

## Building bridges, constructing networks: METM 2007

*Mediterranean Editors and Translators' Meeting, Madrid, 25–27 October 2007*

The Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) held their third annual meeting and general assembly in an attractive venue in Madrid: the Royal Botanic Garden. The meeting was attended by some 80 participants, all of them language consultants working with English, from 14 different countries.

### Prelude

The optional part of the programme started on Thursday, 25 October with a five-hour workshop on corpus-guided editing and translation. The facilitators demonstrated free or inexpensive computer tools for mining field-specific text collections (corpora), explaining the difference between a clean corpus and a “quick-and-dirty” one and showing participants how to build both. The workshop was held in a computer lab to allow hands-on practice with the various tools. The next day was filled with six shorter training workshops on a genre analysis approach to editing research articles in different fields, use of punctuation and information ordering to improve text flow, a systematic approach to communicating with clients, statistics for editors and translators, and principles and strategies for correct citation practices.

The general assembly was itself like a panel discussion, going beyond the usual brief to include progress reports on some ongoing projects within MET: the consolidation of the existing workshop programme with new additions; a pilot study of a model revision-and-review protocol (reflecting European translation standard EN 15083); and a client education document in the form of guidelines that describe the different types of language services offered, the characteristics of a professional language consultant, and what to expect of their services.

### Sessions

On Saturday 27 October, the actual Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting took place. This year's theme—Building Bridges, Constructing Networks—can be read as an effort to maintain a stable network of English language consultants offering quality support services in the Mediterranean space, thereby bridging the divide between science and language. The full programme of METM 07 can be found at [www.metmeetings.org/?section=metm07](http://www.metmeetings.org/?section=metm07).

### Computer aid

The first panel session, on computer-aided translation (CAT) and its benefits to freelancers, was especially interesting to translators. Presenting their favourite CAT tools, the four speakers made it clear how much more these tools have to offer than just recycling old translations. Potential advantages included consistency in terminology, quality control features, the possibility of exchanging translation memories with other translators, and working in a team on very big projects.

The second panel discussed a number of useful internet and computer tools for editors and translators. Examples were a tool for using a series of search engines simultaneously; a means to create one's own, field-specific search engine; specialist spell checkers; and much more.

### Language brokers

Ana Moreno, researcher at Madrid's Centre for Information and Scientific Documentation, gave the keynote talk: “Cross-cultural differences and similarities: What do we really know about cultural differences in written communication?”. This is a key topic for “bicultural language brokers”, as the MET audience was referred to by one of the earlier speakers. Ana's research is based on a large, genre-specific corpus of texts by proficient English language writers and a comparable one by writers in another language, a design departure from older studies comparing student work or the work of non-native English speakers writing in English. Her most recent study on critical language in book reviews brought out differences in the respective cultures. Her talk set the stage for a discussion of the implications of these findings for editing and translating texts for an international readership.

### Working the market

The third panel, “Working the market”, was divided into two parts: “Adding scope, breadth and depth to your work” and “Managing your clients: focus on communication”. While editing and translating are the primary language support categories clients request, English language professionals are often asked to add to their basic skills by becoming writing instructors, oral presentation coaches, peer reviewers, desktop publishers, mediators, and more. On the basis of their own experience, the four panel members showed how translating and editing scientific texts can become similar to a peer review process; how you can drive your career as an English language facilitator by the way you structure your website; how a translators' team can grow to become a journal production facility; and where to draw the line between what you should do in addition to your basic skills and when you should stop.

The second part of this session, with a different four-member panel, focused on the relation with the client from a communication and negotiation point of view. The relationship between an in-house language service at a university science department and its freelance translators on the one hand and its internal clients on the other were discussed. Another speaker illustrated the importance of active communication with clients and of requests for feedback from them. Then, the English language consultant working in the Mediterranean area was described as a skilled person working in a seller's market in real need for services. The talk included a number of very useful tips for negotiation—and many colourful illustrations of

Mediterranean market scenes, a few with scribes and their clients.

### **Additionally**

Some of the topics addressed by the poster session were efficient author querying by means of a “problem-solution” structure; a case-control study between Italy and the UK on editorial leadership in biomedical publishing; academic publishing in a global context; and a method of “text-based ethnography” for studying author-editor interaction.

All participants were invited to the closing dinner on Saturday evening in the atrium of the newly refurbished cast iron Atocha railway station: good wine and good food provided an excellent context for consolidating new

contacts. The social programme on Sunday consisted of an excursion to Toledo, once a multilingual, cosmopolitan city and a centre of translation of texts in Arabic to Latin and Spanish that made the 12th-century “Renaissance of the Middle Ages” possible. The MET tour aptly focused on this historic aspect of the city.

Next year’s meeting, METM 08, will be held 11–13 September 2008 at the Medical School of the University of Split, Croatia. The main theme will be Communication Across Disciplines.

*Marije de Jager*  
dejager@tin.it

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## **From the Literature**

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### **CONSORT for abstracts**

The CONSORT statement, which covers the reporting of randomized clinical trials, has recently been extended to provide guidance about journal and conference abstracts.<sup>1,2</sup> The original CONSORT statement (an updated version of which is due to be published in 2008) gives little guidance about the content of abstracts, but focuses on the body of the paper. However, it is clear that abstracts are often the only text available to doctors working outside academic centres or in resource-poor areas. While, ideally, clinicians should base decisions on reading full papers, we know that abstracts (available on databases such as Medline) may be used to inform clinical decisions and it is therefore important that they contain as much relevant information as possible to enable readers to assess the research. In some cases, studies are never written up in full, so a conference abstract may be the only publicly available record of a trial. CONSORT for abstracts has therefore developed a minimum list of essential items that should be included in an abstract reporting a randomized trial. The list may also be applicable to abstracts reporting other types of research.

The new CONSORT for abstracts was developed after consultation with researchers, editors, and methodologists. Like the main CONSORT statement its recommendations are, as far as possible, based on published evidence about the factors that contribute to high quality reporting. However, the guidelines also recognize that abstracts must be short, so a Delphi panel was used to determine the essential elements for reporting.

CONSORT for abstracts recommends that abstracts should use a structured format, but leaves the choice of

headings to journal editors. Items that should be included are shown in the table. The items have been selected to give readers sufficient information about the design and conduct of studies to enable them to evaluate the results and, in particular, to judge the validity of a clinical trial and the applicability of the results to other clinical settings.

There is considerable evidence that structured abstracts are superior to unstructured ones and that the structured format enables readers to obtain information more easily. Further guidance about the contents of the abstract should optimize the information provided within the space constraints of the abstract format. It should be possible to include all the information recommended in CONSORT for abstracts within an abstract of 300 words. Worked examples of applying the checklist are available on the CONSORT website ([www.consort-statement.org](http://www.consort-statement.org)).

The CONSORT group hopes that editors of biomedical journals will endorse the new guidelines about abstracts in the same way that many have endorsed the original CONSORT statement. We also hope that editors will educate potential authors about the new requirements by adding a reference in their instructions to authors and will perhaps also draw readers’ attention to the checklist via an editorial or commentary.

*Liz Wager*  
liz@sideview.demon.co.uk

*Sally Hopewell*  
email