**Globally Speaking**

**Podcast 87 Transcript**

**A New Chapter in the Multilingual Publishing Industry**

**Featuring Margaret Ann Dowling of Create&Translate.org**

Michael I’m Michael Stevens.

Renato I’m Renato Beninatto.

Michael And today on Globally Speaking, our guest is talking to us about the publishing industry.

Renato The publishing industry is one of the oldest industries in the content space. One of the first businesses was publishing Bibles, but we’ve come a long way and our guest has some interesting perspectives and connections with where localization meets publishing.

Michael Right. And so, we get into a deep dive of how the publishing industry, especially magazine publishing, functions. And you’ll learn a bit about the business model there. But if you hold on, there’s a really great challenge thrown out to folks in the localization industry around places where we can improve to help support the creatives in the publishing industry.

Renato So, let our guest introduce herself.

Margaret My name is Margaret Ann Dowling and I am an Irish-born psychology graduate who has been working as a publisher for more than 20 years in central European markets. So, I’ve been publishing in magazines, websites, mobile applications in Hungarian, Polish and Czech language[s] over those years. And I’m an avid magazine lover, both as a hobbyist and in terms of creating and designing them typographically from a content point of view. The reason I’m here today is because I realized about two and a half years ago that there was a LocWorld event in Dublin. I got a one-day ticket and I went in and I met a number of people there on that day, and I realized that localization itself as an industry segment has a whole load of magical tools that the publishing industry is just not aware of.

And the reason I call them magical tools is because translation has always been a part of global publishing, particularly if you have done big brands like me, like Cosmo or National Geographic or FHM or Sports Illustrated. Translation has always been there, but I didn’t realize that there was such a huge wealth of technology supporting localization and translation. So, that’s when I fell in love with localization then.

Renato Publishing has been around since the 1400s. One of the first information technologies was the printing press, right? From your introduction, it seems that it’s an industry that is quite local in nature and it’s slow to change. Is that the case?

Margaret Well, I think there’s a lot of preconceptions, misconceptions about what publishing is. You’re talking about news publishing, then you might be talking about book publishing, you’re also talking about magazine lifestyle content publishing, so each one needs to be looked at separately because each one has its separate business model. So, the publishing industry, yes it’s been around for, you know, hundreds and hundreds of years, but the commercial nature of the publishing industry since the advent of advertising as we know it, like, broad-scale, has been largely a business model that has been focused on particular regions, particular languages, and it has been limited by geography and limited by language accordingly, because most publishing companies are, you know, quite regional; they’re based in a particular country and they solve their globalization needs through a business model called licensing.

So, they find in a foreign country a licensing partner that has a foothold in that market, that has advertising connections and subscribers and distribution contracts in that market, and then they have a business model that was developed many years ago—60-70 years ago—that’s basically license-based, and that has been designed like that to enable, let’s say, an American publisher to be in all European markets without a huge amount of financial risk. In the era of paper and the printing press, the barrier to entry for publishers was always quite high because you had distribution risk and paper risk and so on.

Of course, in the world of technology, there is a significantly lower barrier to entry, particularly for adapting to new markets and new languages, and I think this is where the access of opportunity for the publishing industry, looking at localization, lies: this re-engineering of how we think about geography and language.

Michael So, in general, under a licensing agreement, would the publisher be responsible for any translation or language services involved, or would the licensee?

Margaret When you have a licensing contract, you are limited by that licensing contract to your geographic area and to your linguistic area. So, for example, if you have a German license, you may be able to deliver your magazine or your content in other German-speaking countries, like Switzerland, for example, or Austria, within that same licensing agreement as a German publisher.

Michael So I know in other industries, for instance, the airline manufacturing industry, oftentimes, those manufacturers of the airlines themselves, when they sell an airplane, they will not include any translated materials in that sale, and they will push the responsibility on the purchaser.

Margaret When you buy a license for a magazine or any form of content, you basically get the content in its original language and you, as the publisher, are responsible for the translation of that content.

Michael Okay. And so, the publisher in some ways gives up a level of control in brand recognition. They trust the licensee?

Margaret Yes, that’s why these relationships go back many decades and generations even, because they pick trusted partners who they know respect their brand values. And these relationships are very strictly designed around contractual obligations in terms of content narratives, layout design, typography, editorial choice of candidates for editor-in-chief and main positions. So, there is an entire back story of processes around how these licensing models have been developed over the last 60-70 years.

