**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 76 Transcript**

**How Following the Herd Impacts Localization**

Renato I’m Renato Beninatto.

Michael And I’m Michael Stevens.

Renato Today on Globally Speaking, we’re going to be having a conversation—one of those conversations that Michael and I have occasionally—but it was inspired by a video that I like to show in some of my consulting engagements.

Michael Because, of course, there’s no better way to communicate something than to have a YouTube or TED video.

Renato Absolutely. And this one is a short one. It’s a five-minute YouTube video. I strongly encourage you to watch it when you have the time. Just search on YouTube for “Brain Game Social Conformity.” The basic idea of this social conformity video is that a person is invited to a doctor’s office—

Michael It’s an eye clinic, I believe. It’s an eye clinic, they’re all sitting there.

Renato It’s an eye clinic, and all the people in the room are actors, and this person comes in and every few seconds there is a buzzer that goes off.

Michael And she’s able to just sort of observe for a little while.

Renato Yeah. And what happens when the buzzer goes off is that people start, one by one, standing up and sitting down. They just stand up, sit down. And she is confused at the beginning and she looks around and she doesn’t know what’s going on.

Michael But then she gets the deal.

Renato And she gets that whenever there is a buzzer, they need to stand up. And then people start going into their appointments, they leave the room…

Michael Which seems very Pavlovian.

Renato Pavlovian, yes.

Michael And so she gets with the system, the bell triggers the action, all of that goes on, but it gets even more interesting than that, because…

Renato As the video goes on, all the actors that were in the room start to go out and she’s the only person in the room. And the buzzer goes off and there’s nobody there, and what does she do?

Michael She still stands up.

Renato And then new patients start to come in.

Michael And she still stands up at the bell! And the new patients start following her along to do it.

Renato Exactly. She creates a norm that she learned from the previous—

Michael Group of people.

Renato —set, and she passes on that behavior to these newcomers, and they don’t know why. So, it’s a very interesting exercise and it shows how we, in all situations, tend to follow what people tell us to do—or, they don’t even need to tell us, they just give us an indication and we follow the social norm.

Michael Right. And so, we can see it over and over again in localization. If you haven’t done any type of analysis of your process, there are likely places where you’re standing just because you know that that’s what you’re supposed to do at that moment.

Renato This is why I bring up when I’m working with consulting clients: what part of your process can you improve, can you change, can you move? Then, when you ask the translator, the project manager, the reviewer, the sales person, “Why are you doing this?” they don’t know.

Michael Right.

Renato They don’t know because “This is how we do things. This is how we have always been doing things.” So, this is a great opportunity, and I think that the message that I want to convey in this conversation is that you have an opportunity to look at the processes that you have in place and try to understand why? Why is TEP—translation, editing and proofing—

Michael Why is it the norm?

Renato Why do we do that? Why do we need to do language quality assurance in every single project?

Michael Is the content fit for purpose?

Renato Exactly. Or, do you have to have the same process for everything? One of the things that has always bugged me in our business is this obsession with thinking that more eyes, more reviews, will improve the quality of the translation.

Michael Endless cycles of feedback lead to better results.

Renato So, when I have these conversations, what I like to bring up is this principle that comes from total quality assurance, TQA: it’s a process that was developed in the ‘50s by the Japanese and made popular by Deming. There are 14 principles, but one of the principles is that every time there is a handoff, every time somebody touches a product, there is an opportunity for a mistake to happen.

Michael It was primarily a concept applied to automotive. And the more people you end up putting on that assembly line, the more chance for a person to make a mistake along the line.

Renato It applies to any process, right?

Michael Absolutely.

Renato Any point of transition—you can look at files as pieces in the process, right? Every time there is a handoff, somebody else touches the process, there is an opportunity for degradation. There is an opportunity for an error to be introduced. I think it was 15 or 16 years ago, I made a presentation where I said quality doesn’t matter. And what I proposed at that time as a topic for us to look into is this concept that we developed an industry around catching errors instead of doing things right the first time.

What people think about quality is, “I’m going to find mistakes.” So, you get in those situations where you’re a vendor manager; your job is to find the best translator to do the translation of a certain project.

Michael Yeah, so it changes some of the assumptions you approach a project with. One of them would be able to recruit a more talented or knowledgeable linguist in the first place.

Renato One that knows the topic, understand the tools, understands the process and can do a close-to-final project. But, what happens here is that there is an imbalance.

Michael Mhm.

Renato I know there are going to be some of our listeners that are going to say “no, that’s not our case,” but the majority of the industry spends more money on the translation and less money on the review when the review is supposed to be the quality control. You want the reviewer to be more knowledgeable than the translator. But, we aren’t the only industry where you get an engineer to do an engineering translation, and then you get a linguist that has no idea about the engineering topic to review and incorporate new errors. So, who catches the reviewer? And then you get into this endless loop of…

Michael Feedback.

Renato The more reviews, the better it is. And when in reality, we should be asking ourselves why? And this is where the concept of social conformity comes in.

Michael Right. So, the idea of social conformity comes in. You mentioned one change you may make in the process, and that is recruiting someone differently from the start.

Renato Yeah!

Michael A second change you might want to implement is one related to training.

