**Globally Speaking**

**Episode 048**

**Will TAPICC Become an Industry Standard for Translation APIs?**

M I’m Michael Stevens.

R I’m Renato Beninatto.

M And Renato, today on Globally Speaking, we’re talking about something a little different. It’s a change of pace some would say.

R Yes. Instead of the stories and the fun things that we’ve been talking about, we’re bringing you information about an industry initiative.

M That some people would find very fun and very relevant.

R Absolutely. Well, it affects everybody, because it has to do with a standard for communicating technologies and making things work more easily. So it affects everybody, but it affects people in different ways.

M In different ways. And so it’s a pretty in-depth look at this new initiative for standards in our industry, and we’ll let the experts speak for themselves.

R Yes, and keep in mind that this is an initiative that spans across several industry associations and organizations, so it’s quite important and interesting for you to listen to it. So without much further ado, let our guests speak.

L I'm Laura Brandon, and I'm the executive director of Globalization and Localization Association (GALA). We are a trade association of over 400 companies around the world, all engaged with global content on different levels. Many of our companies that are members are language services companies, but a large number of enterprises that are members and most of the major language technology development companies are also members.

 And as a nonprofit we have several different programs that are of benefit to our companies. We exist to bring our companies together for mutual interests, and so you'll see that we do things like training and conferences and initiatives, such as TAPICC because they touch many companies.

M Yeah which is exactly what we're talking about today. Laura how long have you been with GALA?

L I've been with GALA forever! I was actually GALA’s first employee, and over the years we've built a small staff and infrastructure to support vision of our founding members.

R And we have another guest. Jim why don't you go ahead and tell us who you are?

J Yeah, I'm Jim Compton. I'm a long-time localization industry veteran. I'm a technology program manager at Moravia, and in a nutshell, I'm applying technology to solve customers’ globalization problems. But I've been really interested in this space of where content systems interact with translation systems. So that's my interest in TAPICC.

R So our conversation today is exactly about TAPICC, what does TAPICC mean?

L So, TAPICC is an acronym that stands for *Translation API Class and Cases Initiative,* and it's an initiative that actually came to GALA through TAUS. Many people don't know that, but TAUS previously had a translation API program, and then at a certain moment, they asked if GALA would like to become home for that because they were focused on other projects. And we said yes. We brought it under the GALA umbrella and looked at how to reformulate a few things, and rebranded it TAPICC. So we'll be talking about a number of facets of this, but essentially it's a community initiative to bring coherence to APIs for translation.

R So Laura you mentioned that TAUS started with this initiative of bringing together technology companies to create an API, a basic platform for sharing data. But this is not only TAUS and GALA that are involved in this initiative. I think there are other participants, in addition to the individual companies and software publishers that work with it.

L That's right. I mean, it's a completely open initiative; the organization or affiliation does not matter. But there's also one other organization supporting it called LT Innovate, which is a language technology group out of Brussels. But in terms of participants, membership affiliation doesn't matter; it's completely open under an open source framework. So anybody who participates has to agree to that, but that's the only prerequisite.

R So like in that movie Philadelphia, Jim, how would you explain like I'm a four-year-old that I understand—what does this mean for a translator, for a translation company owner, for any individual that works with translation technology?

J In a nutshell I would say the initiative is attempting to remove friction that's in the system right now because of unnecessary variation. So today, if you're wanting to execute some work for a customer, let's say that customer has their content within a specific content management system, and your ability to be able to let's say translate that work is going to be largely based on the integration options that are available with whatever system you use and whatever system the content management system that the customer is using.

 If there's not an existing integration solution, then you end up having to create one, and this is the landscape that we have right now, is a collection of one-off permutations of integrations between these two systems. Which I guess it means that if you don't have a full-time connector development staff, you're not necessarily able to execute work from certain systems. So I see the advantage being a leveling of the playing field for translators in that the barrier to entry to be able to integrate with a TMS system and a CMS system should be lowered.

M So Jim, with this openness, and Laura for that matter, how was this received from technology vendors?

L Well, I was actually going to add one piece to what Jim said previously before, maybe we move on to the language technology vendors. And that's I'd like to say something about the language services companies out there. When you think of the landscape of language services companies, so many of the companies are small to medium-sized organizations and so the success of an initiative like TAPICC is going to enable more of these companies to serve their clientele, who are dealing with increasing technology challenges. So they've got a customer that comes and wants to connect in a translation to a system they can't connect to, the vision is to be able to say, ‘look at these specifications’. If you can ask your developers to put these in place, you're going to have no problem getting our translations in. So that has a potential to help a lot of companies stay competitive in a changing market place.

