

Mediterranean Editors and Translators Launch Regional Association at METM 05

Mary Ellen Kerans

More than 80 journal editors, author's editors, translators, and others who help writers in the Mediterranean to reach world readers took part in the first Mediterranean Editors' and Translators' Meeting in Barcelona on 4-5 November 2005. METM 05 launched a new association for providers of language support services in the region. Its aims are to track the changing needs of local users of language support, channel information on effective solutions to problems, and offer training that is accessible.

Registered as Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) by Barcelona-based founders—me, Alan Lounds, and Carolyn Newey—the association targets those who work with English to facilitate communication for nonnative speakers. MET is an alliance of service providers and service users—largely scientists, their journal editors, or the institutions they work for—that have strong parallel interest from other knowledge societies or entities whose social, political, or economic messages compete for international attention. The founders—backed by seven other signers of the charter and many more who discussed objectives during and after METM 05 but could not be on hand for the signing—were concerned that information on promising practices was not reaching many translators and editors, who often began working ad hoc in response to an acute call for help. Because language consultants arrive from a variety of fields that also claim their attention, years can pass before they become aware of international associations that provide continuing education and stimuli for multimedia communication work. Once they discover such groups, they find that Mediterranean

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incomes will not always support membership in the several organizations that these interdisciplinary consultants might like to be involved with or that traveling abroad is difficult. MET will try to fill that gap with a low membership fee, by seeking alliances with larger organizations, and by developing training events that use local expertise structured so that participants can take information home to others. MET's Web page, at www.metmeetings.org/index.htm, announces activities and gives instructions on how to join.

At the first meeting, *Croatian Medical Journal* (CMJ) Editor-in-Chief Ana Marušić struck two key notes in her plenary talk on the importance of journal processes in educating young biomedical scientists: the power of sustained instructive peer review in helping them learn to write and think clearly and critically and the role of small journals in creating a bridge to mainstream science. Because CMJ is published in English, that bridge can be crossed not only by Croatian authors but also by contributors in many other countries through developmental editing of articles that might not be reviewed by larger journals. CMJ also takes on topics of mainly regional importance, further supporting communities outside centers of research. At the end of her talk, Marušić took a strong educator's stance: "We saw that an author-helpful policy was not enough. It just treats the symptoms. So we work with medical students on medical communication. We teach them basic sense about numbers and how to read a scientific article." How CMJ carries out that policy—with instruction, patience, and up to eight revision rounds and four layers of manuscript editing—was explained in detail in another session by its manuscript editor, Aleksandra Mišak. A full account of the CMJ approach can be read in two recent papers.^{1,2}

METM 05 was a forum for those who work with communication, but concern

for education—inside or outside classrooms—was widespread. Editor and writer Valerie Matarese, from Italy, described an added benefit of her courses for students and doctors on the critical reading of journal articles. By encouraging browsing through articles—a different behavior from specific information-seeking or criticism—Matarese's approach supports writing by fostering awareness of structure. Iain Patten, a translator from Valencia, Spain, outlined a way to improve novice writers' referencing skills by drawing parallels between citations and other forms of evidence. He showed how references need to be placed to support the message—just as facts and figures are—and how comprehension is affected if they are misplaced. Malcolm Hayes, also from Spain, presented another educational approach to author's editing in "Negotiating the Final Text". He set out a technique for directing independent revision by authors to encourage better future manuscripts.

Translator and author's editor Joy Burrough-Boenisch's inaugural plenary talk emphasized how workers at the "word-face"—a potentially forgotten group she likened to those at the coalface—can manage their professional development by keeping abreast of a wealth of extramural training opportunities offered by associations. Her main message at METM 05, however, was an account of the successful history of SENSE—an active self-help editors' association in the Netherlands.³ SENSE has grown steadily over 15 years in a country where there is a critical mass of language service providers who were once fairly isolated from one another. Since SENSE appeared, stable interest groups have developed, workshops and a handbook have tapped local expertise, speakers are occasionally invited, and social events ensure that professionals are not invisible. Discussion after the talk suggested that even though the Mediterranean is a larger

and more varied region, a similar approach could address common concerns.