Renato So, Margaret Ann, one of the things that we have discussed already here in our podcasts is that, for example, the video world has been revolutionized by streaming, and this has affected the licensing structure of the industry, right? Movies used to be distributed in a very similar way to what you described: you would have local distributors for movies and then local TV channels that would acquire the rights for a movie for a certain period of time; they would translate the content locally, and they would broadcast it locally. In the last few years, what we have seen is that the publishers or the studios, the producers, the content creators, have reclaimed that process, and they started translating the Disney movie into 70 languages in Los Angeles and then selling the translated material to the different markets. Do you see something similar happening in any way in the publishing industry?

Margaret I think there is some movement in that direction; it’s very early-stage. You have to appreciate that [the] publishing industry is very structured by country and by language and geography. Historically, the first person that you would give the first right of refusal to in a new language environment or territory would be your existing partner. So, for the moment, the existing franchise model continues to deliver some money, even if it’s diminishing. There is no rapid-paced need or desire for people to change it before they extract as much value out of the old model as possible. But, of course, you need to be developing the new models in parallel with the decline of the old model.

So, I do believe that some publishers are working on this idea. It’s very easy for certain types of brands, maybe food, gardening, home deco, things that aren’t real time or that aren’t very, very local in nature, you can take this model as you described it, that would be common to the film industry, and apply that to content as well. But this would not be a familiar thing to publishers at this particular moment.

Michael For the publisher, why would now to be a good time to start considering this change?

Margaret Twenty-five years ago, I started in publishing in total, but let’s say in the last 20 years of really actively running publishing companies as a CEO, I was in peripheral markets. So, obviously, the impact of the globalization of the advertising model, the change of the entire metrics around [the] pricing that you are able to sell your advertising inventory for, and so on, this affected peripheral markets much earlier than it affected mainstream markets. There is a kind of a slight time delay in larger markets, where there was a lot more meat on the bone. The impact of this global shift in how advertising was purchased and distributed came later in larger markets.

So, the pressure on CEOs and on business stakeholders to make those changes quickly wasn’t there as much as it was, let’s say, for me in peripheral markets. I mean, the big step will be when people start to run out of other alternatives, they’re going to have to start to think about their structures beyond geography and beyond language, because eventually, they’re just going to reach that precipice where there will be no more revenue-generating opportunities within their own geographies. That’s my hypothesis.

Michael The revenue started to decline overall in the publishing industry, and you’re saying the outer side markets—the markets further than the core for the publishers—were affected first.

Margaret Yes.

Michael And that’s a big influence. Is this true for both traditional print publishing and the move to digital? Or is it a whole other conversation when you get into digital?

Margaret The same rule applies in the digital world. I mean, anybody who designs a website today for a single market, I think, is missing the whole point of what the digital world is about. So, there are many people, even in the publishing industry, who still think only in single-language terms. They’re wondering why they’re not making traction in what is actually a global market play. So, I mean, if you are in the world of the internet, you have to think globally. Even if you’re a local enterprise, you need to think globally. Which means you need to re-engineer a little bit about how you think about your editorial value proposition as well.

You need to have, maybe, less brands, but more deeply understand the global marketplace and focus on building those brand equities over multiple geographic regions. So, simplify so that you can distribute more broadly and then take those individual brands and build more revenue streams around them. I mean, Cosmopolitan magazine is an exact example: it has got like 64 editions in 36 languages in 110 countries. In each one, they have a different stakeholder, a different company, a different licensing agreement.

Michael Just managing the business relationship alone is huge overhead for that number of regions.

Margaret That’s why you need a separate company in each country paying you a licensing fee so that you can *not* have those costs. I mean, that’s a revenue-generating opportunity for those large publishing companies where they have a very remote connection to those markets, but they’re not saving the translation memories, there’s no feedback loop in terms of building the relationship with local market editors or anything like that.

Renato What is it that you find in the localization industry that could be applied to the publishing industry?

Margaret So, it’s in the terms of being able to create a new generation of brands. And I’m not talking about print brands or digital brands; I’m talking about editorial brands. So, create new editorial brands today.

An editorial brand could be Time magazine. An editorial brand could be Rolling Stone, Cosmopolitan or even Martha Stewart’s magazines. You know, an editorial brand is anything where you have an iconic, influential person at the forefront of the brand whose objective is to bring the world to its readers in whatever form…

Renato So, something like Monocle or…

Margaret Yes, Monocle is in its very essence a print product. It is about a curated, print-based experience. Monocle’s purpose in the world is deeply rooted in its presence as a print product. But if you think of content and what the purpose of really influential content is, it’s to help readers navigate the world around them in bite-sized chunks, delivered in a particular type of frequency that is commensurate with the emergence of their needs. So, it’s not like giving them the Encyclopedia Britannica once a week; it’s about people helping them navigate on a daily, weekly, monthly, bi-monthly level, whatever it is, bringing them towards whatever their goal is.

