

Sectoral Assembly of the Languages Service (March 2016–February 2017)

Minutes of the 2nd meeting of the Bureau¹

Held in room E.5116 on Thursday, 12 May 2016, at 3 p.m.

Attended by: Luis SARABIA UTRILLA (President), Ahmed GHAILAN (ATS), Judy FADEL-OSTOJIC (ATS), Jamila CHEDAD (ATPU), Leslie FILLION-WILKINSON (ETS), Melanie GUEDENET (ETS, note-taker), Olivier Meyer (FTS), Alexei IVANOV (RTS), Ana María IZQUIERDO (STS), Romina MERIÑO (STPU), Philippa FLETCHER (ES), Elena ISSAEVA (Reference Unit) and Miguel MORENO (Terminology Unit).

Agenda

- I. Adoption of the agenda
- II. Activities of the President since the previous meeting
- III. Health risks associated with prolonged computer use
- IV. Possibility of introducing bilingual working glossaries into UNTERM for eLUNa use
- V. Regulation of compensatory time off and overtime for P-staff
- VI. Other matters

The meeting began at 3 p.m.

I. Adoption of the agenda

1. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** suggested the addition of a new agenda item, entitled “Memorandum by STS staff member on interaction with HRMS”, immediately after his introduction of the President’s activities since the bureau’s previous meeting.

2. *The agenda was adopted, as orally amended.*

II. Activities of the President since the previous meeting

3. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** said that he had met with the staff representatives of the text-processing units (TPUs) to discuss their concerns about timekeeping, on which they were obliged to spend an inordinate amount of working time since the introduction of gDoc. While such data was important for planning purposes, solutions needed be found to relieve staff of the burden and associated stress. He was working with Anne Aboh-Dauvergne to identify potential solutions.

4. **Mr. Ghailan**, who had attended the most recent Chiefs’ meeting in the absence of Mr. Sarabia Utrilla, said that one of the topics discussed at that meeting had been the working groups on recommendations for the Steering Group, which were expected to send their conclusions to the Group by the end of May 2016; management would examine those conclusions in June 2016. He proposed

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the opinions reflected herein represent staff suggestions and views collected by their representatives and are aimed at promoting communication between management and staff. In order to avoid misunderstandings, any comments or requests for corrections to the minutes should be submitted to the President of the LSSA only, for inclusion in the minutes of the following meeting.

that the Bureau should monitor the situation and provide, in a timely manner, any feedback requested on the working groups' conclusions. Another issue raised at the meeting had been the MERS-designed Pipeline Visualization Tool for Programming Officers. Ms. Keating had informed those at the meeting that the tool had been demonstrated to ASG Movses Abelian, who had expressed interest in introducing the tool at UNHQ.

5. Also at the Chiefs' meeting, it had been stated that five estimated standard pages (ESP) was a floor, not a ceiling, in terms of expected productivity. It had been suggested that such a standard might be included in the e-performance documents of staff in the future.

6. **Ms. Izquierdo** pointed out that since staff were in fact expected to produce an average of five ESP per day, it was a de facto minimum.

7. **Mr. Ghailan** said it was his understanding that management intended to tie productivity to the use of eLUNa, especially since productivity had allegedly risen by 15 per cent at UNHQ following that tool's introduction. Together with other members of the Bureau, he expressed concern that excessive attention was being paid to quantity over quality, and that raising standards might result in burnout among staff.

III. Memorandum by STS staff member on interaction with HRMS

8. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** drew attention to a memorandum drafted by a colleague from the Spanish Translation Section for consideration by the Bureau. In the memorandum, which he read out loud, the staff member expressed dissatisfaction with the recent loss of personal human contact caused by the introduction Umoja. The introduction of a generic address (HRPartner@unog.ch) for the communication of all problems and questions, rather than facilitating the resolution of problems, had instead led to feelings of uncertainty, disempowerment and frustration among staff. The memorandum concluded by urging management to re-establish human contact in human resources management with a view to remedying the current situation. He had recently spoken to a human resources assistant who was similarly unhappy with the changes introduced by the generic e-mail address to deal with all issues and who had suggested that the LSSA raise the issue with management. The generic human resources e-mail address had been introduced some six months ago as a pilot project and, as such, could be ended if deemed ineffective or unsuitable. If the Bureau should vote to endorse the memorandum, the latter would be sent to the Director of Human Resources and to the Executive Secretary of the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council.

