verbs, Kewa nouns, and Kaqchikel syntax. Contestants found the last problem, written by Dan-Mircea Mirea, particularly innovative. Contestants were challenged to decipher scene descriptions in Kaqchikel without reference to English sentences, but accompanied by descriptions of fMRI brain activity by listeners. Only by correlating the sentence structures, the pictures, and the brain activity can the solver fill in the blanks to solve the puzzle.

“I actually noted #5 as my favorite one,” Aidan Wang said. “I think it was a really creative way to push the boundaries of what can be a linguistics Olympiad problem. And I really liked drawing my little pictures.” Aaron Chai felt that “It definitely feels like they’re revisiting old formats but trying something new in how they’re approaching them.”

The team contest required participants to work together on a single large problem, a three-part examination of verb morphology in two Kiranti languages. Devin Joe praised the atmosphere of the contest site; each team were given their own university classroom, with many teams rearranging the room and decorating the board to build team spirit. “I think just having a classroom to [ourselves] for the team round was one of the most enjoyable parts of the test-taking this year, especially because the Red team just, like, put 25 tables together and lay down on it,” he said.

Aidan Wang was equally enthusiastic about the university’s facilities (“Pre-competition, I was hooking up the speaker to my phone and playing hype music”) but expressed appreciation for his

team members as well: “I could feel the synergy on our team this year [...] We were handling problems [with] all four people together, looking at the same thing at the same time, chugging along at a really good pace.”



At left: Nicla Marabito, Devin Joe, Denys Tereshchenko, and Kyle Zhang (USA Red) in their rearranged university classroom; at right: Aidan Wang (Canada Moose) builds hype at the IOL Jeopardy event.

Ultimately, Aaron Chai tied for second place in the individual contest and was joined by Devin Joe, Kyle Zhang, and Peter Dong in claiming a gold medal. One contestant, Jason Liu, won a silver medal, with four more winning bronze: Nicla Marabito, Elaine Jiang, Sophia Davis Morris, and Nina Stadermann. Aidan Wang and Denys Tereshchenko received honorable mentions. Furthermore, between this year's gold medal and his gold medal from the 2024 olympiad, Devin Joe entered the Hall of Fame, becoming one of only 23 people in IOL history to earn two gold medals. The nine medals achieved across these three teams makes 2025 the most decorated individual performance from the participating North American territories in the past five years. We additionally congratulate Canada Moose for their honorable mention in the team contest.

Outside of the competitive events, contestants were introduced to Taipei through traditional alleyways, urban industries, and natural scenery. Whether in new foods (“I would not have had the opportunity to try Buddha Jumps Over The Wall soup, even though I didn’t try it. But it’s the opportunity that matters,” said Devin Joe) or on new streets (“It was so cool to ride around on the transit. I mean, in North America, our public transit’s not the best,” said Aidan Wang), each team was able to experience not only Taiwanese culture and linguistic diversity, but also the cultures and languages of teams from 43 countries.

“I was asked by someone on the Swedish team whether the ‘s’ in ‘dogs’ is actually voiced or not. Ostensibly it’s voiced, but if I check and I say ‘dogs’, I think I’m actually devoicing it. It’s weird, but I wouldn’t have thought about that if I hadn’t been asked that. And that’s because Swedish doesn’t have the voiced sound,” Aaron Chai recounted, explaining how speakers of other languages often provide unexpected phonetic insights, even about our own languages.

Throughout each eventful day, the most valued aspect of the IOL turned out to be its community. Given the elusiveness of linguistics as a field of study—no country includes it in their mandatory

secondary school curriculum, and “a lot of people”, as Aidan Wang described, “have never even heard of it”—it can be difficult for passionate students to find like-minded peers.

“When else am I going to play Glossotechnia?” asked Devin Joe, referring to a language-invention game that’s become a team tradition. “Who else is going to get my joke about Korean phonology? For some reason, especially this year, I found myself talking about things [...] that I’ve never been able to say out loud without sounding like a maniac. So probably the important thing [about the IOL] is giving us the opportunity to be ourselves, at least for a little bit, and meet people who we could keep being ourselves around.”

We would like to extend many thanks to everyone who made this event possible, including: team leads Ken Jiang (Canada Moose), Patrick Littell (USA Red), and Arul Kolla (USA Blue); coaches and lecturers Lori Levin, Daniel Lovsted, Deeraj Pothapragada, and Annie Lee; the NACLO Program Committee, Logistics Committee, jury and graders, problem writers, and site coordinators; all NACLO sponsors; and, of course, everyone involved with the organizing and facilitation of the IOL itself.

We would especially like to thank NACLO’s sponsors: the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), Boomi, Virtusa, the Nations of the Americas Chapter of the Association of Computational Linguistics (NAACL), the Languages Technology Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, and anonymous private donors. Without their generosity, NACLO’s contests and participation in the IOL would not be possible. We are deeply appreciative of their support.

The dates of the Open and Invitational Rounds of NACLO 2026 will be announced on the NACLO website in September 2025. Registration will begin in Fall 2025.

The 23rd IOL will be held in Bucharest, Romania.

View this year’s full IOL results here: <https://ioling.org/results/2025/>