Renato That’s the conversation of focusing on doing the things right first. So, what are the activities that you can do to avoid mistakes?

I see this in marketing messages and positioning: go to a client and say, “Our quality is better because we have three reviews, “we have three steps,” and “we have five steps.” And how about focusing on doing the thing right from the beginning, and like you said, training the translators, getting them used to the product, building teams?

I’ve seen processes where the translator and the editor work together; they’re peers and they have similar levels of knowledge. All of us have typos, all of us skip a word, all of us have minor mistakes, but if you are professional translators, linguists, testers—if you’re trained and you know your core subject and you know the technology and you know the material, and you know the client inside-out—you shouldn’t be making basic translation mistakes.

Your mistakes are going to be on form, format and details that even some technology could catch. Conversion errors or things like that. So, going back to the video that we talked about at the beginning of our conversation, how do you stop being that first patient that comes into the room and starts following the herd?

Michael I was thinking the same thing. I want to change the dynamic a little bit. What if you’re one of the people who’s already standing up with the bell? Instead of following the herd, you’re already in the midst of it, and you’re doing this and you’re rolling your eyes right now when you’re hearing this conversation. You can test this. You can say, “Okay, right now we have three review cycles. What if we did two?”

Renato What if you did none?

Michael “What if we did none? What would the feedback be from our consumers of the product? What would the people in-country, what would our resellers believe?” And so, you can begin testing some of this and limiting it. You can begin saying, “What if, instead of this large scope of words that I’m sending for LQA, what if I just start doing taglines or headlines, or, you know, content that really matters for me?” These are all experiments you can run so you can start really questioning your assumptions about what you’re doing. So, fight the power to stand up at that bell.

Renato Absolutely. I would add two very powerful tools to this process. One is the “five whys” approach. The concept of the “five whys” or root cause analysis is the idea of the young child when they come to you and they ask you, “Why is the sky blue?” and you say, “Oh, because of the atmosphere,” or whatever. “Why?” And then you give them another answer, and they go “why?” and “why?” and “why?”

This approach of asking five whys will bring you down to the core problem when you’re looking at processes that you have today. And I’m not only talking about translation processes: this can apply to your invoicing process, this can apply to your expense reimbursement process.

The point of the five whys is that you can use this technique to audit your own business, audit your own processes and figure out why are you using three tools? Why do you have four different people doing the same task when you can consolidate some of them?

Sometimes, as a consultant, you go into organizations—and organizations are very proud of the processes that they have put in place. It’s usually the same situation of the people that come in the room after the process and they have no idea why they’ve done this but everybody else does it like that, so it must be right.

Michael Yeah. So, you mentioned one area that’s worth examining, and that’s the quality assurance process. One other I see that companies do on a regular basis is the quarterly business reviews.

Renato Mhm.

Michael Oftentimes, when you’re simply doing the work and then telling the client the work that you did, there’s not a lot of benefit in such a meeting. So, I think the traditional ways where you’re just regurgitating data that should be communicated on a regular basis, even more regular than quarterly, they’re a waste of time.

Renato Absolutely. That’s a very interesting point because QBRs, or quarterly business reviews, are a fantastic sales tool, but people don’t understand that, and instead of using the QBR to have four slides as a conversation starter, you will have people showing up with 55 slides and huge decks, and then the clients are lost because we tend to be talking about ourselves instead of talking about them.

Michael Exactly. And where the partnership should be. Those are usually the most beneficial meetings you can have, in any circumstance: instead of regurgitating what I already did, let’s stop looking in the past. Let’s use that data as a way to say, “This is where we want to be the next time we meet, and two years from now, and where are we going?”

Renato And why are people doing QBRs the way they are today? Because that is how it has always been done!

Michael Everyone else is standing up in the room. Is there any other area that comes top of mind for you that would be worth a question and analysis on?

Renato Sales strategies, right? That’s an area where, very often, when I sit down with my clients, we start reviewing their processes…

Michael They should be making 50 phone calls and 50 emails every day, correct?

Renato Yeah, that’s the old-school approach. Why? Because it’s a numbers game!

Michael It’s a numbers game! We’re filling that pipeline.

Renato Yeah. But, I believe it’s a small numbers game. It’s not a big numbers game. And that’s a whole other conversation. If I’m doing 50 calls a day, how much business am I closing? Am I just annoying 48 people a day, instead of…

Michael Right, and 48 future possible clients.

Renato So, this approach of social conformity is the challenge that we leave you with today. Look at your organization, look at your processes. Are you a follower? Are you just standing up at the buzzer, or are you really thinking and creating something new for the industry as a whole, but that gives you a competitive advantage in this market? And when I talk about competitive advantage, it’s not only the client-facing competitive advantage, but also the fact that you can improve your margins and improve your profitability by eliminating redundant activities that you have.

Michael Right. And make your employees more happy, even.

Renato Absolutely.

Michael Imagine such a thing because conformity is not necessarily fun, it’s the office, it’s the assembly line. Listen to the two of us telling people to stop conforming and be creative. What a surprise! But I hope our listeners take that to heart.

Renato Well, this was a fun conversation, Michael. We need to do more of these.

Michael Let’s go out and let’s not conform, Renato.

**End of conversation**