The two plenary talks, 12 parallel sessions that were either workshops or interactive presentations, and four roundtable discussions made up a rich first program. Theory was present—for example, in a talk by applied linguist and translator Ian Williams (Universidad de la Cantabria) on argumentation in article discussion sections in Spanish and English. Such genre analysis can underpin confident editing and translation because it is a tool for recognizing an author's intention quickly or for explaining to an author why a message is hard to glean. Practice was the main focus everywhere, though. There were session titles like "Editing Translation: Pitfalls in Style, Grammar and Usage"—from Barcelona translators Ann King and Jane Lewis, who looked at language interference that can make a text difficult to read. When to edit and when to refrain was the focus of a workshop by translator Karen Shashok, of Granada, Spain. Shashok pointed out that clients in the region need substantive editing as well as translation and that if translator-editors experience role conflicts, it helps to discuss them frankly among peers. Training editors to enlarge the array of ways they might intervene beyond their own voice and style was covered in a second session by Burrough-Boenisch.

What editing or translation feels like to a writer was the focus of a panel discussion with translated authors chaired by anthropologist and Barcelona-based editor Susan DiGiacomo, "Translation and/as Dialog". The message was that authors are helped through structured dialog that looks a bit like ethnography—centering on a writer's own knowledge and experience. Respectful mediation allows a voice to be heard in a new language but remain under the author's control.

A session in which publishers were invited to state their views featured Ann Graul, of Proux Science, explaining what it takes to be a freelance biomedical-science journalist for that multimedia publisher. Ediciones Doyma (a division of Elsevier in Spain) sent Managing Editor José Alonso

to explain the motivation and logistics behind cover-to-cover journal publication trends. He said translation and native-language publication processes need to be integrated—a simultaneous publication approach I had also described earlier as potentially supportive of text quality for a local research community's output. Mercè Piqueras, of *International Microbiology* (Spanish Society of Microbiology—SEM), also spoke in that session on the publishing trials and successes of an English-language journal in a non-English-speaking setting.

The theme of METM 05 was "interdisciplinary collaboration—international communication" to emphasize that there is no single profile for a language consultant who can meet the changing requirements of demanding clients. One panel discussion explored that theme specifically: "Interdisciplinary Transitions—Making the Shift from Subject Expert, Linguist or Educator to Language Facilitator". Author's editor and one-time biologist Catherine Mark, based at one of the Spanish national research centers, skillfully led the audience in open discussion after short presentations from four of us—Iain Patten, Mary Ellen Kerans (background in English for specific-purposes instruction), Benjamin Young (a linguist and former president of the European Medical Writers Association, now based in Madrid), and Simon Bartlett (also trained as a scientist, now communications officer at a research center in Madrid). The consensus was that no one had a smooth way into the profession but that research, thinking, writing, and people skills honed in one field were transferable. That more would have to be learned was seen as a plus for a career shift, not a drawback.

Other talks looked at the history of knowledge transfer in the Mediterranean (Alain Touwaide, of the Smithsonian Institution, and Frances Luttikhuisen, of Barcelona). That interest promises to be a stable feature of future METMs. In a well-attended parallel session, Lounds brought together representatives of three more Spanish universities to discuss the hard realities of institutional language-support services.

The full program can be accessed on the association's Web site, where announcements of publications will be posted as they appear. Missing from that official record, however, is a subprogram of enthusiastic casual discussion of regional concerns that gave this conference its special relevance—made possible because there were plenty of chances for 80 people to get to know each other over Mediterranean hospitality with wine, *tapas*, coffee, and a working lunch. METM 06—9-11 November—will also be in Barcelona.

METM 05 was organized by Mary Ellen Kerans, author's editor and translator, Barcelona, Spain; Carolyn Newey, manuscript editor, Institut de Recerca, Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, Barcelona, Spain; Frances Luttikhuisen, language consultant, Canet de Mar, Spain; Alan Lounds, Servei de Llengües i Terminologia, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain; Karen Shashok, translator and author's editor, Granada, Spain; and Catherine Mark, Departamento de Inmunología y Oncología, Centro Nacional de Biotecnología/CSIC, Madrid, Spain. Participants from 11 countries attended, and wider interest is expected in 2006 as word spreads and travel support for resource-poor regions is found. The first meeting was made possible by speaker grants from the consulate general of the Netherlands and Proux Science. An early grant from Ediciones Doyma supported the Web page, and the Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània donated conference facilities. ☺

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