

Conferences to up your game

Sarah Griffin-Mason reveals the benefits of joining the Mediterranean Editors and Translators, and reports from this year's annual meeting in Split, Croatia



Sarah Griffin-Mason MITI is a freelance Spanish to English translator and editor, MFL and translation teacher currently working for UNICEF-TACRO, Actas Dermosifiliográficas and the University of Portsmouth.

Our favourite translation gurus regularly state that to make a living income in translation we need to broaden our skills base, build on our more lucrative specialisms, take ownership of the text and convince our clients of the true worth of our language services.

However, as a struggling second-year Spanish to English freelancer with a broad background in the humanities and development issues, I could not see how to break into a new field without endangering my budding professional reputation with the extent of my ignorance.

I was exceptionally pleased, then, when a chance meeting at the ITI conference in London in 2007 put me in touch with a team working on bilingual medical journals in Spain. I was reassured to be told that some of the best translators on the team were those least qualified in medicine, as their humility led them to be both thorough researchers and careful writers.

A couple of months later I joined the team as a junior translator. With the chunky AMA style guide for

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support I was happy to launch myself into a new and largely unknown field, safe in the knowledge that all my work would be scrutinised by senior editors, experts in their fields.

A chance to meet up

Most of the team members were also members of the Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET), and we started to meet up at the annual conference in order to share experiences, expertise and skills, and, of course, to socialise.

And what a boon these meetings have proved to be, opening up the vista on a whole new world of professional opportunities I could not have accessed in any other way.

For MET is a volunteer, non-profit, interdisciplinary group of translators, editors and academics who believe that by sharing skills and knowledge they can improve the quality of language support for international communication in English, increase professionalism, and help those in the non-anglophone world to get better access to audiences worldwide.

As a result of this mission, MET meetings provide impressive training and information opportunities for anyone working in editing and translating into and out of the Mediterranean languages. The group has so much to offer that members attended this year from as far away as Brazil and the US, while Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and

Sweden also underwent temporary geographical and linguistic reclassification in honour of the event.

A busy programme

This 2008 meeting was held in September at the Medical Faculty of the University of Split, Croatia, in buildings allegedly won from the army in a poker game at the end of the conflict there.

While the bulk of the programme was related to the production of research articles for international journals, there were also many gems on offer for general translating practice and skill-set extension.

The frenetic four-day meeting included a wealth of presentations. Professor John Swales – the father of genre analysis – gave a keynote speech on patterns in research articles across various fields of study, while Liz Wager of the *British Medical Journal* Ethics Committee spoke on thornier issues of publication ethics and how best to deal with these.

The Professional Development section of the Meeting was full to bursting with opportunities to learn or hone up on related skills.

Ailish Maher, Mary Ellen Kerans and Stephen Waller offered a pre-conference Corpus-Guided Editing and Translation Workshop showing participants how to build quick and dirty corpora to assist with translation projects, and demonstrating desktop software that can instantly make a

Above: Sarah and her daughter enjoy their time in Split.

Inset: Diocletian, the Roman Emperor who wisely built his retirement home in Split in around 300 AD – the palace forms an almost surreal ancient centrepiece to the modern city. Above right: a statue of Marko Maruli (1450-1524), the first to translate the Bible from Latin to Croatian.

corpus of all documents on your computer in any format.

This was followed by workshops to improve writing and editing skills, including: Professor Swales on writing abstracts; Mary Ellen Kerans on improving text flow; John Bates with a ten-point scheme to improve the readability of English texts by non-native writers; Tom O'Boyle on brushing up punctuation; and Alan Lounds with a genre analysis approach to translating research articles.

Other workshops were more directly linked to medical journals: how to manage plagiarism in medical journals and professional academic writing in general; a workshop on the anatomy of the thorax given by Professor Ivica Grkovic of the Split Medical School; and another on how to spot errors in badly presented statistics, by Darko Hren of the *Croatian Medical Journal*.

Medical knowledge updates included: Sasa Misak on the criteria for different study designs in medical

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research; and Greg Morley explaining the various documents required at each stage of clinical trials.

But there were plenty of juicy bits for the non-medics too.

Ann King and William Orr demonstrated how Dragon Naturally Speaking can provide relief to the overworked freelancer; Sarah Freitas-Maltaverne showed us how to spice up PowerPoint presentations by using story-telling techniques; and Anne Murray gave very handy tips on time management and organisation (my favourite: download Time Stamp freeware and keep track of how much time each project really takes you).

Diverse subject matter

The following two days of the conference then broke into a series of panels and updates covering a wide range of issues.

Heated discussions were sparked by talk of the political and cultural issues underlying the need to publish in English versus resistance to cultural imperialism, and members finally agreed to disagree on the point. The fact that academic career progression is heavily linked to the publishing of articles and that international indexing is essential in achieving visibility for researchers adds other levels of complexity to the issue.

Another welcome thread was opened with Teresa Lillis of the Open University describing translators and editors as 'literacy brokers', who can

clearly have a great influence on texts. Many of those present agreed that greater visibility of translators and editors would both boost our professional profile and increase transparency in academic publishing.

The final panels turned to best practice and quality assurance. They started by discussing the support, guidance and recommendations offered by some journals to authors submitting papers, and went on to cover feedback and revision structures employed by various journals working with complex teams of writers, editors and translators. George Witherington showed some graphic representations of the complexity of such systems when multiple language versions of legally binding documents are needed simultaneously in international banking (think 'spaghetti on a plate' and you are only halfway there).

Karen Shashok then closed with an appeal for AuthorAID, asking generous translators and editors to offer pro bono help on one or two articles by scientists and researchers from developing countries each year in the name of international cooperation.

Social gathering

And, saving the best until last, Anita Marusic of Acta Adriatica organised a highly enjoyable closing-night dinner with delicious local seafood, a cheery toast to Split from Professor Swales and a rousing rendition of *On Ilkley Moor Bah t'Hat* (with a hastily written Croatian refrain) by the MET Impromptu Choir – both pleasing and thoroughly confounding the host of international linguists in the audience.

The bottom line of the story, I suppose, is that this group offers a great opportunity for lone freelancers looking to broaden the range of services they offer. MET offers excellent training by seasoned professionals at a very reasonable cost, along with opportunities for extending networks across Europe, building on the solidarity of like-minded professionals. I strongly recommend that you check out their website and events for yourself at www.metmeetings.org.

For further information on AuthorAID see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AuthorAID> or contact me at sarah@griffin-mason.co.uk.