

Extinction or evolution?

Changes in in-house translators' work in Finland in 1995–2018

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, outsourcing, streamlining and technologisation have induced profound changes in the content, organisation and location of translators' work. Nevertheless, due to the scarcity of longitudinal research, such changes must typically be pieced together from individual studies. The present paper adopts a novel approach: analysing data from a survey in which the respondents (n=223) could report on one current and two previous in-house positions, we provide an overview of the changes in in-house translators' work in Finland from 1995 to 2018. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, we consider 1) indications of outsourcing and restructuring, 2) changes in responsibilities and 3) changes in physical location and organisational position. The responses indicate some decrease in in-house jobs and a greater variety in responsibilities. There is also an increase in teleworking and indications of complex organisational structures, although translation teams remain common. On the whole, in-house translators appear an evolving rather than an endangered professional group.

Keywords: in-house translator, staff translator, language industry studies, workplace research, teleworking

1 Introduction

Change has been a constant in professional translation in recent decades. Since the 1980s and the 1990s, the globalisation of the production of goods and services has created an enormous demand for translation. To cater for the proliferation in job volumes, translation services have become an overwhelmingly outsourced and technology-facilitated industry, with a strong emphasis on streamlining the processes and lowering the cost of translation (e.g. Pym et al. 2012: 88; Dunne 2012; Moorkens 2017). The changes are likely to have had a profound impact on translators' work: its content, organisation and location. Nevertheless, such impacts must typically be pieced together from various individual studies as systematic longitudinal research remains scarce (cf. Risku, Rogl & Milošević 2020: 44).

To contribute to filling this gap, we conducted a survey among Finnish translators in 2018 in which the respondents could report on not only a current in-house position but also two previous positions. A total of 223 respondents reported on 171 current and 127

previous positions from 1995 to 2018, providing both quantitative and qualitative data on contract length, employer type, responsibilities, organisational position, physical location and reasons for terminations of employment.

In earlier articles (Ruokonen & Hjort 2019; Hjort & Ruokonen 2020), we analysed data on employment relationships that were ongoing at the time of the survey, and observed differences in the career paths and job descriptions of the respondents who had started their careers in different decades. In the present article, we look at both current and previous employment relationships to provide an overview of changes in in-house translators' work in Finland from 1995 to 2018. More specifically, we analyse the data for 1) indications of outsourcing and restructuring, 2) changes in responsibilities and 3) changes in physical location and organisational position. The findings are then interpreted to see to what extent they reflect the above-mentioned major global trends of the translation industry.

In what follows, we first review previous research on in-house translation (Section 2) and then describe our material and method (Section 3). The results are reported and discussed in Section 4, followed by concluding remarks and suggestions for further inquiry in Section 5.

2 In-house translators in previous research

Our study focuses on **in-house translators**, also referred to as **staff translators** or **salaried translators**. They are employed by businesses operating in the language industry or other fields, or by national and international institutions and organisations. In-house translators typically work on their employer's premises and in an organisational structure including a supervisor or project coordinator (Rodríguez-Castro 2015: 36).

Recent surveys point to in-house translators being a considerably rarer breed than freelancers. A 2012 summary of several surveys indicates that the proportion of in-house translators is around 20%, although it may vary by country and specialisation (Pym et al. 2012: 89). In Finland, in a recent survey of the members of The Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (SKTL), 24% of the respondents were in-house translators (Wivolin 2019).

In-house translators enjoy a steady flow of work, regular income and employee benefits, which can contribute to a sense of job security (Moorkens 2020a). On the other hand, in-house translators have less autonomy than freelancers to select the commissions and services they provide (Rodríguez-Castro 2015). While they typically also have less autonomy in terms of working hours and place of performance, many employers are offering increasing flexibility in this regard.

In-house translators' work has been studied in various contexts and based on different theoretical approaches, as illustrated by a recent overview of research on translators' work environments (Risku et al. 2019, 2020). Risku, Rogl and Milošević divide the theoretical approaches to translators' workplace research into cognitive and sociological (2019) or cognitive, sociological and ergonomic (2020) orientations, pointing out that they are increasingly converging. The cognitive orientation, or the study of translators' thought processes, has begun to incorporate social and material considerations (Risku et al. 2019: 6).

