

## Springing into Action in Miami at FIU

by Diana Rhudick

The Spanish Language Division of the ATA and Florida's local translator and interpreter group, ATIF, did a tremendous job organizing the recent Spring into Action conference at Florida International University in Miami. Apart from providing multiple learning experiences, the conference was a great opportunity to air out my Spanish and meet people from all corners of the Spanish-speaking world. I was also fortunate to be invited to speak at one of the sessions.

The event offered 35 sessions over three days—a huge undertaking. Many of us stayed at the same hotel and would meet up in the breakfast room in the morning. The atmosphere was electric with the urgency of getting to the conference on time and the buzz of Spanish accented from many lands. Except for the woman at the hotel serving coffee who greeted me each morning with, “Good morning, Lady.”

This was my first trip to Miami. I was surprised to discover how completely bilingual the city is. A couple of the Lyft drivers I encountered actually spoke no English. I felt like I was back in Brussels or Quebec, where the shopkeepers and people in the street can code-switch on a dime. All the palm trees and glorious sunshine quickly reminded me where I was, though. And bilingual speakers in Miami have the advantage of knowing right away which language to use with me.

One look at my pale white skin and tall frame, and it's “May I help you?”, not “¿Cómo puedo ayudarla?”

Of course, most of the conference participants were fully bilingual; many seemed to be interpreters with Hispanic backgrounds. I'm sure there were other gringas there, but I was hanging with the Hispanics. The talks themselves were stimulating. The one by Jorge de Buen Unna on English and Spanish quotation marks was just like being back in college listening to a lecture from my Spanish lit. professor. The next morning at breakfast, I was able to have a conversation in Spanish with Jorge about the printing press, punctuation marks, and other esoterica that you just don't get an opportunity to indulge in very often.

The lovely Castilian accent of Antonio Martín Fernández of Palabras Mayores speaking on Word tips and macros brought me back fondly to my college semester in Spain. The talks at the conference covered a wide span of subjects, from consecutive interpreting skill-building to website and marketing tips. I got to meet in person Tony Rosado, well known in ATA circles. He gave a thorough presentation on the Mexican court system with

heaps of useful terminology and understandable explanations of the two legal systems.

The stars of the program were the members of Palabras Mayores. When I first started hearing about them, I thought they were a musical group that would perform at the conference. They did in fact perform, but in the classrooms. Palabras Mayores is a collective of lively linguists in Spain who can't help clowning at every turn. Their talks were thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining.

The conference was very well organized overall, but some grouching occurred because no lunch

was provided for attendees. My most memorable lunch break happened when about ten of us decided to get smart and order lunch from a take-out menu rather than walking into town. Of course, gathering everyone together, writing down individual orders, and then placing so many orders over the phone took up about 40 minutes of our one and a half-hour break. Next we had to decide who would drive to pick up the food, with whose phones, and where we would meet to eat. Another 15 minutes. Traffic is continually heavy in Miami, so the group that went in search of the lunches didn't return for over 30 minutes—just in time for the next conference session to begin! Instead of returning to the conference, we walked back and forth among

outdoor tables trying to determine which would be just the right setting. Eventually, we all sat down and had a communal feast of Cuban foods before bolting back to the conference.

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## Is Google Translate part of our future?

by Rudy Heller

A colleague of mine shared with me an article from the January issue of *The Atlantic* [The Shallowness of Google Translate](#) by Douglas Hofstadter. Hofstadter is a professor of cognitive science and comparative literature at Indiana University at Bloomington. I found the article fascinating. You might find it interesting too.

# Snapshots of the Spring into Action Conference at Florida International University in Miami

*Photos courtesy of Diana Rhudick*

