**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 71 Transcript**

**Educating Localizers of the Future**

**Featuring Max Troyer of MIIS**

Renato I am Renato Beninatto.

Michael And I am Michael Stevens.

Renato Today, on Globally Speaking, we will be talking to somebody that is responsible for one of the most important education programs in the translation and localization environment.

Michael Absolutely. It’s a place that’s become a regular pipeline for professionals in our industry, both on the buyer side and on the LSP side.

Renato The Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey is a reference for interpretation and translation education worldwide. And today we have the honor to interview one of the people responsible for that program.

Michael Let’s let him introduce himself.

Max Thanks for having me on the podcast. My name’s Max Troyer, I’m an associate professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, formerly the Monterey Institute of International Studies. My program is the Translation and Localization Management program, otherwise known as TLM, and we train localization professionals for exciting careers in the ever-expanding localization industry.

Renato And that’s a significant program; it’s one of the best-known in the world as a program for developing professionals for the localization industry. We have several colleagues that have graduated from there. How long has this program existed?

Max Well, the TLM program is an offshoot of our traditional translation and interpretation programs, and we’re just getting ready to celebrate our 50th anniversary of the Translation and Interpretation, or T&I, Programs. The Translation and Localization Management program was established basically as an offshoot when we realized our T&I graduates were going off and becoming project managers. Why not harness this, and train them in this industry and have them go out with the skills that they need to do translation and localization project management?

 So, yeah, the TLM program is around 15 years old, and one of the things that we’re seeing is, what is the future of the T&I program? What is the future of TLM at this crossroads?

Renato Monterey is pretty much the world capital of language training. It’s the school for the military, and also the Translation and Interpretation Program at the Middlebury Institute. That must be great to find faculty and good talent there.

Max I think the Chamber of Commerce has the trademark on the “Language Capital of the World.” They have the “Language Capital of the World” festival every year and we’re obviously involved in that, but there does seem to be a synergy of languages here in Monterey, and I think a big part of that is growing up next door to the Silicon Valley and Bay area where a lot of our graduates intern and end up when they graduate. We’ve got a good thing going on here in Monterey.

Michael Yeah, well, the location has been a key piece to that pipeline into the localization industry for students. Fifteen years ago, you guys sensed something that was happening with the translators and the interpreters that were entering the market. Why start the new program? What were the skills that were lacking and what did you start providing?

Max I was just talking to a student today about interviews, and an interesting thing that I just thought about was, when you interview someone to hire them, you tend to hire people that are good at interviews. But do you want to hire someone who’s good at interviewing, or do you want to hire someone who’s good at doing a job? That’s the question that we have.

 When you take someone who’s from the T&I space who’s a really good, rock-solid translator or interpreter, and you say, “Oh, you know something about this, please manage this process,” and, “Do you know a little bit of DTP?” “Okay, I’ll learn InDesign, and then I can do a little bit of DTP. Oh, we’re going to do subtitling; now I’m going to learn a little subtitling.”

 But these are all new skills that these people aren’t really prepared for, so taking a translator and asking them to be a project manager is not necessarily something that they want to do, and obviously they’re not prepared for these roles. So, this was the decision that was made many years ago: we need to be training people so that they can go into these roles, and kind of raise the bar on the skills that they have, so that they can hit the ground running and not have to learn so much on the job.

Renato Over these 15 years, how has the curriculum changed? Because there is an element of technology that is very strong in localization management, and if you are graduating people in this space, what has changed?

Max The percent of our graduates going to LSPs as project managers is kind of shifting. We’re seeing a slight migration towards people wanting to go directly to the buyer side, and this is interesting to me. I’m more traditional in the sense that I believe that our graduates need to start out at an LSP: get experience, cut their teeth and get all the skills that a localization project manager needs at an LSP. And then once they’ve mastered that, then they’re ready to move on to the buyer side or the client side and use those skills to help the clients who are purchasing localization do a better job at what they do.

 And there are those in the industry who think that’s misguided, that it’s a different skillset. In some cases, when you go to the buyer side, you have to unlearn everything you did at an LSP, that it’s unrelated.

Michael But you raise an interesting point there, and maybe you could dig in a little bit for us. What do you see as the difference in skillsets between those two sides—the LSP side and the buyer side—for new employees?

Max When you’re on the LSP side, you get to do a lot of different things, wear many hats, see a lot of different types of projects that the clients bring to the LSP. In some ways, when you go to the buyer side, you become kind of a one-trick pony; like, you can look forward to a new feature, maybe a new product every now and then, but if you work for a corporation, you’re really just localizing that corporation’s content. Obviously, you have product, you have sales content, you’ve got customer support—and there are a lot of different types of content that clients have. But I’m generally more excited by what’s happening on the LSP side of things just because I get bored easily, and I like the idea of wearing many hats.

