

What's news at EMWA?

The EMWA 26th Conference, Barcelona 2008

Scientific and medical translation

The special focus of EMWA's 26th Conference held in Barcelona was scientific and medical translation. Translators among members of EMWA, the Mediterranean Editors and Translators (MET), and the Spanish Medical Writers Association (AeRTeM) contributed to the great success of the translation session at the conference in Barcelona. The following are a sample of reports on the theme.

Tools of the Modern Translator's Trade: Laura Russell

No discussion on modern-day translation would be complete without at least a brief look at some of the software tools available to the modern translator. In her seminar on computer-aided translation (CAT), Laura Russell, University of Mainz, presented the general functions of the most common translation memory (TM) programs available.

Contrary to widespread belief, a TM has nothing to do with machine translation. Rather, it is a database storing translations previously done by human translators. Thus, the concept of TMs is based on the premise that sentences used in previous translations can be 'recycled.' The TM consists of text segments in a source language and their translations into one or more target languages. These segments can be sentences, phrases, or other predefined parts of text.

When a new text is translated, the program splits the source text into segments, looks for matches between source and target language segments among translated pairs stored in the TM, and offers matching pairs as translation suggestions. The translator can now accept the suggestion, modify it, or replace it with a new translation. The modified or new translation will again be stored in the database.

One major advantage of a TM is that it can significantly speed up the translation process. Also, it guarantees the terminological and stylistic consistency of translations. In general, the more technical a text, the longer a text, and the more often it is updated, the more useful a TM. In the world of medical writing, an example of a text genre lending itself to being translated using a TM is the Summary of Product Characteristics or the Package Leaflet. Both documents may have to be translated into up to 24 European languages within a period of just a few days—the ideal application for a TM.

Useful as TMs may be, there are a few constraints, and the seminar was interspersed with interesting discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of TMs in different translation settings. For example, TMs offer only few, if any, benefits when translating texts of a more creative or artistic nature, such as prose or fiction.

Even though TMs are of greatest interest to translators or translation managers—in other words, to those who sell translations—a basic knowledge of what CAT tools can offer and in what situations they are of greatest benefit is also essential for anyone buying translations, enabling informed decisions to be made when selecting or cooperating with a translation service provider.

Gabi Berghammer
gabi@the-text-clinic.com

Linguistic validation of questionnaires used in health outcomes: Paz Gómez-Polledo

Linguistic validation is a complex process which is designed to ensure robust data in international clinical trials. The goal is to confirm that all patients respond to the same questions, no matter what language they speak; only then can reliable data be compared on a multi-national basis. Patient-reported outcome questionnaires are translated into the language of the target country and then 'back translated' by a different language professional to confirm that the content of the translation matches the master document. The original text and the back translation are reviewed by local and central project teams and modified as needed. The process is then repeated at least once and sometimes more times: the revised document is 'forward translated' into the foreign language again and back translated for purposes of comparison and review. Each phase of the process has to be carried out by language professionals with specific qualifications.

Paz Gómez-Polledo explained the procedure of linguistic validation in detail and cited examples of the textual ambiguities which come to light when texts are forward and back translated. These passages have to be resolved in all of the documentation in all languages. Patient-friendly idiomatic language can be misconstrued; Gómez-Polledo discussed one case in which a query about patients' activities 'around the house' was rendered literally in the sense of 'in circles outside the house.' However, even more straightforward turns of phrase can be unclear (e.g., is 'at night' supposed to mean 'in the evening' or 'while sleeping'?). Texts may also need to be localized to make them more culturally appropriate; when comparing relative levels of exertion in a COPD trial, for example, asking patients in Spain if they have difficulty breathing while shovelling snow does not yield useful data. The interesting presentation and discussion provided greater insights into a very specialised branch of the translation industry.

Laura Russell
laura@russell.de

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**Corpus-guided translation and editing:
Mary Ellen Kerans**

Mary Ellen Kerans' short workshop on 'corpus-guided translation and editing' taught us how writers without a linguistic background can learn from linguists. Mary Ellen gave an enthusiastic and convincing presentation on practical applications of corpus linguistics for medical writers. 'Corpus-guided translation and editing' basically means putting together a body of carefully selected (electronic) texts and analyzing it with computer tools to answer specific questions on language usage. Taking this approach, medical writers who want to produce (or edit) a text in a certain medical subspecialty that is new to them will collect reliable 'model' texts from the given subspecialty into a 'corpus' and analyse it to obtain information, e.g. on the frequency of a term in a certain subspecialty or on typical word combinations such as compounds. This type of linguistic information proves tremendously helpful for non-native-speaking writers of English, who are often insecure about 'just the right term' their target audience expects to hear. The analysis can also assist English native-speaking editors in making competent editing decisions when working in a subspecialty that is new to them. But what is the advantage of corpus analysis over a simple Google search? In the corpus-based approach, the search is performed on reliable, 'good models' of subspecialty texts; therefore the information from the analysis can be trusted. Even though unreliable search results from a Google search can be discarded, statistics, e.g. on the frequency of a term or word combination, will be unreliable. While the corpus approach does involve upfront effort for selecting and generating a good text body, it appears to be a promising method for medical writers. The scope of the 90-minute workshop was too short to fully cover this fascinating subject. I would be very interested in a more comprehensive workshop with hands-on training on the tools and methods.

