

Something for everyone

The ever-popular annual MET meeting was held in Barcelona last year. First-time attendee Isabel Hurtado de Mendoza reports on a diverse and stimulating event



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Back in May 2011, relaxing with some colleagues after a busy day at the ITI 25th Anniversary Conference, someone recommended the Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) association and their meetings. A few weeks later, I set about finding out more about MET, this forum for translators and editors who work mainly into or with English. Their useful website (www.metmeetings.org) states: 'What unites us is a belief in peer-generated continuing professional development, consistent with practice in the disciplines we started from and in the knowledge societies we serve.' This probably struck a chord with me, because I soon investigated their offer of events and, a few months later, I was a member of MET and had registered for their annual meeting (METM).

METM11 took place at the European Institute of the Mediterranean in Barcelona (Spain) on 21 and 22 October, with 1.5 days of pre-meeting workshops beforehand. This seventh meeting of MET bore the title 'Quality in English translation and editing – from research to practice and back', and offered a rich programme of keynote speeches, discussion panels and parallel sessions.

Pre-meeting workshops

On Thursday 20th, there were four afternoon workshops on offer, which dealt with translating research articles, medical translation, financial translation and improving text flow respectively. Due to my travel arrangements, I was unable to attend any of these sessions but, if they were comparable to the ones on Friday morning, they were surely a good warm-up for the MET meeting itself.

On Friday morning, five workshops ran in parallel; two were related to medicine, one to scholarly writing and another to readability. I opted for 'Translation revision: why, how and how much', which was a repeat of a very popular workshop that Ailish Maher and Luci Vázquez had conducted the previous year. In this session, the figure of the reviser was defined as a first reader in a privileged

position to release the translator from his slavery to the text; someone who needs to find a compromise between all the parties involved: author, translator, client, reader and the profession as a whole. A good reviser, we were told, must be critical, precise, systematic and restrained and avoid several pitfalls, namely over- or under-revising, introducing errors, duplicating efforts already made by the translator and imposing his own writing style. It was acknowledged that there are a whole range of revisions – from a full comparative revision of source and target text to simply skim-reading a unilingual text – and that, depending on extra-textual factors and constraints, it may be the case that a reviser can only add extra layers of improvement to a text. With that in mind, the presenters shared with the audience their own principles and guidelines for revision or self-revision, useful tips and further recommended reading, before presenting us with some challenging exercises to work on in small groups. I would have preferred it if more time had been devoted to the practical exercises but, all in all, this was a very informative workshop that got me ready for the 'real thing'.

A busy first day

On Friday afternoon, the MET meeting itself started with a panel discussion on 'Establishing a dialogue between research and practice' with Sally Burgess, Theresa Lillis, Valerie Matarese and Mary Ellen Kerans. The idea was to have an interactive session and reflect together on the role of research but, even though I know this is a hot topic these days, it wasn't particularly engaging for me. After coffee, there were parallel presentations divided into two threads: promising practices and research. This was meant to give the audience the chance to attend diverse sessions, but packing two talks into one hour on two different floors and doing it seamlessly proved a bit optimistic! Of these sessions, the highlight was Oliver Shaw's on 'Twitter for language professionals', which was a huge success, not only for the topicality of the subject but also for the superb presentation skills demonstrated.

The programme for the day ended with a plenary talk on machine translation (MT). Dorothy Kenny confidently presented this controversial topic, differentiating between rule-based and statistics-based machine translation, presenting us with challenging questions and giving us practical advice (Never accept a post-editing job if it's described as 'revision', if it's not properly paid or if the MT has not been properly customised). I found it quite interesting that a show of hands indicated that part of the audience would be more inclined to use MT after this talk.

The reception that topped off the first day of the meeting gave attendees plenty of opportunities to network and enjoy an exquisite and innovative catering service.

Practical presentations

Saturday started off with panel discussions in two threads again. I chose 'Practical ideas for getting the most out of your working environment', which was the second part of

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a talk given last year. Three presenters (Anne Murray, Ann King and Jason Willis-Lee) described tools that save you time and make your working environment easier, which consequently means money in the bank. Among the tools showcased were desktop-sharing software, storage services, PDF annotators, fences, mind-mapping software and smartphones. The audience contributed keenly and ideas for future sessions were suggested, which made this a very enjoyable discussion.

The parallel presentations after coffee were again divided into two threads. The first one I attended dealt with peer revision and mentoring and presented the benefits of cooperation over competition. The presenter, Helen Casas, described how to find a peer, negotiate a project, give feedback, etc, and explained that working in tandem can improve quality, lead to better production in a shorter turnaround time and enhance your negotiating position by providing added value. ‘Translating audio guides for art exhibitions’, ably presented by Joanna Martinez, was a very practical and interesting talk on the whole audio guide production process, and important tips were highlighted: the text must flow and the translator should read the translation aloud and have the listener in mind at all times.

Ros Schwartz gave Saturday’s plenary talk ‘Making kiln purses’, where she presented the translator as a writer, who needs both ability and attitude to prepare a text that is fit for purpose and meets the client’s unarticulated requirements. In her view, we must ditch the humble-servant approach to our work and submit translations of superior quality. This will give us job satisfaction and a good reason to increase our rates. Ros’s insightful

presentation was full of anecdotes and included a practical exercise that was far too short, but an eager audience was keen to devote over an hour to questions and comments.

After lunch, I attended a panel discussion on CAT tools, which was very well organised. Four presenters (David Cullen, Kelly Dickeson, Sarah Griffin-Mason and Rob Lunn) talked about SDL/Trados Studio 2009, Déjà Vu, MemoQ and various free and open tools. The strengths and drawbacks of all tools were presented and attendees participated actively.

As a new feature, this year the METM included ‘town hall meetings’ on subjects from presentation skills to literature in translation to close the programme. These provided a forum for attendees to generate ideas, raise issues, discuss future conference topics and share expertise and knowledge but, in my opinion, they lacked structure and felt a bit vague.

Saturday ended with the MET General Assembly and a superb closing supper, which, together with the ‘off-METM networking get-togethers’ scheduled during lunch breaks and after hours, completed a packed programme.

The schedule was quite tight, which made days long and tiring, and I would have enjoyed having more practical sessions and a less strong focus on research and the academic world. However, the METM11 programme catered for all tastes – those of translators, editors, interpreters and researchers; proficient speakers were engaged; and it was a great opportunity to network and share experiences with like-minded colleagues. This meeting certainly came up to my expectations and, in my opinion, was very good value for money, as well as a great excuse to visit Barcelona again!

The meeting allowed time for networking as well as a very wide range of presentations and workshops

If you are tempted by this report, I’m sure Kim Eddy’s efforts to make full use of the social networks to promote METM will not go to waste. You can find out about METM12 – to be held on 8-10 November 2012 in Venice – on the METM website, its Facebook and LinkedIn pages and on Twitter. After you do, I’m sure you’ll add this event to your CPD plan for 2012!

PHOTOS: KIM EDDY, VALERIE MATARESE