 But, with more and more of our graduates going directly to the client side, we needed to amp up the types of courses that we have on the buyer side. For a long time, we just had this course “Localization as a Profession.” This course has now kind of been expanded. We have a program management class. Tucker Johnson’s going to be teaching an account management class, which is the bridge between what the sales and production teams do.

 So, exploring these new roles for localization professionals and new exciting opportunities that are coming online as technology develops, and especially as automation starts eating away at the boring project manager jobs.

Renato I understand your excitement with the LSP side and the variety of the work, but on the buyer side, there is more focus probably on the management side, on the internal management process organization, dealing with other teams, and there is some kind of different challenges than there is at an LSP, which is more on the service side and on the preparation and on the technology and on the delivery. It’s the usual difference. On one side you’re buying, on the other side you’re selling, but at the end of the day, you’re both working on the same project. You don’t know what you’re going to be doing the next day when you’re working at an LSP.

Max You’re right, at the LSP, you’re not really involved with the strategy of operating a global business, so that’s probably the draw of the buyer side: getting to work on strategy, working with different divisions and different departments on coming up with solutions, and obviously the salaries are a little bit more attractive on the buyer’s side.

Michael When you are looking at Silicon Valley companies and the high-profile names and how much people want to work there—if you’re talking about Google, if you’re talking about Apple, Uber…these are world-changing companies. There is something very sexy about working at these companies.

Max Very true.

Renato The TLM program is a two-year program; it’s a graduate degree. Is it more training or is it education? What kind of subjects do students go through in this program?

Max The primary axes of the program are the language component. We have students who study translation, and then another group of students who study language, improving the skills in their second language, and this is a change we introduced a couple of years ago when we realized that not all project managers or not all localization engineers need to have rock-solid translation skills. We can let people into the program who just have a second language, at least, so they know what it means to communicate in another language.

 So, we have the language component, we’ve got the localization component, which includes all the technology and all the CAT tools, and then we have the business component or the management, in TLM, and we cover the financial aspects, the marketing, all the stuff on the client side. Those are the three areas that we explore. They’re fully baked localization professionals by the time they graduate.

 Definitely walking students through a series of exercises and getting them to start thinking about things that they’re going to need to think about. And what’s really funny, I like to tell people that our program is really general, in the sense that we try to give students exposure to a lot of different things. But from an outsider point of view, our program is the opposite of general, it’s such a niche. But at the same time, though, I like to say that our students know so much about the industry, I wouldn’t say that they’re really prepared to be experts at anything, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. I really feel like if you take one of our graduates and throw them into almost any situation, they’ll either know the thing already, or it won’t take them too long to say, “Oh, I’ve done something similar, I can apply those skills to this and learn this new thing very quickly.”

 The balance that we have to strike is between being so lost in the technical details of something that it’s not a skill that you can transfer to something else. Transferability is a big theme.

Renato It’s not training, because training you can get in any organization and the skills will change over time. You’re really talking about an education. One of the things that I like to say is the most important skill these days is to be able to learn how to learn. Right? To be able to be prepared. I know the Middlebury Institute is very aware of this changing landscape and what is the future of the localization professional. What kind of conversations are you having internally about this and how is this affecting the program?

Max I just taught my software and games localization course. We look at internationalization and localization of quite a few different types of content and my main theme when I was going through this course preparing it was automation. And so, for every topic that I teach in this course, I was asking students to think about if it can be automated, and if it can’t be automated, what do we do about that?

 For example, one thing that we did this year was MadCap Flare and MadCap Flare is pretty common when it comes to documentation, and we could not find any way to automate MadCap Flare. I don’t know if it’s been done right now. But, these are the things that keep me up at night—what do we do when we can’t automate and how do we enable automation in our processes?

 That’s a big theme in all of the courses: can it be automated, and what are the ramifications of automating? Who loses their job, or rather, taken on the positive side, who is now free to do something more exciting?

Michael When you talk about automation, Max, do you see students in the future needing more of a background in basic code, writing APIs, being able to read APIs, and going down that road?

Max I don’t. I actually think that there will be a market for someone who wants to write that code, but I don’t know that that necessarily needs to be our students. Our students need to understand the business processes and the business requirements and be able to analyze the situation, maybe write some pseudo code to explain to a developer what needs to happen, but we’re not trying to graduate software engineers. We have software engineers that come through the program, and those folks become internationalization engineers, obviously, but the bulk of our student body is localization professionals who will be qualified to design these systems but not necessarily do that actual coding.

 Companies have outsourced all development to the East, essentially. You know, there’s not a lot of coding done in North America anymore. That’s where the thinking takes place.

Renato How does Apple do it? It’s designed in North America, right? It’s manufactured somewhere else. Yeah, designed in Cupertino, that’s it.

Max Yep, exactly.

