

Putting on the style

Hayley Smith reports on this year's sell-out online

Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting: The Style Issue

Conference season. That wonderfully busy time of year with such a rich variety of events on offer left, right and centre. It can be hard to know where to begin. And 2021 was no exception, despite the ongoing uncertainty surrounding international travel and the restrictions imposed in various corners of the globe. MET's steadfast team rose above it, unperturbed, and set to organising MET's first fully online conference. Introducing The Style Issue...

No disappointments for a newcomer here

Having only joined MET in 2019, I hadn't yet had the pleasure of attending one of its METMs (Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meetings), held once a year in the autumn in different Mediterranean cities. But I had been gradually dipping my toe into the world of MET, as it too moved all events online in 2020 and 2021. Thanks to the monthly MET Conversations, online workshops, and the METM Revisited event held in place of the conference in 2020, I'd had a taste of the quality of the content and the friendly feel of the association. I was convinced METM21 Online would not disappoint, and disappoint it did not.

It was a sell-out, with all 250 virtual seats being snapped up by MET members and non-members alike. One of the benefits of the online format, the organisers confessed, was being able to expand capacity to welcome more attendees than had previously been the case in person. And despite all the sessions being recorded and made available to attendees until the end of the year, some of the sessions I was at had over 100 people watching live – not bad at all, especially considering there were two parallel tracks running at any one time.

The event itself was spread over two afternoons on 14 and 15 October 2021, with Zoom the platform of choice for the conference proper. I found the half-day format to be effective, helping to abate the screen strain and making it easier to juggle professional and personal commitments around the sessions. If one thing has come out of the last few years, it's that we've all got rather good at this online CPD business!

Plenty on offer for different specialities

The presentations covered everything from research writing to collaboration, and from style guides to cultural mediation, with plenty on offer for medical translators too. Karen Tkaczyk kicked off on track one and did a sterling job of exploring technical style, especially given that it was 6am for her in Colorado! There were also a number of positive tweets flying around about the parallel session: Phillippa May Bennett's spotlight on ethics over on track two. Clare Vassallo was superbly eloquent in her exploration of the many facets of negotiation in literary translation, including touching on recent campaigns such as #NameTheTranslator and #TranslatorsOnTheCover. Andrea Shah guided us effortlessly through the nuts and bolts of search engine optimisation (SEO), with the added benefit of her perspective from the US market, and Lucy O'Shea dug deep into some of the many ways technical translators are creative in their work.

Overall, the programme included 15 sessions and represented MET members' vast array of skills and specialisms, and there really was something for everybody. All for a very modest fee.

Technology without hitches

The online programme was cleverly designed to work much like a paper programme: each event had its own user-friendly Zoom icon with an embedded link, and switching between tracks felt much like hopping from one room to the next, just like at a real conference venue (perhaps with less chance of getting lost or distracted by coffee and biscuits en route!). Handouts were also made available to download before the relevant sessions with the same handy icon to click. From a technical point of view, the event ran very smoothly, and the links worked without a hitch (well done, Michael Farrell!).

But Zoom links weren't the only techie part of this conference. Each of the four tracks had its own tech team working behind the scenes, consisting of a Zoom recorder and a Zoom host. Front-of-house, each track had a welcomer and a master of ceremonies (MC) too. A MET Council member was also on hand in each track team to keep everybody organised. The army of helpers amounted to some 35 willing volunteers – quite the organisational

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machine! But it would seem that all the hard work was worth it: the post-conference survey findings – some of which MET Council kindly shared with me for the purposes of writing this article – show that 87 per cent of attendees consider the online format to have worked ‘very well’, and the organisation was even described as ‘impeccable’.

The irreplaceable presence of the human element

METM21 was a particularly special event for me as I was invited to be one of the four MCs, guiding attendees through the afternoon of sessions in track two on the Friday. I was able to experience first-hand the unfaltering enthusiasm and dedication of MET volunteers in putting together the event. The teams rehearsed and rehearsed to make all the transitions as seamless as possible and ensure everything had been *METiculously* thought through. As MET chair Emma Goldsmith commented, the online format also meant that planning and preparations had to run to a whole different schedule. The dress rehearsals were concentrated in the immediate run-up to the event to accommodate the latest software updates and allow the speakers to test their devices and set-ups, as well as to ensure everybody had the order of play fresh in their minds.

