

# Lingua Franca and Beyond

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## Welcome to Lingua Franca and Beyond



It is my real pleasure to welcome you to the second issue of *Lingua Franca and Beyond*, a regular feature of *Medical Writing* for non-native English speaking medical writers.

As soon as I'd written those words, I realised that this section should not be exclusively for non-native English-speaking medical writers; but should be valuable for all medical writers. So, we would like to hear the voice of native English-speaking medical writers, as well. In my welcome message in the previous *Medical Writing* issue, I wrote that although I believe that being a non-native English-speaking medical writer has certain advantages, 'it does not mean, that we can manage to make it all happen on our own'. We need help from our native English-speaking colleagues; we need to work in teams. The next issue of *Medical Writing* is about Business Models. What better theme to

discuss the idea of collaborating, team working, and sharing complementary skills with both groups of medical writers! In the next issue, we will outline some business models for working together across different native languages.

This issue is more about '*Beyond*' as Laura Collada Ali from Spain, but based in the Italian Alps shares her story about going *beyond* in her short journey from a non-EMWA-member to a very active EMWA Executive Committee (EC) Officer. Laura served as Public Relations Officer for two years where she implemented initiatives such as the EMWA webinars and the Conference App. As her term finished last May, I'd like to thank Laura for her contribution, and invite you to read how she sees the role of non-native English-speaking medical writers at the EC – the role that extends far *Beyond* writing in English.

## Acknowledgements

I thank Amy Whereat for helping to edit this text.

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## A non-native English speaker in the Executive Committee!

The European Medical Writers Association (EMWA) is, a truly 'European' organisation that includes medical writers, editors and translators who speak twenty-four official languages (Table 1). The European Union is in favour of linguistic diversity and even has a special role for securing linguistic diversity, namely – the European Commissioner for Multilingualism.

English, the *lingua franca* at EMWA, unites professionals from many different linguistic cultures, who represent a diverse heritage. Despite having a common language, some members still feel uneasy about getting involved in the organisation precisely for their 'non native English' background.

To get the most from a professional organisation, it is important to get involved, either as a volunteer or through an elected role on the Executive

Committee (EC). Getting involved means understanding the importance of professional networking, following current affairs in the field, continuing education, defending and promoting medical communications professions, improving working conditions, and other important professional issues. It is also an investment in your chosen career area.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1: Languages of the European Union<sup>1</sup>

Languages of the European Union	
Official languages	Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish
Semi-official languages	Basque, Catalan, Galician, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh

Source: Wikipedia.

Although I think all this might seem quite obvious to all of us, there is nevertheless a certain tendency, particularly among members who have recently joined EMWA, to consider oneself an inappropriate candidate either as: (a) a young member – having been part of EMWA for less than a year; or (b) a non-English native speaker, as our *lingua franca* is English.

Now, here is how I became involved in the EMWA EC!

I first attended an EMWA fall conference in 2011, in London. Before then, I had not realised that apart from translating, writing texts for my clients had an official name: ‘medical writing’. Indeed, ‘medical writers’ are not well recognised in the Mediterranean area so joining a professional association and promoting it in the area became even more important to me! After that, during a dinner table conversation at the Cyprus conference, I was rather critical about some aspects of the organisation and, the comment I got back was: ‘It’s great you are so judgmental. We need people like you. Get involved!’ As a result, I immediately joined the Social Media Team and at the end of that same year I sent a candidate statement for the Public Relations Officer position and got elected in May 2013.

Well, having been part of the EC for the last two years, I have come to three main conclusions. Firstly, recently joined members often have a fresh, external view and can critically spot areas where input is needed – in my case, this has always been very much appreciated. Secondly, enthusiasm and

proactivity are more useful than experience, when proposing new initiatives. And thirdly, language really is not a barrier; we all speak – up to a certain level – the language of science, even if we may use a different one at a professional level. I do not work in English, but from English. That said, EMWA business is conducted in English and native speakers within the EC are always very helpful reviewing text. After all, we are medical writers, we love writing, reviewing and helping colleagues!

During the last three EC mandates, we have had two non-English native speakers out of the 9 members that form the committee. Thus, as you can see, language is not a barrier to get involved in the association.

If you are one of those fortunate professionals who is passionate about what you do, committing to your professional association will be most rewarding. Do not think twice about it and get involved!

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## References

1. Wikipedia. Languages of Europe [2015; cited 2015 Jan 21]. Available from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Europe).
2. Collada Ali LC. Your professional association: a great way to expand your skills and advance your career. *Med Writing*. 2013;22(1):34–6.