R So is this an extension of the concept of interoperability? Will this initiative help, for example, the classic problem of the LSP and the freelance translator that they have to have licenses of 10 different translation management systems because they don't really talk to each other? Is this API touching this challenge, or is it more between translation management systems and content management systems, which is more between the technology that we use in our business and the technology that the buyers use? What is the integration landscape here that we're talking about?

J Yeah, I think it's all of the above. One of the most acute integration challenges is starting with getting content out of content management systems into a translation ecosystem to begin with. Once you're in the ecosystem, then of course, then there's integration challenges there as well. So I see it as addressing all of the above.

L I think that the first area of focus really is around the content owners and the services companies that are helping them translate their content, more so than with the translators.

R This challenge, I mentioned the translator, but this affects everybody. The translator is just the end of the line, but LSP also has to have a license of...let's not pick on anyone…but who are the companies that are participating actively in this initiative, Laura?

L So the real drivers behind this initiative are the language solutions companies and the owners of the content. So what's interesting is that thinking about the technology companies, they're on the bookends of this, right. They are not the ones driving it from the beginning but they are all observing it. So we've got a number of language technology companies that are watching through the groups, and we've been staying in touch with them. And I think that they will be fully onboard when they see that their customers insist on it, and that's the vision really.

 So we've got…technology companies have a strategic advantage, not to necessarily be opened up into a standardization process because they're selling these kinds of solutions. So it's the people who are on the buy side who could save a lot of money to translate more content ultimately that are going to need to drive it. But our function really in the GALA piece too is building buy-in. Demonstrating that we have the ability to pull off a project like this and sustain it and keep it vendor neutral and technology neutral, and bring in enough voices to make sure that it's addressing the needs because if we create something that can't be implemented easily, it's no use.

M What does it take from your organization's perspective to keep it under neutral? Because I think the opposite side of this is there are companies who have invested a lot in research and development in customized APIs and connections with their clients who could actively work against this.

L Well, I mean, I think there's a number of levels to it, but the first level is just the architecture of it. So when we were conceiving this, we looked at the legal, we talked to organizations like Oasis about how to structure it, so that were it to become a full standard, everything's in place that there's no…the IP, everything is open, and that the participation isn't going to lead to somebody saying no that's proprietary you can't use it anymore.

 That was a big piece of the early days of the initiative. Second piece is the marketing and the messaging around the openness of it, which is legitimate, and then the third is really this admin component, which is how do you bring in enough forces, how do you have enough people participating when you do have some sort of prototype or draft of something to share? How do you make sure enough eyeballs are on it? Then really build in the time to make sure that when you're getting input, you have time to implement it—that’s the idea. We're trying to move really quickly so that we are not like a kind of traditional standards project, where we're hamstrung by bureaucracy, but at the same time we want to make sure that we're getting a lot of input.

M So at this point you guys are trying to get as much feedback and information during this time period. Is that what I'm understanding?

L Well, at this point we're actually, we've got four working groups that are working on their first set of deliverables. So those four working groups have been together for about six months, and they will produce their first set of deliverables next month.

 So, one of the elements of getting lots of voices involved is making sure that we're out and about at industry conferences. So we presented at Localization World; we've presented at T-Com; and we use the GALA conference as a real milestone for having more information to present and new deliverables to present. So these are opportunities for us to bring in new faces and interest and try to bring in new participants also to the working groups.

R So how do these participants contribute? Jim, you are, I assume, involved in this process, and you are giving input from one of the LSPs in this space. What different roles can people perform, or how they can contribute to the initiative?

J Yeah, that's great. So, we have with the four working groups, you can sign up to any of them or all of them, and that will get you in the loop with all the activity that goes on with those. So you…

R And when you talk about a group, is that a virtual group, or what do you mean by group?

J Yeah, working groups on the GALA system. It represents a channel, GALA Connect channel, so people can bring up a subject and discuss it on the channel, and if you subscribe to any of the working groups which are these channels, you'll be given access to all the conversation there. And that is a form of participation that is fine, right, you can make sure that the output that's coming from the group is consistent with how you'd like to see this take shape. Or, if you'd like to be more hands on, there's lots of heavy lifting that just needs to be done with the documentation of the specification.

R The group is called API Class and Cases, what does it mean, what does it mean class and cases? An API class, of course, but what are the cases? Is that you need to bring case studies, situations that would require the use of these API, is that a type of contribution that would happen?