9. **Several Bureau members** expressed the wish to share the memorandum with the colleagues in their respective sections/units before endorsing it.

10. **Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson** said that the frustration of staff stemmed in part from the lack of training of so-called "super-users" of Umoja. In most cases, such super-users merely served as an intermediary between LS staff and HRMS staff, as they usually referred the staff member's problem or question to the HR partner. If the Bureau decided to endorse the memorandum and send it to the Director of Human Resources and Ian Richards, she would suggest also copying the Director-General.

11. **Mr. Ghailan** said that in addition to the general dissatisfaction of staff, the real problem was the time, and therefore money, wasted by staff and the Organization as a whole as a result of the recurrent failures of the new system.

12. **Several Bureau members** said that they regularly claimed time spent on resolving Umoja-related administrative or technical problems as a “special assignment”. It was important for management to be made aware of the time spent thusly. **Some members** expressed the view that the lack of human contact was not the problem per se; rather, it was the system overall that was inefficient.

13. Another issue underscored by **several members** was the failure of management to recognize the increasing amount of time spent by staff on administrative tasks; even more worrying, staff were increasingly required to do what had previously been done by specialists – a loss in productivity could only be expected in such cases.

14. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** suggested that Mr. Ghailan and Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson should meet with the staff member who had drafted the original memorandum, and that together they should re-word it to emphasize the inefficiency and resulting waste of resources associated with the current system and to stress that staff needs were not being met. The draft should also be reviewed for editorial purposes.

15. *It was so decided.*

IV. Health risks associated with prolonged computer use

16. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** said that Mr. Boichuk had contacted him with a question: were there any health standards regarding the maximum number of hours per day a person should be allowed to stare at a computer screen? The information he himself had found tended to focus on the number of breaks recommended for a given number of hours in front of a computer.

17. **Mr. Ivanov** said that the United States Labor Department had posted information on its website on the recommended maximum number of hours of computer use. In addition, a former staff representative had informed him that when computers had first been introduced at the United Nations, TPUs had been instructed to work for no more than four hours at a time; however, technology had no doubt been less sophisticated and working conditions generally less ergonomic than they were today.

18. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla**, responding to a question about the purpose of including the current item in the Bureau’s agenda, said that, in the light of the Division’s plans to introduce a completely electronic workflow, it would be advisable to gather information on the effects of extensive computer use and possibly to emit recommendations thereon. He therefore suggested that he should contact the Medical Services, as proposed by **Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson**, to seek information on any existing guidelines.

19. *It was so decided.*

V. Possibility of introducing bilingual working glossaries into UNTERM for eLUNa use

20. **Mr. Sarabia-Utrilla** said that the current item had been submitted for discussion by the Bureau with a view to exchanging ideas and sharing experiences on a topic that was likely of interest to most sections. He invited Mr. Moreno to introduce the topic of UNTERM and the possibility of creating bilingual glossaries that were closed to the public but available internally and also via eLUNa.

21. **Mr. Moreno** said that although he had not been part of the team that had effected the migration of glossaries into the initial UNOGTerm termbase, he understood that the portal was

designed to encourage the sharing and harmonization of terminology across language services and duty stations. LS staff members were welcome to submit to their terminology colleagues any terms they found useful, together with any available source information. After checking for overlap with existing terms in the termbase and verifying sources, the Terminology Unit would create an entry in UNTERM, to be supplemented over time by other language sections.

