

# Pedants' corner

*The 2016 Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting in Tarragona gave grammar nerds plenty to get excited about, says Laura Bennett*



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Of the many complimentary things you could say about Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET), top of the list must surely be the organisation's expertise in selecting conference venues! The MET Meeting in 2012 (METM12) in Venice and METM13 in Poblet had me hooked, and although I'd reluctantly had to miss the last two annual events, I was determined to be in Tarragona for METM16. I wasn't disappointed.

This year's theme was 'Raising standards through knowledge sharing and peer training', and the event began as usual with optional pre-conference workshop sessions on the Thursday afternoon. After my journey from Barcelona airport in the torrential rain, my first event was the translation slam on the Thursday evening, held in the dimly lit back room of a typical Catalan Irish pub. Tim Morris and ITI chair Sarah Griffin-Mason duelled over a suitably tricky piece of Spanish literary prose and dealt expertly with the zealous audience participation.

The conference proper began for me on the Friday morning with two short mini-sessions focused on relative clauses and commas, led by MET stalwarts Mary Ellen Kerans and Alan Lounds. A feast for grammar nerds, these sessions were a wonderful opportunity to focus on how these constructions are or should be used in English. With the help of a motivational jar of biscuits, we went some way towards proving the old adage that a roomful of translators can spend an entire day debating the position of a comma.

The mini-sessions were held in a room with stunning views of Tarragona's beautiful cathedral.

Located just behind the building, the El Seminari conference centre had plenty of architectural jewels of its own, including a lavish main hall and a charming 13th-century chapel in the courtyard, where we enjoyed coffee and networking.

## Concise tips

Conference presentations, interspersed with the odd interactive session on networking and coaching, began after lunch on the Friday. First up for me was Simon Berrill's talk entitled 'Spinning your web: getting clients to come to you'. As an arachnophobe, I would have preferred fewer spider-related images in the slides, but Simon's point about translators drawing clients in through networking and presenting ourselves in a professional manner was very well made. Offering sensible, clear and concise tips based on his own experience, Simon struck a number of chords.

Simon's session was followed by Oliver Lawrence's presentation entitled 'I had to swerve before I hit him: the perils of ambiguity and how to avoid them'. It was easy for Oliver to get his audience on side with a seemingly endless list of hilarious examples ('Toilet out of order; please use floor below' and 'I saw her

duck'), but ambiguity in our translations can be a very important issue with serious consequences, particularly in technical documents. Topics covered included taking sufficient time to proof our translations thoroughly, the benefit of a second pair of eyes, the importance of specialist knowledge, and the possible use of a quality assurance tool such as ApSIC Xbench.

My Saturday began with visits to Tarragona's Roman amphitheatre and the cathedral. Once I was back in listening mode, two of the day's most interesting presentations addressed the issues of virtual offices and disability language. Philippa May Bennett, Oliver Lawrence and Helen O'Leary-Brown offered a case study of a virtual translation team, while Elizabeth Garrison reported on her year as a digital nomad, leaving those of us with responsibilities at home dreaming wistfully about the globetrotting opportunities now available.

On a very different note, Mary Fons i Fleming focused on the use of disability-related terms for translators and interpreters. This is clearly an area fraught with potential pitfalls for the unwary. She spoke of the current preference for 'people-first language', ie 'people with disabilities' rather than 'disabled people'.

## Comma Queen

The highlight of my METM16 was the keynote speech delivered by Mary Norris of *The New Yorker*, aka 'the Comma Queen'. Mary regaled us with details of the everyday life of a copy editor and proofreader at the magazine, which has its own distinct style. Mary's anecdotes covered everything from the contentious capitalisation of maraschino (or, indeed, Maraschino) cherry and the 'a' in 'a-hole' to classics such as who vs whom and singular 'they' debates. It was a fascinating insight into what the magazine demands from its copy, delivered in a captivating way.

The conference drew to a close with the MET AGM and raffle, followed by a gala dinner and a virtuoso performance by the MET choir. The AGM included the announcement that METM17 will be held in Italy – Brescia, to be precise – at what looks like yet another breathtaking venue. ©

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