Renato Since the program has been around for 15 years, and you have alumni now that have been in the market for at least 13 years, what is the career path that the TLM students have taken? What kind of positions are they holding today? What is the outlook for a professional that wants to develop and invest in themselves?

Max Well, the traditional career path and the career path that still holds to this day is three to five years as a localization project manager. From there, either moving up within that LSP into a higher role, maybe account management, maybe over into sales. Many folks after three to five years move over to the buyer side, spend some time on the buyer side, and then after another three to five years, many people end up off of the core localization teams and move over to international marketing or other types of roles within engineering or marketing departments. You start out so specific in localization project management and then end up thinking about more international marketing strategy, and so it’s kind of a nice progression for a person to have, I think.

Renato I know that you have some VP-level alumni in certain companies. How about anybody that goes out and decides to start their own company? Or go back to Monterey to recruit? [Laughter]

Max There have been a couple agencies that have been started by graduates both in California and internationally, and it’s really fun. I made the mistake one time when I was interning back when I was a student: I told the owner of the company that in 10-15 years I would like to start my own agency. And that was a real turn-off for that owner. They thought, “Oh gosh, so everything you’re learning here will be used against me!”

Michael “Oh no, I’m raising up my competition!” [Laughter]

Renato That’s a very short-sighted person. It’s one of those interview questions that is really tricky: where do you see yourself in five or ten years? And the best answer is, “I want to be in your place. I want to replace you.” That means that the person who’s interviewing is going to be moving on to something better, right? But I can understand this short-sightedness of not wanting to develop their own competition.

Max When I review the alumni database for TLM graduates, I do see that it seems as time goes on, that people are moving into more accessory roles within the industry. So, the more recent graduates are all localization project managers or something very related to what they studied here, but as time moves on, they kind of go into more marketing or other international-related roles. So, it’s kind of exciting.

Michael Max, share with us a story of a recent grad, one of the things you’ve heard or feedback you’ve gotten that would be captivating for our listeners.

Max Two recent graduates, one from last year and then one from about four years ago, both went to big LSPs. Working at a big company is not for everyone, and some people really excel in a large company. Me, personally, I know that I would not necessarily succeed in a giant corporation. Both of these graduates very quickly ended up at startups. It’s kind of the way things were for the last five years. Actually, I read an article recently that the reign of startups, or the sexiness of startups, may be starting to dim.

 But, anyway, both of these graduates ended up at startups and were basically creating localization departments within these companies. And to me, this is pretty revolutionary. I’ll never forget, there was an IMUG from a few years ago that focused on localization at startups, and the guy got up on stage and basically said, “Here all the things I tried when we were localizing our product.” And everyone in the audience is looking around at each other like, “Why didn’t you call one of us when you were trying to do this? You spent like two years and a gillion dollars making all these mistakes when you could have just hired any one of us in this room and we would have told you what to do?”

 And I think that for me, this story of these two graduates going for a big LSP and then going to a small startup, this was an opportunity to do something exciting. I would love every graduate to do something like that: go work in an LSP for a while, and then go find an awesome startup and create a localization department and just show that company how to save money and not make so many mistakes as they start going global.

Michael That’s a great opportunity, both for the students and the companies.

Max Indeed. And will save money in the long run, a lot of money.

Michael Yep, yep. Well, that’s great. Anything else you want to cover, Max? Anything we didn’t talk about?

Max No, I can’t really think of anything. Every time I go to conferences or gatherings of localization professionals, I like to talk to people and hear what they think we should be covering in our curriculum. Everyone has opinions on what we should be covering; we’ve got a pretty well-oiled machine at this point.

Michael I know a good question for this. If you had to make an ask of our listeners, what are the things that you talk about when you meet people at conferences?

Max I think my biggest ask would be to mentor other professionals who are new to the industry. And this isn’t just for TLM graduates. We need to welcome young people into the profession and kind of show them the ropes. I know a lot of more senior folks in the industry are doing formal and informal mentoring, but that would be my big ask: just to mentor young people when they come asking for informational interviews and things like that.

Michael Yeah, I think there’s a unique opportunity within our industry because we are all so connected, and there are a lot more people than there used to be for some of us who’ve been around for a bit. But that being said, most people are a phone call away, and so being able to set up some of these more formal relationships…Renato is connected with LocWorld, the sales and marketing seminar. What is the seminar you do, Renato?

Renato The workshop.

Michael The workshops, and so this is a unique opportunity we have to engage people. And who knows, maybe some of our listeners will follow up with you, Max.

Max That would be very cool. That would be very awesome, thank you.

Renato And actually, I would encourage anybody who goes to California to take a little detour and go visit Monterey. Besides being a wonderful, beautiful town, just walking around the campus of the Middlebury Institute, which is right downtown, which is amazing, is quite a nice experience.

Max Very cool. Thanks for the compliment. We’ll take it.

**End of conversation**