22. **Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson** and **Ms. Guedenet** said that while they understood and supported the overarching goals of the UNTERM project, the way in which their Section's "provisional" glossaries had been set up made it difficult in practice to follow the guidelines for including terms in UNTERM. ETS provisional glossaries contained hundreds of reviser-approved terms for which no sources had been recorded. ETS simply did not currently have the resources to review the terms one by one either within the Section or with terminology colleagues. It seemed a pity to forego the use of such glossaries in UNTERM, and therefore in eLUNa, on the sole basis of those constraints. **Ms. Guedenet** pointed out that some section-specific termbases already existed in UNTERM; one such example was ESPATERM at UNHQ.

Mr. Moreno said that provisional glossaries were still welcome in UNTERM; on the matter of entries for which no source information had been recorded, ETS and the Terminology Unit could discuss the best way to proceed. He insisted on the importance of avoiding the creation of duplicate entries and sharing available terminology resources with all sections.

23. **Mr. Meyer** pointed out that a useful workaround was the incorporation of section-specific working glossaries into the respective sections' dedicated indexes in eLUNa, which could be accessed using the "Lookup" function in eLUNa.

24. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** said that that workaround was of limited use because it did not generate automatic highlighting of the terminology or phraseology in the source text in eLUNa, as was the case for "official" entries in UNTERM. Moreover, the translator first had to be able to identify a word or phrase in the original text as potential terminology or phraseology – that was not self-evident, especially for junior translators.

25. **Mr. Meyer** proposed that the Bureau should recommend the establishment of a working group to discuss the issue further.

26. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** suggested that the members of the Bureau should encourage their colleagues to send new terms to the Terminology Unit.

VI. Regulation of compensatory time off and overtime for P-staff

27. **Mr. Ghailan** drew attention to a paper, which was circulated to the Bureau members, on the issue of compensatory time off. Inconsistent practice and lack of clarity had led to frustration on the part of staff. A clear and fair policy on the calculation and granting of such time off was needed.

28. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** suggested that the Bureau members should circulate the paper to their respective sections and, should there be no objection, that it should be sent to Ms. Keating and to Ms. Momal-Vanian, Director, Division of Conference Management.

29. *It was so decided.*

VII. Other matters

Reporting lines

30. **Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson** asked for an update about the pilot project on reporting lines taking place in ATS.

31. **Mr. Ghailan** said that he was not aware of the submission of any specific complaints or rebuttals since the beginning of the pilot project; that was understandable since the 2015-2016 cycle had not yet been completed for all staff members. ATS had nevertheless drafted and signed a petition requesting the postponement of the pilot project until better conditions were in place, and had sent the petition to Ms. Keating. The concerns raised in relation to the project were that the new reporting lines would divert resources from production to tasks that had been efficiently carried out previously; would make it difficult or impossible to ensure evaluation consistency within the same work unit; would create artificial work units with first reporting officers who lacked managerial authority and the means necessary to produce a comprehensive and fair evaluation; and would undermine the checks and balances in the established system of reporting lines, whereby the second reporting officer acted as the first point of contact in case a problem arose with the first reporting officer. The fact that some P-3 staff were being evaluated by P-4 colleagues and others by P-5 colleagues illustrated the asymmetric set-up that made the project appear unfair from the outset.

32. **Ms. Izquierdo** said that it was exceedingly difficult for a P-4 staff member to evaluate a self-revising P-3 translator, and for a P-5 staff member to evaluate a P-4 colleague, as the one serving as first reporting officer in each case did not usually read his/her colleague's work. Furthermore, under the proposed system, first reporting officers were unlikely to use the same evaluation criteria and it was difficult to rate someone's performance without a benchmark. While such a system might work well enough in a very large and hierarchical workplace, some STS colleagues were of the view that it would be detrimental to working relationships in the Section.

33. **Mr. Sarabia Utrilla** said that the best way to make the voices of staff heard was to present management with specific examples of unfairness and any other problems.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.