

Meeting up with MET

Networking is both enjoyable and of huge benefit to freelance translators, says Sarah Griffin-Mason, as she recounts her experience of the 2009 MET meeting



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At recent meetings of the ITI Spanish Network and Wessex Network, members have expressed concerns over the pressures exerted on their earning potential by crowdsourcing, automatic machine translation and lower rates due to globalisation – especially on the more common language pairs of the Western European languages.

From what I can see, the best way to outpace these threats is to head for the top of the range by offering a range of skills the robotic, amateur or lower-end providers can't provide.

Translators who wish to earn a professional income in such a highly competitive marketplace need to work hard to expand translation-related skills and keep them up to speed, improve the quality of their work and build professional networks.

Initially, keeping ahead of the game can be a lonely process and the economics don't seem to add up – especially when you are starting out unsupported – but I speak from experience when I say these processes are ESSENTIAL if you wish to survive and prosper as a professional translator.

Many of us work in isolation, rarely if ever meeting our clients, agents or even colleagues face to face, and it is all too easy to settle for the status quo (two dogs and a comfy cardigan in my case). However, it might inspire you to know that about half of my income this year – and all of my new clients bar one – has come from 'word of mouth' recommendations passed on by people I have physically met at Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events organised

by ITI, Portsmouth University and the Mediterranean Editors and Translators.

Meeting in Barcelona

By far the greatest leg-up of the year for me was the Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting (METM09), held in Barcelona from 29-31 October 2009.

The Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET) is a not-for-profit association of editors and translators working into or with English, mostly from countries around the Mediterranean Sea (but also from Northern Europe, South America and other places), who are committed to improving the professional profile of our sector internationally through mutual support, sharing skills on a voluntary basis for 'the greater good' of the likes of you and me and the international knowledge community.

When I wrote my piece on METM08 in Split for *ITI Bulletin*, the meeting was largely medicine- and science-oriented, but the recent October meeting in Barcelona proved the organisation is branching out and covering wider areas of interest: literary translation and poetry; art and history; and valuable discussion of professional issues ranging from how to improve networking, computer skills and time management, to dealing with plagiarism.

The meeting was preceded by a number of optional three-hour workshops on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning that benefited many delegates eager to add to their CPD record. Subjects on offer included: terminology on the anatomy

of the thorax; the principles and strategies of correct in-text citation; the construction and use of corpora to inform translation decisions and improve terminology usage; improving punctuation and text flow; planning interactive training activities; improving readability in non-native English; and study designs in medical research. I was only sorry that I could only attend two of the sessions as they are run in parallel.

Eminent speakers

The meeting proper, 'Translation, Editing, Writing: Broadening the Scope and Setting Limits', started on the Friday afternoon, in the Institut Europeu de la Mediterrania (IEMed) in central Barcelona. We were welcomed by Lurdes Vidal – IEMed's leading Arabist, who opened with some fresh perspectives on the importance of the shared history and future of human civilisation that were to form an important thread throughout the meeting.

Keynote speakers included former director of the British Centre for Literary Translation Peter Bush, who gave a reading from his sparky new translation of the 1499 Spanish classic *Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas and discussed the reasons for retranslating classics ancient and modern, and Professor Thomas Glick from Boston University, who fascinated us all with the story of how ancient science came to Western Europe via translations – made for both bona fide and less genuine reasons – in Islamic Spain (Peter the Venerable was evidently well aware that 'knowledge is power' even way

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back in the 12th century).

The rest of the meeting consisted of the pleasingly alliterative parallel presentations, panels and posters.

Presentations covered a range of content from practical advice on how to get your office, computer and career up and running, to the translation of poetry, history and art. I particularly enjoyed ITI SpanNet member Joanna Martinez's 'Nude, Lewd and Rude' section explaining the need for correct anatomical descriptions in art publications. Other topics included ergonomics, quality assurance, appropriate use of sensitive language, plagiarism and a wealth of advice on useful computer devices and programs to support productive workflow.

Panel discussions allowed for more open discussion of pertinent issues such as: defining roles in writing support services; pricing editing jobs; and issues and approaches in translating historical texts.

Posters explored aspects of the role of English language consultants in research institutions and of in-house language services in scientific publishing, along with corpus-guided translation and editing and some recent research on the language used in historical diplomatic letters.

Added value

The main onus of MET is definitely on excellence in the production of English-language texts, but many of the tools and procedures discussed at the meetings are just as valid for the production of texts in many other languages. There are also close links

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with the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) and the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) – MET members get a discount on subscriptions to their magazines – and the MET website gives information on a range of other international endeavours, events and undertakings.

Apart from that, the meeting also had the best conference catering I've ever experienced, arranged by Carolyn Newey and Jane Lewis, with delicious Catalan delicacies provided on-site in the Institute, a full lunch at L'Altra Llossa on Saturday, and a slap-up meal in Brasserie Flo for the closing dinner on the Saturday night.

Now that I have been to three MET meetings I also have a lovely group of friends and associates to help me enjoy the host city for a couple of days either side of the event. It was great to do the Gaudi sites, go shoe shopping and share meals with like-minded souls.

This time we polished off the visit with a trip to the Caixa Forum for an exhibition on Islamic art in Spain. I was knocked out by the beauty of the artefacts and was especially deeply touched by the Aga Khan's astrolabe – a beautiful bronze instrument with inscriptions in Arabic, Hebrew and Latin – a lasting testament to the type of cross-cultural

Clockwise from above left:

The closing dinner at Brasserie Flo (from left: Sally Burgess, Sarah Griffin-Mason, Felicity Neilson, Valerie Matarese, Anne Murray, Joanna Martínez, and Kim Eddy behind the camera).

The Institut Europeu de la Mediterrania, where the meeting was held.

Panel session on Writing Support Services.

exchange so essential to the shared future of human civilisation.

Getting involved

If I have whetted your appetite, it is worth taking a look at the MET website this month, as the Spring Workshops are being planned as I write; so far, these are expected to include re-runs of many of the sessions held at the conference coupled with new contributions on getting started in medical translation and genre analysis for editors and translators.

Meanwhile, METM10, the autumn conference, is being scheduled for the beautiful city of Tarragona from 28-30 October. Plans so far include new workshops on editing non-native speaker prose and a second anatomy workshop, alongside old favourites like storytelling skills in presentations and statistics for editors and translators. Full details will be available on the MET website as soon as details are confirmed.

For me, the absolutely best thing about MET is the feeling that all the people involved are on the same side. Many work as academics, translators, editors, reviewers, writers, teachers and in other related professions, and they all freely share information on how to diversify and expand contacts, expertise and skills. The cost of the meetings is kept low as speakers volunteer their time, mainly in exchange for what they get back during the sessions, and don't forget, marvellous CPD events like this are tax-deductible.

So, a hearty chunk of Auntie Sarah's home-boiled philosophy to end with: if you know you are good and want a secure future in translation, stick to your guns and make plans that ensure you will acquire the skills and expertise you need to reach the upper end of the market – it is only here that your brainpower, expertise and range of skills will earn you the good professional income you deserve.

I look forward to meeting you in Tarragona in the autumn. 

USEFUL LINKS

**Mediterranean Editors and Translators
European Association of Science Editors
European Medical Writers Association
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