

Mediterranean Editors and Translators Holds Second Meeting

Joy Burrough-Boenisch and Sally Burgess

Mediterranean Editors and Translators—MET—is rapidly crystallizing around a core of motivated author's editors and translators based in Spain. The first 2-day MET meeting, held in October 2005 in Barcelona, attracted about 80 language professionals, more than two-thirds of whom were based in Spain. Their shared interest was in English-language texts, which they approached from various professional perspectives: as authors' editors, translators, journal editors, teachers of English for specific purposes, copywriters, language trainers, or combinations thereof. That meeting concluded with delegates deciding to formalize the group. Within a few months, MET had achieved legal status and, thanks to its talented Web master, an attractive and informative Web site.

One year on and the MET organization had more than 100 members. MET's legal construction means that one has to be a member to attend the annual weekend meeting, but the annual subscription is low (€30), and this is no hardship for most. In fact, about 50% of those attending the annual meeting held in Barcelona on 27-28 October 2006 became members on registering for the event. Almost two-thirds of the delegates were from the host country, Spain, though 20 other Mediterranean countries (including Algeria, Croatia, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, and Serbia) were also represented. Participants and organizers alike have adopted a loose definition of *Mediterranean*. As a result,

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there were editors, translators, and teachers from the Middle East (Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia), northern (as far north as Finland) and central Europe, and even the United States. The international lineup belies the delegates' linguistic affiliation: more than half were native speakers of English. Most conversation and discussion and all the papers were in English, so the meeting enabled many English-language professionals who work in linguistic isolation in a non-anglophone setting to share experiences, be intellectually and professionally stimulated, and use their working language.

Between them, the two keynote speakers provided intellectual fodder and practical professional advice. Miguel Roig, of St John's University in New York, spoke on "Plagiarism in the Sciences", drawing on his research. By looking at what goes on between the extremes of direct attributed quotation (signaled by being put between quotation marks or blocked and indented) and paraphrase, he showed how difficult it is to define and thus to avoid plagiarism—particularly in science, in that science jargon cannot be replaced with synonyms. It is even possible to self-plagiarize. Of course, not all plagiarism is the result of an author's unwittingly using someone else's words. Roig cited a number of examples of flagrant violation of the norms of intellectual property, some of them by eminent academics. Plagiarism may pose an ethical and professional dilemma for editors and translators who happen to detect it in their clients' work, so it is an important issue for a meeting like this to address.

Chris Durban, an American translator based in Paris who specializes in financial translation, gave a feisty talk, urging translators to be more active and commercial by seeking out premium (high-paying) clients who value translators with proven expertise and business acumen. Durban

also took part in the plenary panel discussion "Organizations for Communication Professionals—What Do They Offer You?", in which she represented the Société Française des Traducteurs. Also represented were the International Federation of Translators (FIT), the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA), the Eastern Mediterranean Association of Medical Editors (EMAME), the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), CSE, and the World Association of Medical Writers (WAME). (CSE and WAME were represented by CSE President-Elect Ana Marusic.) The impressive lineup gave delegates unique insight into the personal and professional advantages of joining regional and international organizations. Welcoming the panelists, Karen Shashok noted that in spring she had represented MET at an EMAME meeting in Shiraz, Iran, and that it was therefore a particular pleasure to welcome EMAME's Farhad Handjani to Barcelona.

Other panel discussions at the MET meeting dealt with mentoring and coaching oral communication, including relaxation techniques for nervous public speakers; the new European translation standard; academic English versus plain prose (presented entertainingly in the form of an old-style debate between a supporter of Plain English and an academic); time management; ergonomics for editors; issues in freelancing; and tips for interpreters. A particularly engrossing session was "The Historian's Corner", in which one of the three panelists discussing translation and translators in the Mediterranean was Siam Bhayro, of the University of Cambridge. He vividly described the crucial and often underrated role of 6th-century Oriental Christian translators in ensuring that Galen's medical writing was not lost to us.

The shorter parallel presentations were wide-ranging, covering topics of interest to

teachers of academic and scientific English (the role of translation in instructing medical students in Serbia, imparting English-language publishing skills in a Spanish university, and computerized detection of plagiarism), author's editors (avoiding innocent plagiarism, collaborating with scientist-authors in an Italian research institute, revising visuals, author's editing by correspondence, and ghostwriting in medical journals), freelancers (starting one's own business), applied linguists (comparisons of Spanish and English medical writing style and first-person pronouns in Earth-science articles), and translators (translating minority languages, a benchmark model for bilingual publishing of compliant documents, and translating complex noun phrases in medical English). Choosing which session to attend was difficult. Sometimes the choice was between presentations and short workshops—on impact factors and bibliometrics, guiding novice writers to deal with editor and peer reviewer comments, nondirective listening for translators and communications coaches, and how to navigate journal guidelines for manuscript preparation.

There was often lively debate after the parallel presentations, but even better

opportunities for professional interaction were provided by the workshops. They were a new feature this year. In addition to the short workshops scattered throughout the program, the early evening of Friday was taken up by five simultaneous 3-hour workshops. Two of particular interest to language professionals working for scientists were "Statistics for Editors" and "Righting Citing". The others were more general, dealing with the rationale and techniques for putting comments to authors in electronic manuscripts, how genre analysis benefits the translating and editing of research articles, and how to use punctuation to improve text flow. At the general meeting held at the end of the final day, Ailish Maher (who chairs the MET training initiative) explained that MET envisages playing a key role in training language professionals. The scope and professionalism of the workshops given in Barcelona in October augur well for that.

Thanks to the hospitality of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, the MET meeting was held in the center of Barcelona. In her official welcome, Lurdes Vidal Bertran said how honored the institute was to host the event. Those of us attending the MET meeting in

2006 felt honored to take part. Despite the punishing Mediterranean schedule (from 9 AM to well after 9 PM, but with a long—and delicious—lunch break), we reveled in the mind-stretching and networking. The working groups and e-mail forums set up during the general meeting should ensure that MET snowballs and takes some of the pressure off the core of hardworking volunteers who have so far shouldered the organization of meetings and workshops. Their efforts achieved recognition early in November 2006, when MET was formally accepted as a member of the Spanish network of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, a European Union foundation headquartered in Alexandria, Egypt, with the aim of promoting discussion between cultures. MET seems set to make its mark in the region and could be instrumental in promoting the interests of language professionals further afield. Those keen to attend future MET meetings can now start making plans for METM 2007 in Madrid and METM 2008 in Split, Croatia. Watch www.metmeetings.org/index.htm for further details. ☺