One of the main takeaways for me was the intrinsically human side of organising a conference, even an online one. People working with people – giving advice, suggesting ideas, asking questions, sharing knowledge and working together to achieve the same goal. I believe this human element also came through for the attendees, who were never left unaccompanied on screen, even during the coffee breaks. Wonder proved to be the ideal platform for networking between sessions, and there were smiling helpers on hand to assist attendees with navigating the space, just like in real life. There were different pre-organised discussion topics set up as icebreakers, including a circle for newcomers attending their first METM (30 per cent of the post-conference survey respondents), as well as session-specific groups. Nothing was left to chance.

Extra entertainment (some still available online)

At the end of each afternoon, the ‘Off-METM’ programme kept us entertained into the evening. On day one, the Pick ‘n’ Mix session proved to be a great way to find out more about MET. Attendees could pick from a selection of seven mini-presentations covering some of MET’s activities, from the MET book club to its hub for tools and resources known as ‘the Hive’. I particularly enjoyed hearing about MET’s travelling bookshelf and all the opportunities to volunteer at the in-person conferences. Each breakout session was led by the MET member(s) in charge of the project, who introduced the topic and took questions. This was followed by a highly original Editor’s Café session in which two expert editors (Alan Lounds and Theresa Truax-Gischler) guided us through their thought processes for how they would help an author preparing an article-length thesis for submission to an international journal. This event proved particularly popular with MET’s editing contingent and beyond.

On day two, some fabulously musical MET members wowed the crowd with a polished rendition of the 1960s classic ‘Hey Jude’, expertly put together by MET choir leader extraordinaire

Further watching to get a feel of it all...

For an extensive list of useful resources from Karen Tkaczyk’s talk, read her LinkedIn post: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/technical-style-issue-karen-tkaczyk?trk=articles_directory

Watch the METM21 rendition of Hey Jude on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kPMWDLzGvU>

Keep an eye on the METM22 conference page for updates on next year’s event: <https://www.metmeetings.org/en/presentation:1265>

Ruth Simpson. Hats off to everyone who got involved, and top marks for the ‘Swinging Sixties’ costumes. (This was also a chance to see ITI chair Paul Appleyard in a rather fetching wig!)

And then there was more: a raffle, with some juicy CAT tool and resource giveaways for the lucky winners, and MET’s very own version of *Desert Island Discs* – a wonderful networking opportunity and a fun way to get to know other attendees. Together with the after-party on Wonder, it was the perfect way to relax after all that concentrating, and head into the weekend on an adrenaline high.

As always at translation and interpreting conferences, there was plenty of activity on Twitter throughout the event. Much to the envy of other attendees, speakers Holly Hibbert and Aleksandra Chlon even managed to meet in person and enjoy the conference together with a few other colleagues – a fitting tribute to their presentation ‘Together in Style’ on how they set up a snippet slam group, which developed into a professional support bubble. Their talk also included concrete examples of how their collaboration helps them to produce better work, and stirred up a lot of interest in the Zoom chat box.

It was great to see colleagues enthusiastic to replicate their successful formula. To quote Allison Wright on Twitter: ‘METM21 is full of examples. More examples is what we want.’ Allison herself also led by example, delighting us with a lively 90-minute interactive session exploring how we might use Grammarly and Hemingway to help improve our writing style, with a practical breakout exercise included to boot. You can find her tweet and others using the hashtag #METM21.

Before the conference drew to a close, Emma also announced the much-awaited decision regarding METM22. While METM21 Online was a resounding success, the excitement on hearing that next year we’ll be back in person was palpable, even through the screen. San Sebastián is waiting for us, and I for one am looking forward to seeing just what MET can do when we’re back in the flesh! Nothing, it seems, can beat the human touch – at conferences, just like in translation. See you at METM22! 

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