L Part of the idea has been to not start from scratch. There's a lot of interesting work that has happened already in this space, where different groups have tried to tackle this challenge, and so there's a few pieces to it. But one of them is simply collecting documentation around different scenarios where APIs are needed, so that we can focus on the most common scenarios.

M Okay, so the class is referring to the principle of organization naming, making sure you have as many of the APIs listed and compared, and then the cases are the uses of those.

L Yeah so part of…so one of the intended deliverable is to have a very flushed out use case catalog.

M Okay and I see here the four groups that you have. One is business metadata, payload specification, XLIFF extraction and API specification. So those are the four specific areas that people are joining in contributing, is that correct?

L For now, yeah, and there's actually future phases of the project that we want to launch, but we're focused in what we call track one, which is the supply chain automation track of the initiative, and that's what's launched for now and broken down into four groups.

R Some people are listening to this podcast in front of their computers. So if they want to go there and sign up for it, where do they go?

L So go to the GALA website, which is [www.gala-global.org](http://www.gala-global.org), and right from the home page slider there should be a TAPICC graphic, but if you don't see that, you can also go to resources. The resources drop down in the very bottom item refers to a number of things; you can read the project charter; you can see the open source framework; you can see the intended deliverables and structure; and you can also see the links to the various groups, and you just need to create a user account on the website if you don't have one already.

M And as you guys see the future state of this, it all going well, because right now, it's a pre-standard initiative. Clearly, you're looking that it becomes the standards, and what do you see as the sort of biggest single effect on people who are working in industry?

J Well, I think the biggest effect will be on the industry as a whole that there will be less money wasted on solving a problem inconsistently. So I think the biggest effect is there will be more money in the system to apply toward where the value is created, which is in getting more content translated.

L I think that there's potential impact on a lot of levels, and one of them is, one of the things that we see frequently, is that translation is considered a pain, a thorn in everybody's side. This is intended to make transition easier and to help get it done more smoothly, and so if we can demonstrate that, then hopefully there's more budget being allocated as merely translating more words.

J There have been all these advances on the CMS side, and in the translation world itself, right, like we can do translation more quickly because of MT. But this space between the content management systems and the TMS systems represents a bottleneck. Like, if we can't get the content efficiently from one system into another ecosystem, then it sort of doesn't matter how advanced they are. So that's really the focus I guess of this track is to help take that supply chain process where content is flowing between these two worlds and, I mean, it doesn't remove the need to do integrations. It just means that integrations don't have to be completely invented from scratch every single time.

R And what do software developers and language technology companies have to gain from an initiative like this?

J I think it's in everyone's best interest, to be honest. If you're an LSP, it means your ability to take work from one of the many dozens of potential systems in which content is managed becomes an easier proposition, right? If you're a person that owns a content management system, it means that you're not having to be at the mercy of this wild west of integration solutions to have your system that manages content be an actual global content management system. And I think if you own one of the pieces of technology in, like, the translation stack, it means you have to invest less of your attention and money and development time into solving this problem of integration and you can focus more on building unique capability into your system. So, I'm not sure where… and I've tried to think through this exercise, is there anyone in the mix that benefits from the current sort of fractured state? And I don't think so. I really think this is a win/win for every person in the ecosystem.

R That's great. And the role of GALA as you describe initially, Laura, is project managing this initiative. Do you have dedicated staff or is this more of a volunteer initiative with the different work groups setting their own schedule and coordinating themselves?

28:44 L So right now we don't have a sole dedicated staff person. We’ve got two of our existing staff who have time allocated to it. As the initiative progresses, I think that there will be a moment where we need a dedicated project manager to that and whether that comes from a volunteer initially, it probably will. I think it's a progression for us. We’re using funding from our you know our general funds to support things like some travel to conferences, some marketing collateral, and then we're using our existing systems to support.

 So, for example, GALA launched an online community about a year ago with the idea to be able to support this kind of thing. It's one of the reasons companies want to engage with the trade org, is to be able to connect with organizations with common interests, but we didn't always have things like an online community to connect them when they want to start something. So, for now it's not dedicated staffing but definitely dedicated resources.

M So people can join the work groups. What other ways would you suggest people get involved?

L I think a really important piece is going to be to review our prototype API that we're publishing very soon. Or that may be published by the time your listeners hear this podcast and that giving concrete input on whether this would work with their systems is a discrete task that people could do without committing to long-term working groups. We need as many people doing that as we can have.

**END OF CONVERSATION**