Susanne Geercken
Susanne.Geercken@Pfizer.com

Welcome lecture

Mercè Piqueras, who is a native of Barcelona and author of the book *Walks around the scientific world of Barcelona*, gave the welcome lecture. She described how Barcelona universities had developed and gave tips for finding signs of the city's scientific past in the street signs and buildings of Barcelona. A particularly interesting story was that of Maria Elena Maseras. She was the first woman to enrol at the School of Medicine, University of Barcelona. She enrolled for the academic year 1872-1873. There were no rules prohibiting female students because no one had ever thought women might want to study. However, her professors refused to examine her and it was not until 1882 that she was able to obtain her degree. Two other women who had enrolled in the meantime were also awarded degrees in 1882 but following their success a royal decree was proclaimed prohibiting universities from accepting female students. It was not until 1910 that women secured full legal rights to study at universities although several scores of women are reported to have taken university courses during the period of the ban.

Education

EMWA conferences are a prime training venue for medical writers. Participants at the Barcelona conference were offered a choice of 48 workshops—more than ever before—from the 68 titles in the EMWA's Professional Development Training Programme (EPDP). Eleven of the 48 workshops were newly introduced and under assessment for the Barcelona conference on such diverse topics as Systematic Reviews, The CTD Clinical Summary, Beyond Simple Editing, and Writing PowerPoint Slide Kits. The Barcelona EPDP programme included 27 foundation workshops, 19 advanced workshops and 2 'soft skills' workshops. Foundation workshops can take a maximum of 32 participants and advanced workshops up to 20 participants. Seventeen workshops (6 foundation, 11 advanced) reached this capacity at the Barcelona conference. Those participants who were unable to secure a place on their workshops of choice are assured that opportunities will be available at future EMWA conferences. At the AGM, Stephen de Looze, EMWA's Education Officer, announced that since the last AGM, 26 members completed the requirements for a foundation certificate during the 24th EMWA conference in Vienna, and a further 13 members during the 25th EMWA conference in Basel. Furthermore, there are now 8 advanced certificate holders (the advanced programme was launched at the 20th EMWA conference in Malta, 2005).



Presentation



Julia Forjanic Klapproth and Geoff Hall

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If you weren't at the AGM this year, well, you should have been ...

The thought of attending an AGM is not usually considered to be the highlight of any conference meeting, but even more so when held in a location as enticing as Barcelona...

However, to use the proverbial 'there are always exceptions' and this AGM was one of them. The hour-long meeting was organised, informative, succinct and interactive.

Julia Forjanic Klapproth, our President, opened the meeting, welcoming attendees and introducing the panel of committee members. Refreshingly, the often-usual laborious style of reading and presenting lengthy reports, was substituted with a short presentation of key activities and main points from each of the EC members.

These reports were followed by an open forum for discussion and interaction. Questions from the floor ranged from the development of Internet-based workshop modules, the impact of meeting locations on cost for attendees (although all agreed our Spring meeting 2009 in Slovenia was an excellent choice!), maintaining commitment from pharmaceutical companies to allow employee attendance, and so on... For those less comfortable with expressing their views publicly, suggestions and comments offline were welcomed.

Julia thanked the EC for their commitment, time, and hard work; and applauded the excellent organisation and running of the meeting by Nancy Barkan and her team. Finally Julia reminded us all to consider election to the EC, because a number of positions on the EC would be up for election again next year. The meeting was then closed.

So next time, when the thought of another 10 minutes in bed or that sightseeing jaunt is more appealing, spend that hour with your fellow EMWA colleagues and friends instead, and join in and participate.

After all, without the rigours and efforts of the Committee, we wouldn't have an EMWA meeting to attend.

So, see you at the AGM next year?

Rosalie Rose

Rosalie.Rose@eu.astellas.com

**Keynote lecture:
Scholarly publishing in
peripheral countries and
scientific multilingualism¹**

Françoise Salager-Meyer, from the Multidisciplinary and Multilingual Research Group on Scientific Discourse Analysis at the University of the Andes, Merida, Venezuela, gave a fascinating lecture exploring the main

problems faced by peripheral scientists writing in non-English languages, particularly those in developing countries. She gave a clear, well structured presentation of the key issues hindering these scientists from achieving the same status and recognition as scientists from developed countries. These issues include world power structures, the social organisation of peripheral countries, and the question of collaborative research. The discursive (i.e. language related) and non-discursive problems faced by peripheral researchers were nicely illuminated. Ultimately, she proposed that peripheral scientists should try to work together and develop communities that can promote and aid each other to become fully integrated members of the worldwide network of science and to promote scientific multilingualism. A worthy goal that we should all try to be a part of.

