
Reports of Meetings

METM10 – a jamboree for editors and translators

Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting 2010, Tarragona, Spain, 28-30 October 2010

I first came across the Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) group after I joined the translation team on *Actas Dermosifiliográficas*, a bilingual dermatology journal produced by Elsevier. My motivation for attending the first MET meeting was partly the wish to put faces on the other members of a team I had only met virtually and partly the need for guidance to improve the quality of my medical output.

What greeted me was a community of supremely professional editors and translators willing to openly share their expertise in order to provide better language services and promote the related professions. Most of the sessions offered were practice-based, with real working examples of the issues in hand presented by experienced professionals.

The 2010 MET meeting, “Facilitating knowledge transfer – through editing, translation, coaching”, was held in Tarragona, Spain, from October 28 to 30 at the Universitat Rovira I Virgili. Each year I have attended, the programme has increased in range, breadth, and depth, and this year was no exception.

Before

Pre-conference workshops were presented by academics and practitioners, many of whom work in the production of medical, scientific, and academic texts either in university language support services or with direct clients seeking publication in journals. For me, the pick of the bunch were:

- Ailish Maher and Luci Vásquez, “Revision matters: why, how and how much?” This workshop provided translators and editors with revision guidelines and a table comparing how the elements of transfer, content, language and style, and presentation are involved in various types of editing and translation tasks – and the table offers a handy framework for quoting the deadline and price for a job.
- Darko Hren’s two sessions on practical statistics for editors rolled back the darkness around many statistical techniques used in research and provided advice on how to spot the most common mistakes. I was relieved to be informed that while editors must be able to identify weaknesses and errors in statistics, they do not necessarily have to be able to resolve them.
- Philip Bazire on dermatology: a three-hour workshop on the anatomy of the skin and basic principles of dermatology that was invaluable for members of the *Actas* team and others.

The one shortcoming of the MET meetings is that delegates can only be in one place at one time. Luckily, many of the workshops are run on a rolling programme at the annual meetings, and the more popular ones are

repeated at various times of the year, mainly in Barcelona. The ones I missed at METM10 included “Righting citing” by Iain Patten, helping editors to spot referencing errors or misplaced citations and suggesting ways to resolve these issues; Alan Lounds on how genre analysis can support editors and translators of research articles in improving abstracts and introductions; John Bates on approaches to effective paragraphing; Marije de Jager and Dado Cakalo with pointers on how editors should deal with plagiarism in science writing; and Felicity Neilson with an introduction to editing medical texts.

During

The conference proper had a rich programme of plenary speeches, panels, and parallel sessions of knowledge updates and promising practices for editors and translators. The full programme can be viewed at <http://www.metmeetings.org>.

Plenary speaker Emma Wagner of the EU Directorate General of Translation delivered an overview of the European Commission campaign for clear writing, born of their earlier “fight the fog” campaign. This was of special interest to those who were working on bids for EU editing contracts.

The panels and parallel sessions included gems such as Mary Ellen Kerans and David Cullen’s presentation on use of the Springer Exemplar corpus. They explained how this collection of peer-reviewed journals can be used to inform lexical choices in translation and editing. Mary Ellen and David pointed out the qualities and possible shortcomings of the Springer corpus and then demonstrated ways to achieve better matches and more appropriate search results by refining search techniques and interpreting the results intelligently.

Other afternoon sessions included my knowledge update on sensitive language, comparing style guide recommendations to actual usage of non-biased language in medical texts and journalism, and education-oriented presentations discussing the criteria for excellence in modern English writing and genre awareness.

Paola de Castro spoke about how the Italian National Institute of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome) is working with institutes and universities in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Colombia, and Brazil in NECOBELAC (the Network of Collaboration Between Europe & Latin American-Caribbean countries, www.necobelac.eu), to improve scientific writing, promote open access publication models, and foster technical and scientific cooperation and communication, specifically in the field of public health.

Another thread of the conference focused on presentation skills for researchers and speakers, with Joy Burrough-Boenisch and David Alexander advising on

the clear presentation of content in posters. They strongly suggested reordering information away from the typical IMRAD format that proves impossible to read from more than three paces, opting for some less-is-more, punch-them-in-the-eye principles that could also prove useful in other scenarios. Sara Freitas-Maltaverne ran a session on using storytelling principles in PowerPoint presentations, and Jean-Luc Doumont blew everyone away with his full-on approach to effective design, construction, and use of slides.

Posters on issues in translation, editing, and presentation were displayed in the coffee lounge, providing a surprising range of transferable tips on clarity and good communication.

Theoretical input was balanced by practical advice on issues like ergonomics, the best way to organize a work station – the practical aspects of multiple screens, docking stations, external hard drives – and peer-to-peer updates of tools available on the web for building quick-and-easy websites, improving organization, and increasing productivity.

The official schedule was supplemented by many opportunities for networking (and great food). Many members had come to the meeting in search of collaborators in linked portfolio areas ranging from a project to improve

the English communication skills of Spanish GPs, to bids for editing contracts and peer reviewing arrangements between translators and editors.

All contributors give their time and ideas freely in return for the benefits they receive from attending the meetings and most meetings are held in venues offered by MET supporters. As a result, the cost of these meetings is more than reasonable, keeping my trips from the UK comfortably within budget and making the investment-to-gain ratio highly favourable.

After

Plans are currently afoot for MET 2011 in Barcelona and the Spring Workshops will be listed on the website (<http://www.metmeetings.org>) soon. The benefits I have drawn from MET meetings lead me to strongly suggest you check out the website and put the event on your CPD plan for the coming year if you possibly can.

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