Similarly, the sociological orientation is becoming interested in individual experiences in addition to the social aspects of work practices, agents and environments. Ergonomics (described in more detail in section 2.2), in turn, offers a holistic view, examining translators and their tools, routines and environments from organisational, cognitive and physiological perspectives (Risku et al. 2020: 41–42). The present study is sociologically and ergonomically oriented, as we consider translators' perceptions of their responsibilities and physical and organisational places.

2.1 Trends in in-house translation and implications for jobs and responsibilities

While tracing the history of in-house translation is beyond this article, we draw attention to three major trends, which are often intertwined: outsourcing, streamlining and technologisation.

Outsourcing is the result of structural change and an increasing demand for translations and has been further facilitated by technological advances (e.g. Dunne 2012). Outsourcing accelerated in the 1990s (Pym et al. 2012: 88), and by 2000 some types of businesses, such as hardware companies in international markets, were mostly acquiring translations from external partners (Dunne 2012; Risku et al. 2020: 45).

For translators, the consequences of outsourcing have been mixed. On the one hand, outsourcing has been credited with the birth of the language industry and its subsequent massive growth (Dunne 2012). Outsourcing has also created new in-house tasks involving the management of outsourced translations. On the other hand, the trend has arguably been accompanied by an insufficient understanding of the nature of translation and of the conditions required for producing appropriate quality (ibid.) As a result, translations have been tagged as 'non-core' activities and are commonly seen as commodities sold by the word count. Particularly the global financial crisis of 2007 made translation services an ideologically and financially 'easy target' for reducing expenses in both the private and public sectors (Sosoni & Rogers 2013: 7).

A related trend permeating both businesses and institutions today is **streamlining** of processes and organisations, aimed at increasing output and efficiency while lowering costs. Pressures to offer services at lower prices and with a faster turnaround were among the main concerns and challenges of the linguist respondents of a recent CSA survey (2020: 60–61, 65). Even when streamlining does not lead to a translation function being outsourced, it tends to involve downsizing and rearranging the remaining staff's responsibilities and work processes. In short, any work today is

characterised by constant change and increasing demands: more should be achieved with less resources and in less time. Vacant positions are not necessarily filled, and fixed-term employment relationships have become common. Old tasks disappear or are incorporated into new and broader jobs. (Virtanen 2019: 99)

The third trend is **technologisation**, which for the present study has two main aspects. On the one hand, communication technologies and, recently, digital platforms, have paved the way for complex networks of multilingual projects, greatly facilitating outsourcing.

Translators in such networks need to adapt to new organisational structures, work environments and ways of communicating (Rodríguez-Castro 2015). Moreover, by embedding translation tools in digital platforms, companies can monitor their translators' processes and output for efficiency and quality to an unprecedented degree (Moorkens 2020b: 17–18), serving the drive for streamlining.

On the other hand, the advances of translation-specific technology affect translators' work processes and responsibilities, introducing new tasks such as translation memory management and machine translation post-editing (MTPE). According to the 2020 CSA survey covering more than 7,000 (freelance and in-house) translators from 178 countries, as many as 35% of the respondents provided MTPE services (CSA 2020; freelance and in-house translators not distinguished). Based on a survey by SKTL, this is still somewhat less common in Finland, where only 16% of respondents listed MTPE among their tasks (Wivolin 2019).

The combined consequences of outsourcing, streamlining and technologisation for in-house translators can be profound. For some, these trends spell loss of employment. For others, they involve a change of employer through a transfer of undertakings – and sometimes subsequent loss of employment, as such arrangements rarely involve post-transfer job security (Engblom 2013: 149–152). Finally, for some, they mean changes in responsibilities, as new tasks emerge, and translations are fully or partly directed elsewhere. Indeed, recent studies illustrate that in-house translators' tasks can be diverse, and translation may not necessarily constitute a major part of their work. In one study, Risku et al. (2013) observed project managers' work at a translation company in 2002 and 2007. During this period, the number of employed staff actually increased, but their tasks shifted from translation to translation management: the production and review of translations were outsourced rather than completed by in-house staff.