Note: For further reading on Françoise's topic see Salager-Meyer F. Scientific publishing in developing countries: Challengers for the future. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 2008 in press

**Plenary lecture 1:
Translation: An exciting job
and a delicate art**

Llorenç Serrahima started the plenary lecture series the first morning with an entertaining and thought provoking discussion from the translator's perspective on who a translator is and where the hurdles lie in the life of a translator. It is clear that there is a large cultural component to translating from one language to another, but often the difficulties stem quite simply from poorly written texts. His plea to keep the language concise and to avoid adjectival phrases is something that applies to all of us, whether writing or translating.

**Plenary lecture 2:
Evolution of the translator in the
pharmaceutical environment**

Catherine Bougette's plenary lecture on Friday morning looked at the development of translators within pharmaceutical companies. Beginning with the role of the translator before Microsoft dominated the work environment and moving up to today, this was an insightful tracing of how technology and globalization (with the spread of English as the daily language) has dramatically changed the need for translators in this industry. Coming from a time where everything used to be written on paper in a local language, which demanded the need for translation at many levels, we have moved into an environment where things are written directly into an electronic medium (which simplifies dissemination) and often directly in English (which saves the need to have it translated from the local language into English for regulatory or administrative purposes). Of course translators are still in demand, but the role they play within a pharmaceutical company has shrunk considerably.

1. The reports of the keynote and plenary lectures were written by Julia Forjanic Klapproth. There is no report on the Saturday plenary lecture because Julia was unable to attend it.

>>> **What's news at EMWA?****Banquet**

The conference banquet was held in the Can Travi Nou, a 'masia' outside Barcelona city centre. A masia is a typical farmhouse for the region from the 16th and 17th century. At that time animals were housed on the ground floor and the farmer and his family lived on the first floor, benefiting from the warmth coming up from the animals below. Traditional Catalan food was served at the banquet polished off with a fortified wine which is customarily drunk direct from a decanter with a thin spout. The idea is that you pour the liquor in a steady stream from the decanter directly into your mouth, head thrown back. A few brave guests had a go at this. Christine Cyrus, who won a free banquet ticket in the *TWS* carnival competition (see page 61) commented, "I was very delighted to be the winner and spent a very funny evening in the Can Travi Nou with delicious food and wine but fortunately I was careful with the perron."

Social events

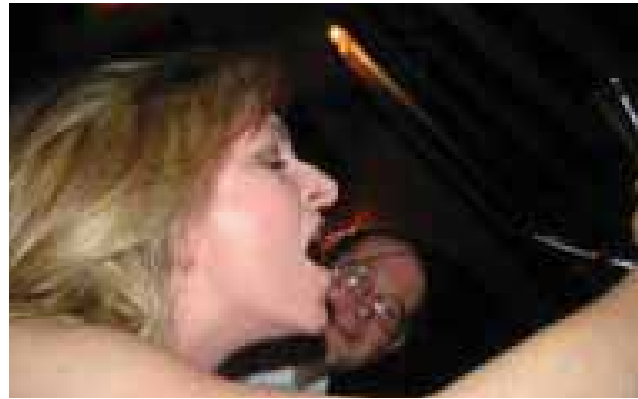
After conference days filled with earnest learning this year's social events provided relaxation and a lot of fun. Wendy Kingdom declared that the Paella Challenge was the most fantastic social event ever. Under expert instruction participants first cooked paella in teams and then sat down at tables running the length of the room to enjoy the fruits of their labours. Other events were a walking tour, biking tour, and aquarium visit.



Cycle tour



Paella challenge



Drinking from the perron



Banquet

Lunchtime discussions

EMWA's tradition of setting aside one lunchtime during the conference for discussion was continued at the Barcelona conference. Participants interested in any of the topics listed can sign up for a table where this topic will be discussed. Each table has a discussion leader. There was some lively discussion in Barcelona as can be seen from the following reports. One table discussion, not included below, centred on ghostwriting. Journal watch on page 99 reports on the topic of this discussion and concludes with a mention of the exchanges at this table.

Conference reporting

Discussion leaders: Geoff Hall and Lisa Chamberlain James

Conference reporting, perhaps more than any other topic, lends itself to discussion very well. Anyone who has done this kind of work has a library of anecdotes and experiences, because no two projects are ever the same.

This conference's lunchtime discussion proved the point beautifully. Gathered around our table were people who had spent their whole careers reporting on conferences, side by side with people who had only covered one or two—and some who liked the idea but were a little daunted by the whole process.

