

Ireland on Sunday

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Headline: Talking? Not so easy PC...

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An Irish company is at the forefront of a world bid to 'teach' computers to understand and use language more like humans.

The Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI) in Galway has €12m of Government funding plus backing from computer giants Hewlett Packard to develop a so-called 'semantic web'.

More than 100 scientists from 16 countries at DERI are trying to solve one of the last great problems with computers.

Whereas the human brain instantly knows the 'bonjour' is French and that D15 is a postcode, to computers they are just strings of meaningless data to be matched against billions of other bits of unrelated data.

Computers make too many meaningless connections, whereas a semantic computer of the future will recognise D15 as a postcode or the word 'Galway' as a place through an electronic 'label' or tag, like an invisible bar code attached to it.

This would transform the way search engines work. Searches would be more focused and therefore faster.

The Government is investing heavily in scientific research. It wants to boost spending on research and development from 1.4pc of Gross National Product in 2001 to 2.5pc by 2010, higher than the European average.