Interpreter Voices: Anyuli González, UN staff interpreter

Four years after getting her degree, Anyuli became a UN staff interpreter. In this interview with Michelle Hof she talks about getting started and the value of professionalism.

MH: Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Anyuli. Why don’t you start by telling our readers a little bit about your background?

AG: I have been working as a conference interpreter for 4 years, and my language combination is Spanish (A), English (B), French (C), and Portuguese (C). I was raised in Puerto Rico, and during my childhood my mother made a point of raising me bilingual (¡Gracias mami!). In college, I began studying comparative literature, which led me to go to France, and eventually pursue a European Master’s degree in Conference Interpreting at the Ecole Supérieure d’Interprètes et de Traducteurs in Paris.

After my training, I decided to try my luck in the Washington, D.C. freelance interpreting market. During my time there, I planned a six-month stay in Rio de Janeiro, where I trained in the postgraduate program in Conference Interpreting at the Pontificia Universidade Católica in order to add Portuguese as a C language. I spent three fun (and also challenging!) years working as a freelancer in Washington, and traveling around the United States for various assignments. In July of 2015, I accepted a position as a staff interpreter at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

MH: What made you decide to join AIIC?

AG: When I was in graduate school, AIIC was presented to us as the gold standard in professional competence. All my professors were in AIIC, and I truly admired their professionalism and skill; I thought joining AIIC would be a professional milestone. AIIC’s rigorous peer-review application process is a signal to both clients and colleagues of an interpreter’s experience and commitment to the profession. Moreover, AIIC provides a wealth of resources for its members to grow professionally such as training opportunities, as well as a vast network of colleagues with different backgrounds, language combinations and expertise.
MH: What do you see as the main strengths of AIIC? What about its weaknesses?

AG: I like the professional network that AIIC affords us. As members, we can literally travel to most major cities in the world and meet like-minded colleagues who can offer advice and support, as well as help us enter new markets or perfect our skills. When I decided to add Portuguese, the AIIC colleagues in Rio de Janeiro received me with open arms, and provided valuable advice for studying the language. My AIIC colleagues were so supportive that I even lived with one of them during that semester!

As for weaknesses, I think sometimes the organization loses sight of its main mission. Like many colleagues, I was dismayed and disappointed by recent controversies within its leadership. We must not lose sight of the forest for the trees! Our working conditions are changing fast, whether we like it or not, and sometimes it can feel like the organization does not have what it takes to deal with them. Younger colleagues can be turned off by what they perceive to be an unwelcoming and complacent organization. AIIC needs to welcome young colleagues with open arms, and take on board our energy and enthusiasm in order to continue advocating for the highest professional standards!

MH: You work in the UN system. How does AIIC's dealings with the UN affect your everyday work?

AG: AIIC and the United Nations have an agreement. Many of the provisions of the agreement apply to freelance interpreters, such as recruitment, offers of work, travel, and remuneration. However, there are important sections of the agreement that govern the work of all interpreters working at the United Nations; these are mostly related to working conditions, so they define appropriate team strengths, workloads, and technical installations. These regulations make the United Nations one of the most comfortable places to work for conference interpreters. At the United Nations, we also have a representative that represents us at meetings of the AIIC Staff Interpreters Committee.

All of this being said, I think AIIC members could do more to raise awareness among the United Nations community about our profession. Unfortunately, many people are unaware how difficult and strenuous our job can be. As AIIC members, we must be advocates for the profession, and make it clear that we add value to the work of the United Nations. We must continue to stress the importance of maintaining world class working conditions in order to ensure output of the highest quality.

MH: What message would you like to share with young colleagues starting out in the profession?

AG: I don’t know if I can speak to all young colleagues starting in the profession; everyone’s journey is unique! Embarking on a new career or joining the working world is no easy feat. I feel it is important to try to learn as much as you can constantly: read anything and everything (no matter how inane!) in all of your working languages, listen to more experienced colleagues, practice doing consecutive and simultaneous at home. There is no better thing for a young interpreter’s reputation than always acting with professionalism and integrity. Perseverance, solidarity, and good faith always pay off in the long run!

MH: Anyuli, thank you for taking this time to share your views with our readers.

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