If you’re a specialist magazine—you’re a surfing magazine or if you’re a cooking magazine or cooking brand—people have aspirations for themselves. They want to bring those aspirations into being, and they look for sources to help them navigate through the complexity that is content, whether it’s delivered through TV, radio or internet. Editorially branded content is really about helping people navigate the world around them in whatever context…

Renato So, BuzzFeed would be a modern version of that. They are in multiple markets, they deliver local content, they have a strong brand that is centralized and they own their own publishing cycle; they’re not licensing. Would that be a good example of a different way of publishing?

Margaret [The] BuzzFeed model has come under a lot of pressure recently because it was overly reliant on Facebook as a distribution platform, so that affected its distribution numbers or its audience and engagement numbers, which then had a knock-on effect on its advertising. So, arguably, in the publishing world, some would say that BuzzFeed has had its day. But BuzzFeed is more really about giving information about what’s happening and what’s current, but it’s not really about the emergent need. Us publishers and editors, we are thinking about turkeys for Thanksgiving when everybody else is thinking about Easter eggs in March. We are always planning our editorial and designing our editorial to provide what’s new to people to help them shape their demands and shape their needs and understanding of what’s up and coming.

A lot of things like BuzzFeed or online editorial in general, it’s pretty much coming after the curve. It’s not shaping the consumers’ tastes; it’s replicating what’s already out there and just amplifying that. It’s like tabloid journalism, you know: it’s, like, got a reading age of nine, it’s very short form, it’s very salacious…

Michael Most of it is easily consumed and shareable.

Margaret Yeah, but it doesn’t really help you get a deep understanding of what’s going on or what it means to me. It’s just like a world of headlines.

Michael So, it sounds like to me as you describe the publishing industry here, you’re looking at their strengths as being the understanding of distribution and what it takes to get a product out globally, especially the larger companies here who have been successful there. A second positive about the publishing industry is the fact that they understand this form of content: there’s a depth to it, there’s a sophistication to it, even if it is a Cosmo survey or questionnaire, that there’s a lot of data and study and testing that has gone in behind that that makes it an effective piece of content. Do you believe that changes by the publishing industry to become more global and adopt some of these best practices will help them return to the state of revenue where they were at before?

Margaret So, I heard a great speaker once say that to chase the insanity of revenue over the sanity of profit is not a good business move. And I tend to believe in that. I do believe that it’s about profitable enterprises, no matter what’s happening with your turnover. Facing turnover is a different type of game. So, I think we need to return to profit and we need to really work very hardly on distinguishing between what’s limiting our innovation capability. Is it really the legacy? Because it’s very hard to build a new boat on a sinking Titanic, right? So, be very pragmatic, but at the same point in time, keep in mind you’re talking about multiple shareholders here. So, we have readers who are maybe not digital natives.

We have staff members who are writers, brilliant journalists, who maybe are not digital natives. We have full companies of people whose families rely on the salaries that, you know, are generated on a monthly basis. So, where is our social obligation best met when it comes to the stakeholders’ position? And we consider in that our readers are stakeholders, and our advertisers and our staff and the owners of these companies, is to keep the model going for as long as possible because you want to keep people in jobs, right? I mean, there’s no point in blowing up a legacy model that’s still making a lot of money and leaving a whole load of people homeless with no jobs, right? That doesn’t make sense.

But, at the same time, as these new models emerge, I mean, we as publishers need to truly lead ourselves into the future and help navigate that journey for our readers also. And I think that’s where, you know, it’s very difficult. And this is one of the conflicts I also had as a CEO myself, is: how can you do both? How can you manage the downturn of a business model at the same time as you focus as much resources and energy on building the new models? And those new models, they need to be reader-first, not advertiser-first. These long-term relationships we have with them which are not transactional—these are relationships through content—we need to build new financial, secure financial models that make sense for our industry to enable us to produce quality content, into the future, in perpetuity.

So, to go back to your original question, which was where do I see the opportunity, I see the opportunity for the creation of new brands that are true to our readers’ needs, which is to help them navigate the world around them.

And we need it more than ever because, I mean, we need to create more content that enables collaboration across cultures and collaboration across markets. This localization world—it’s female-led, lovers of language, technology-enabled, globally-minded, performance-driven. So, translators have this capability to think globally and to really be lovers of language. What do you have on the editorial side in publishing? Very strongly, female-led, lovers of language, globally-minded, not technology-enabled, and not performance-driven, because, yes, we love to sell our magazines, but it’s not real-time measurement.

