

Oya Koc, founder of
Oyraa Inc.
Courtesy of John Amari

Interpretation Anywhere, Anytime

There are many times when people living in a foreign country run into language barriers. Based on personal experience in Japan, Turkish-born Oya Koc established what is now a global business enabling users to request remote interpretation wherever they are in the world at any time of the day.

SATO KUMIKO

Oya Koc, a Turkish-born resident of Tokyo, continues her global activities leading Oyraa Inc., a company she herself established.

Oyraa Inc. provides an app through which clients can request remote interpretation wherever they are in the world, 24 hours a day. Users select the most appropriate interpreter from the company's list in terms of language, area of expertise or other requirements, and directly make a request online.

"Conventionally, in order to request interpretation, you needed to designate a date and time and make a reservation with the office to which the interpreter belonged," Oya explains. "But in day-to-day life, there are many times when you need interpretation immediately for a short period of time. I wanted to solve this problem."

There are few examples of this kind of interpretation platform anywhere in the world.

Oya first came to Japan as a university student, having applied for an internship at a Japanese semiconductor manufacturer to use the electronics and telecommunications engineering that she had studied.

"I was supposed to get on a plane to Japan, but I wondered if I had made a mistake and had traveled to heaven instead. That's how much each day of the internship

felt like a dream. Japanese people are all kind, warm and really nice. It was also great that I headed not to the city in Tokyo but to nature-rich Shiga Prefecture."

Oya later served a second corporate internship in Japan and returned to Japan once again for graduate studies at the University of Tokyo. After graduating, she began working at a consulting company and decided to permanently relocate to Japan. As she had become fluent in Japanese, she began to receive many phone calls asking for help from non-Japanese friends who were struggling with nuanced communication such as when signing contracts at apartments or when at the hospital.

"For the most part, when they gave me the phone to interpret, we reached a solution in a short amount of time. For simple daily conversations, AI-based interpreting apps will do, but to understand and relay each side's thoughts, I realized it was important to have someone in the middle."

Oya left her job, started Oyraa with a friend, and began development of an app. She was able to generate support and steadily grew her service. Currently, there are over 900 registered interpreters on the Oyraa platform, supporting 153 languages. There are many interpreters with expert knowledge handling IT, financial, construction, and a wide range



Oya Koc holds a smartphone showing her company's interpretation app interface. Courtesy of John Amari (top), Oyraa Inc. (bottom)

of other fields, and the number of users, from corporations to city halls and other public organizations, is increasing. More than 9,000 interpretation assignments have been completed to date, and the company has come to receive words of gratitude not only from users but from its registered interpreters, as well.

Respecting the flexible working style of its professional interpreters, Oyraa allows those joining the platform to set their own working hours, location, pricing and other details.

Oya says, "My stage for action is global, but there is a reason why I set up my base in Japan. It's because Japan is a special country that gives me a sense of peace."

Oya's original idea, born from a simple wish to help her friends, is now bringing peace of mind to all kinds of people around the world from her "heavenly" base in Japan. 