Similarly, in another example, translation had become an 'almost residual' part of in-house tasks (Kuznik & Verd 2010: 42). In a third example, an in-house translator was in practice a 'writer + translator + reviewer + interpreter + organiser of commercial events + commercial secretary' (Kuznik 2016: 227). In the above CSA survey, respondents reported providing an average of three other services in addition to translation (CSA 2020: 12–13). Most of these were other language services, with editing and proofreading (72% of respondents) topping the list. The survey does not specify whether in-house translators were more likely to offer non-language services than freelancers. Interestingly, an overwhelming 89% stated that they would prefer to focus on 'pure' translation (CSA 2020: 14).

2.2 In-house translators' physical location and organisational position

The trends outlined above – outsourcing, streamlining and technologisation – affect not only in-house translators' responsibilities but also their physical location and organisational position, which are often intertwined (see Hjort & Ruokonen 2019). To our knowledge, such changes have not been systematically investigated, but some relevant findings do emerge from the previous research reported below.

One possible framework informing the study of physical and organisational position is translation ergonomics (as examined by Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow et al. in particular), which comprises physical, cognitive and organisational aspects. While physical ergonomics mainly focuses on workstations, it also involves 'distractions from noise, light or people' (Ehrensberger-Dow et al. 2016: 3, 6) that can reveal something about physical location. Organisational ergonomics is in principle concerned with organisation structures, policies and processes (ibid.: 3). However, the studies by Ehrensberger-Dow et al. are not concerned with such broader organisational aspects but rather with individual translators' workflows (ibid.: 5).

As for **physical location**, Ehrensberger-Dow et al.'s 2014 international survey with 1,850 translator respondents shows that the majority of in-house translators worked outside their home at the time of the survey (Ehrensberger-Dow et al. 2016, 6–8).¹ There were differences based on employer type, however: while 17% of the commercial translators worked from home, only 8% of the institutional translators did (ibid.). Overall, more than 60% of the in-house respondents were disturbed by noise inside their office, and over a third by outside noise (ibid.). As noise was often due to colleagues moving around or chatting, many in-house translators apparently worked in close contact with (translator or non-translator) colleagues. (However, colleagues are not only a distraction but also a source of job satisfaction; see Virtanen 2019: 147–149.)

There are also indications of how in-house translators experience physical location. As early as 2006, in-house translation teams seemed 'inordinately prone to isolation within their companies and organisations' (Jemielity 2018: 536). A similar sense of peripherality emerges among some Danish in-house translators (n=176) studied by Dam and Zethsen (2012). When asked about their physical location, the EU translators among the respondents mostly reported working far from the centre of decision-making, a marked contrast to other Danish in-house translators' situation (Dam & Zethsen 2012: 226). This may explain why the EU translators' perceptions of their status were lower than the other respondents' in spite of their high salaries (ibid.: 221–222).

EU translators are also a good example of the intertwining of physical location and organisational position. Koskinen (2008) provides a detailed description of the organisational and physical location of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT). Koskinen depicts how both the physical space and organisational structure were arranged by language, with different translation units physically 'mark[ing] their territories' by flags or touristic posters (ibid.: 74) and organisationally being so independent as to develop separate translation cultures (ibid.: 69–70). In the bigger picture, the DGT translators worked in a building separate from other EU officials and formed a distinct organisational unit. Particularly the physical location was conducive to isolating the translators from the other officials (ibid.: 150–151).

Another example of the intertwining of physical and organisational aspects comes from Virtanen (2019), who analysed Finnish government English translators' views of

¹ Ehrensberger-Dow and Jääskeläinen (2019) compare the responses of Swiss and Finnish respondents to this survey. However, as only ca. 25% of the 95 Finnish respondents were in-house translators, the Finnish responses reflect the situation of freelancers and are not relevant for the present article.

translator status and job satisfaction by means of interviews (n=16) and survey data (n=28). At the time of her study, in 2014, the government translators of English were placed in different types of units within different ministries (Virtanen 2019: 24): some within administrative or support services, others within the units they translated for. The organisational position affected the translators' sense of belonging and perception of being appreciated. The translators in administrative units felt that 'it required extra effort to gain and maintain a high workplace status' (ibid.: 125). In contrast, those translators who worked within or adjacent to the units they translated for expressed a greater sense of inclusion (ibid.: 112), and their comments about coming across colleagues in corridors suggest that the proximity was both organisational and physical.