At Christmastime, we’re thinking about what women will be worried about on the beach, you know; when everybody’s at the beach, we’re thinking about how women are going to budget properly for their best family Christmas they can have if, maybe, they go from a double income to a single-income family. Or, maybe we’re trying to help women who didn’t grow up in the digital age help their children navigate the digital age. You know, it’s a completely new world out there.

So, I’m very focused not on news or not on, you know, marketing content. My big thing is content for women and jobs for women. There’s a convergence of the skillset and a re-engineering of how we think about how editorials are designed and how content is designed and deployed, and completely re-engineer how we basically scale our content creation initiative.

I’ve always created my brand in foreign languages. So, I mentioned at the beginning I’m Irish; I speak Hibernian English. I also speak Hungarian fluently because I moved there when I was 21. In the early days of publishing, I published in English business news. But, now, in the last more than 20 years, I’ve been publishing in three foreign languages, and it’s always been my dream to publish in multiple languages simultaneously. And what I see now is that the BLEU scores for neural machine translation—we have an approaching level of human-to-machine parity.

And I just think, wow, that can do a lot of heavy lifting. I mean, if we can redesign how we think about the editorial proposition, and if editors can think, ‘oh my god, I want to get people to read my content in other languages, but I also want to read their content in other languages that I don’t speak,’ we can completely re-engineer things. We can make an internet full of healthy content that really helps people advance themselves in the right way.

Michael You made that great comment that publishers should be focused on the reader and not necessarily advertisers. Readers get a lot of content for free. Are there regions of the world or countries out there where readers are more likely to pay for the content they want?

Margaret People pay for quality when you’re drowning in a world of mediocrity. That’s always been the way. If we look at also business reports, business publishing, people are still paying for great quality content that they can’t find elsewhere.

What we need to be thinking about is how to maintain over the long-term engagement with people and through brilliant content, providing them with opportunities that, without having that support, they wouldn’t be able to get access. The content is the gel.

Renato Is there anything that you would like to cover that we haven’t covered in this conversation?

Margaret Well, I would like to know, I mean, why it is that the CAT tools that are developed so far are so prohibitive to the creative process?

Michael Oh, I love that question! [Laughter] Why are the CAT tools so prohibitive to the creative process?

Margaret By the time you’ve figured out how to use the technology, you’ve lost the idea that got you to sit down in the first place. They’re all about measurement and word count. They’re not about instilling or initiating any form of creativity into the process.

The CAT tool should be like a utility. The user interface should be designed to make it invisible. It’s an obstacle; it’s an awkward obstacle to the process of creativity.

Michael The CAT tools are built to serve a very hard and structured function. And what I hear in your question is, why can’t we incorporate some level of flexibility for creativity in CAT tools?

Margaret Or just design from an earlier point in time, you know. So, imagine the world of the editor who sits down and wants to communicate in 19 languages that they do not speak. But they want to be able to initiate a dialogue with editors around the world where they can, basically, seamlessly exchange information with one another. I mean, all the technology is there; it’s just lying in pieces on the floor. And nobody seems to be interested to put it together. But, I mean, I imagine myself as an editor having a brilliant idea and I’d like to know what an editor who speaks Portuguese thinks about this same topic.

And I want to be able to communicate seamlessly like I would in the physical world, and I don’t want that person to be limited by language inasmuch as I don’t want myself to be limited by language. But I want to know what happens with women on Women’s Day in South America. So, I don’t want to just find an English speaker who can tell me that; I want to be able to communicate with the best editor in that market, in their native language.

So, it needs to be seamless. Translation is increasingly becoming like a utility. I see my children using translation tools, you know, to communicate with their gaming partners in Korean and in Japanese and Norwegian.

There are so many opportunities there that if a person could just design something that met the needs of the editorial creative process, you know, I think that would be really helpful. And I think that’s going to be the next step.

So, one needs to understand that to be a valuable creator, it’s like being a musician or an artist. You need to be recognized with your royalties. So, you need to have your content watermarked, you need to have your creative rights reflected no matter what language that content is translated into.

Michael Mhm. That there’s some level of assurance and security tied into the process for creative license.

Margaret Yes, yeah, for creatives, so that the creatives have a vested interest in thinking and investing their time, putting the reader first. Because today, you know, there has been not enough effort and attention put to good quality content, and look where we are: Kim Kardashian, thank you very much! You know?

Michael Absolutely. And Margaret Ann, I think you have given us a very deep insight into the publishing industry, but also this vision of the future for the localization industry and what could be achieved in a place where there still appears to be a gap. What a great gift to our listeners.

Margaret Well, you’re very welcome!

**End of conversation**