

Communication support across the disciplines

Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting 2008, Split, Croatia, 11-13 September 2008

The Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) had their 2008 annual meeting and general assembly in the Croatian city of Split. It was the fourth annual MET event and the first to take place outside Spain, which makes this young association of language professionals working with English now truly Mediterranean. METM08 was attended by some 85 participants, mostly from countries around the Mediterranean, although northern Europe and even the United States and Brazil were represented. The focus of the meeting was on differences in language use and language support needs in different disciplines, ranging from hard sciences to humanities. The presenters included representatives of scientific journals in diverse fields – from applied linguistics to sociology, marine biology to medicine – and they all had captivating stories to tell.

Keynote speeches

METM08 keynote speakers were John Swales and Liz Wager. John Swales is professor emeritus of linguistics and former director of the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan. He initiated the genre-analysis movement and his contribution to METM08 focused on the genre of the research article, with a workshop on abstracts and the writing of abstracts, and a keynote address about the methods sections of research articles (how and why they differ between disciplines). He also pointed out salient variations in the rhetoric used in research papers from different disciplines.

Liz Wager, a freelance publications consultant, secretary of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and member of the BMJ ethics committee, gave a keynote speech about publication ethics in the electronic era. With the advent of the internet, local and international journals alike have become global, and there is a great deal of international collaboration on all levels of publication. But the internet hasn't brought universal standards or harmonization of practices. What's more, it has made plagiarism, copy-paste writing and copyright breaches much easier than before. There are no universally accepted standards of publication ethics: different individuals, institutions, countries, or cultures may set their own boundaries. Many rules are unwritten, and many are unknown by authors and reviewers or perhaps not generally accepted. Liz Wager indicated how manuscript editors and translators can spot ethical problems and contribute to solving them, and her occasionally provocative statements gave the audience ample food for thought and discussion.

Workshops

As a copy editor of several English-language medical journals published in Italy with an international but mostly Mediterranean authorship and readership, I deal with many of the issues mentioned by Liz Wager. There's a fair amount of copy-paste writing in the manuscripts that end

up on my desk – prepublication plagiarism, fortunately caught in time, but still problematic because these papers have already been accepted for publication. Reason enough for me to attend the workshop by MET chairperson Mary Ellen Kerans entitled “Managing plagiarism: an approach to dialog between authors and editors.” This provided background information on the plagiarism problem as well as useful directions on how to resolve it at different levels, and the role of language editors and translators in this process.

A recurrent theme was the use of English in research publications: which disciplines and situations really require the use of English, and when might the national language be more appropriate; when is multilingual publication the best choice, and how best to manage this; and what quality of English should be expected when it is produced by non-native speakers. There were panel discussions about multilingual publication, linguistics research relevant to wordface practitioners, translation revision and quality assurance, and cultural differences in communication among disciplines. The parallel presentations were subdivided into three threads: research, promising practices, and knowledge updates. In addition to the more academic presentations, there were all kinds of practical items on the programme, such as a demonstration of dictation software by two of its users, tips on how to “create” time for busy freelancers, and how to help academics prepare oral presentations in English when this is not their mother tongue.

The first day of the meeting offered a series of training workshops on practical tools for improving text flow, the anatomy of the thorax, statistics for editors and translators, and storytelling techniques to create high-impact PowerPoint presentations, to name just a few. And there was a pre-METM extra: a half-day computer workshop on corpus-guided editing and translation.

The meeting was impeccably organized at the University of Split Faculty of Medicine by a local team of volunteers. Special mention is due to Darko Hren of the *Croatian Medical Journal* and Anita Marušić of *Acta Adriatica*. METM08 ended with a wonderful closing dinner, where John Swales gave a sweeping performance with a toast to friends present and absent: “Although they are not in our sight, we can recognise them with our glasses.”

MET will return to its home town, Barcelona, for its next annual meeting on 30 and 31 October 2009, preceded by a workshop day on 29 October. The website (www.metmeetings.org) has further details on the meeting and also on MET's spring workshop programme.

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