We shared ideas and experiences on a range of topics, from 'how to handle a client with unreasonable demands' to 'how to infiltrate the Press Room and get them 'on side''. There was a very interesting debate about the advantages and dis-

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advantages of specialising in one particular field or therapy area, compared with being a 'jack of all trades' and covering conferences on all areas.... the consensus being that each writer must decide what they are most comfortable with.

As usual, lunchtime was too short to cover everything, but even the most experienced present learnt a few tips and heard about situations they had never encountered before. Not least, the discussion highlighted the variety and challenges that this kind of writing can bring.

Lisa Chamberlain James

lisa@claritymed.co.uk

Ethics in clinical trialsDiscussion leader: Art Gertel

The round table discussions and networking at lunchtime during the EMWA Spring conferences are always a must, not to be missed. Funny enough, most of the people who joined the table to discuss ethics in clinical trials weren't aware of the round table debates. They didn't know they would be taking part in a hot topic discussion!

I was so thrilled to be there. For me, this was one of the conference highlights. Helen Baldwin started by bringing up themes like ghostwriting (pointing out EMWA and CONSORT guidelines), transparency in publishing trial results (and sites like <http://clinicaltrials.gov/> and <http://www.clinicaltrialresults.org/>) and the role and responsibility of medical writers.

Art Gertel presented 'insider's facts' related to the medical journal editorials accusing Merck and Schering-Plough (and their medical writer co-conspirators) of withholding damaging data in journal publications on Vioxx and Vytarin studies. The Seroxat court cases (US x UK) were also mentioned. Personal experiences were related of how journalists retain the power to present information in a biased manner, and how conflict-of-interest may enter into public perception.

Unfortunately, time was over and we had to break. I just hope the same subject will be covered in the next Spring conference—I'll be swift to guarantee my place at the table!

Andrea Palluch

Andrea_Palluch@etsai.net

EMWA bookgroupDiscussion leaders: Alison McIntosh and Wendy Kingdom

For our first "EMWA reading group" we had suggested two quite different types of book, and each was given a dedicated lunch table.

The Surgeon of Crowthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness and the Oxford English Dictionary by Simon Winchester. Most of the people who joined the networking table had not read the book but did want to learn about it and hopefully go on to read it. Three of us had read and enjoyed it, all for very different reasons: one because of an interest in dictionaries, one because they had lived in Crowthorne and one because it sounded intriguing and different. We all felt

that it was an interesting book dealing with both the illness of the man and also how dictionaries were first compiled without the aid of a computer. I took my copy of the book to the meeting and it is now wending around Europe as three people at the table exchanged addresses to receive it in turn. Happy reading!

The Constant Gardener by John Le Carré.

Some of the people who joined this table had read the book; others had seen the film. John Le Carré tells a good story and, despite the impression he gives that all pharmaceutical companies are corrupt, the book is an enjoyable read. The focus of our discussions was not on the story or the writing but on the issues it raised. In particular, we discussed the ethics of conducting clinical trials in third world countries where the people are poor and unlikely to afford the drugs once they are marketed and unable to give truly informed consent when they are desperate for treatment. We also discussed the bad publicity that the pharmaceutical industry typically gets and how easy it is for one rogue company to damage the reputation of all others. Le Carré, it was noted does, however, describe the pressures from the investors at the company in question. This prompted the discussion to move on to what leads to immoral or unethical scientific behaviour and how this contributes to the generally negative public view of science, and what can be done about it. Unsurprisingly, we didn't come up with solutions to any of these problems, but it was interesting and entertaining to share and hear the views of everyone to these difficult issues.

Most of the people on the table were happy for the book group to remain a feature of the networking lunches. If we can gain enough momentum it might become a social feature in its own right. Our next book will be *Lucky Man: A Memoir* by Michael J. Fox at the spring conference in 2009.

Alison McIntosh

aagmedicalwriting@btinternet.com

Wendy Kingdom

info@wendykingdom.com

TWS editorial meeting

Among the many exciting events—for me at least—at the Barcelona conference was TWS's first editorial meeting. This provided some lively discussion and great suggestions for future articles and topics for the journal. One idea I was keen to promote was that more issues should be guest edited to offer variety to readers and an opportunity for EMWA members to become involved practically with the journal. Guest editors set the theme for their issue, solicit and process 4 or more articles around the theme, and write an editorial. I remain responsible for the rest of the issue content and also liaise on the cover with the guest editor. The September issue will be on the topic of time management guest edited by Alistair Reeves (see page 54 for a call for articles) and the March 2009 issue will feature regulatory writing guest edited by Sam Hamilton.

Editorial meeting will certainly be a regular event at future EMWA conferences and will be open to anyone who wishes to attend—no invitation or registration necessary.

Elise Langdon-Neuner

Editor of TWS

langdoe@baxter.com