

METM08: Conference Addresses Communication Support Across the Disciplines

*This report is a translation by LUCI VÁZQUEZ of an article by KAREN SHASHOK in *puntoycoma*, the journal of Spanish translators working for the European Union. Vázquez works at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Spain, as an editor and translator; Shashok is a freelance translator and author's editor in Granada, Spain. The original article can be accessed at ec.europa.eu/translation/bulletins/puntoycoma/109/pyc1095_es.htm. This translation is being published with permission of the author and the publisher.*

Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) is a not-for-profit organization founded with the aim of establishing a stable network of language-service providers who work primarily with English. Its activities are intended to improve the quality of language services and stimulate research and the exchange of knowledge and good professional practices among translators, editors, researchers, and users of language services.

The fourth yearly MET conference, “METM08: Communication Support Across the Disciplines,” was held in the city of Split, Croatia, from 11 to 13 September 2008. Its focus was the process of writing, translating, revising, and publishing in English texts by authors whose first language is not English. The conference-goers, from 16 countries, took part in an intensive training program that included workshops, plenary sessions, roundtables, parallel sessions, and poster presentations. Those activities were in three categories: effective working practices, the updating of skills, and research. Judging by the responses from participants, the success of the event was due to the excellent program, the numerous opportunities for debate among participants with diverse professional backgrounds, and the extraordinary dedication of local organizers in the University of Split's Faculty of Medicine.

METM08 had two exceptional guest speakers who contributed their longstanding international experience to the event. John M. Swales—emeritus professor of linguistics at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and the author of numerous studies on genre analysis—directed a workshop on research-article abstracts. In his keynote address, “Variation in Methods Sections of Research Articles”, he spoke of differences among disciplines in the use of tense and active and passive voice. Participants quickly became aware that his knowledge of the elements of discourse used in different types of academic and professional texts is highly relevant to editors, revisers, and translators who work with research articles.

Liz Wager—who runs SideView in Princes Risborough, UK—delivered the second keynote address, “Publication Ethics: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally”. A world authority on publication ethics and peer review, she is secretary of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). As a member of COPE, she has analyzed some of the most common types of misconduct by authors, pharmaceutical companies, and editors. She gave numerous examples of regional, discipline-related, and cultural differences in good professional practices.

The roundtables “Where Do the ‘Disciplinary Culture’ Differences in Communication Lie?”, “Research That's Relevant to Wordface Practitioners”, “Best Practice in English Academic Publication on the Periphery”, and “Translation Revision and Quality Assurance: Practices and Protocols in Diverse Settings” were organized as plenary sessions in which translators, editors, and researchers in the audience actively participated. Their firsthand experiences in working with authors who have to overcome countless linguistic and cultural barriers to the dissemination of their writing in English led to much

heated debate on the appropriateness of publishing specialized journals in English, rather than (or as well as) in the local or national language, and on the urgent need, particularly in many Mediterranean countries and countries that are candidates to join the European Union (EU), for training in writing in English and in the editorial policies of international journals published in English.

The parallel sessions were conducted by experts in professional and institutional language and publishing services, journal editors, and academic researchers specializing in research methodology, discourse analysis, and genre analysis. The diversity of topics covered highlighted one of MET meetings' outstanding characteristics: their ability to stimulate communication between practitioners and academics. Inevitably, this report covers only some of the many parallel sessions that took place.

Marie Bourke, translator and editor at the European Commission, summarized the structural features of the EU, the European Community, and its main bodies and provided information on the resources used at the commission in support of translation, including glossaries, style guides, translation memories, and multilingual corpora of texts dealing with EU affairs. Bourke's presentation received very favorable responses, particularly for its practical orientation.

Theresa Lillis, of the Centre for Language and Communication at the Open University in the UK, spoke as an expert on the writing practices of researchers in multilingual contexts. She examined the strategies that researchers whose first language is not English use to produce papers that are accepted for publication in English-language journals. According to Lillis, the role played by “language brokers”, such as translators and other language-service sector professionals, contributes substantially to the professional

success of academics. However, not all researchers have access to such support; to overcome this, researchers and their language advisers build social and professional networks with the aim of facilitating access to high-quality language support.

Claudia Buchweitz and Denise Arend of Scientific Linguagem/SciBooks in Porto Alegre, Brazil, discussed their survey of bilingual Brazilian scientific journals (published in Portuguese and English) in the SciELO database. They found that publishing solely in English or in English alongside Portuguese is thought to increase the visibility of journals and the articles in them. They detected a tendency toward “migrating” to English as the language of publication and suggested that a contributing factor to this trend is that large international bibliographic databases favor English.

A historic moment at METM08 was

the participation of John Swales in the workshop conducted by Alan Lounds, “A Genre Analysis Approach to Translating and Editing Research Articles”. Lounds presented examples, taken from various disciplines, of original research papers, meta-analyses, reviews, short communications, and letters to editors and described their most characteristic structural traits and the variations that occur in different disciplines. The participants then studied the rhetorical moves defined by Swales in his analysis of the aims of the introduction sections of research papers (for example, claiming centrality, making topic generalizations, reviewing previous research, counterclaiming, identifying a gap in current knowledge, and raising a question) and the communicative functions of each move and tried to assign a specific move to each of the phrases or sentences in various texts. The complexity of the exercise was

made evident when discrepancies arose between the proposals of the participants and the explanations of Swales himself. The educational value of the session was extraordinary.

The next MET meeting will be held in Barcelona from 30 to 31 October 2009. In spring 2009, MET will hold a series of training workshops in Barcelona and other locations nearby. The Web site www.metmeetings.org provides information on those activities and on related associations, training opportunities for translators and editors, job postings, and guidelines for users of language services. 