Previous research thus suggests that, on the one hand, most in-house translators work on their employers' premises, some in close proximity to other employees (Ehrensberger-Dow et al. 2016), while on the other hand, we also have examples of physical and/or organisational distance (Koskinen 2008; Dam & Zethsen 2012; Jemielity 2018; Virtanen 2019).

3 Material and method

Our data were gathered in an online survey in March 2018. The survey was aimed at any language and communications professional whose work involved translation to a major extent. As we were interested in both the translators' physical location and organisational position, we delimited the survey to employers with a minimum of five employees in order to exclude smaller businesses with little or no organisational hierarchy. The survey link was distributed via major translator associations (SKTL, Translation Professionals KAJ²), a government translators' mailing list and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn). Based on online searches, we also compiled a list of some 80 companies and institutions with in-house translators and approached those translators directly via email.

As we aimed to collect data on changes, the respondents could report on one current position or employment relationship and a maximum of two previous employment relationships. (Hereafter, employment relationships will be referred to as *contracts* for the sake of brevity.) There were 19 survey items per contract, concerning employer type, responsibilities, position in the organisational structure, physical location and teleworking. In the case of previous contracts, the respondents were also asked about the reason for the termination of the contract.

We received responses from a total of 223 respondents concerning a total of 353 contracts, of which 168 had ended and 185 were ongoing at the time of the survey. As we wanted to ensure that both current in-house translators and respondents who had previously held such positions would be able to fill in the questionnaire, none of the items could be set as obligatory. This means that the number of responses in some items is lower than the total number of contracts.

² Translation Professionals KAJ has since merged with the Finnish Sign Language Interpreters' Association, becoming *Kieliasiantuntijat ry.* (Language Professionals).

The majority of the respondents reported their job title as *translator* (*kääntäjä*, *kielenkääntäjä*), while 30% held other titles such as *language specialist*, *translation service coordinator*, *secretary*, *journalist* and even *storyteller*. The median age of the respondents was 44 and most of them had completed a master's degree, graduating at the age of 25 or older, so by 2018 they had typically been employable for less than 20 years. In an earlier article (Ruokonen & Hjort 2019³), we analysed the 185 ongoing contracts; in the present article, we focus on the 298 contracts that started in the years 1995–2018. 1995 was selected as the cut-off point as the majority of the data came from that and the subsequent years. As illustrated by Table 1 below, this provides us with fairly even numbers of both ended and ongoing contracts, as well as with contracts from different periods of time.

Table 1: Contracts by start year

Start year	Contract ended	Contract ongoing	
1995–1999	37	16	53
2000–2004	29	20	49
2005–2009	28	28	56
2010–2014	21	39	60
2015–2018	12	68	80
	127	171	298

The data were further divided into two groups based on start year: contracts started in 1995–2008 (n=149) and contracts started in 2010–2018 (n=141). The division is based on 2009 being the median in the data, i.e. the middle point before and after which there is an equal number of started contracts. The division should also illustrate possible differences before and after the world economic crisis of 2007.

As some contracts started as early as in 1995, some respondents had to recall events that dated back by more than twenty years. Memories are always subjective and affected by subsequent events and the present in which they are reconstructed (Brownlie 2016: 13). On the other hand, memories may also capture the respondents' deepest, most significant impressions (ibid.: 6) – in this particular case, how the respondents perceived major aspects and changes in their work. In our view, such memories are worthy of study.

The changes in in-house translators' work addressed in this article concern 1) outsourcing and organisational restructuring; 2) the respondents' responsibilities; and 3) the respondents' physical location and organisational position. Our analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches as follows:

³ Also see this article for more detailed information on the respondents.

Indications of outsourcing and organisational restructuring are analysed quantitatively by means of a) contracts started/ended each year, b) changes in employer types, and c) whether the ending of the contract involved organisational restructuring. The last of these aspects is also considered qualitatively by means of a thematic analysis of the respondents' open comments. **Changes in responsibilities** are approached by perceived changes in the proportions of different types of tasks (translation, other multilingual communications tasks, other tasks), illustrated by comments from open responses. **Changes in physical location and organisational position** are analysed mainly quantitatively, in terms of the existence of translation teams, physical location vis-à-vis organisational position and frequency of teleworking (working remotely from home or off-site).

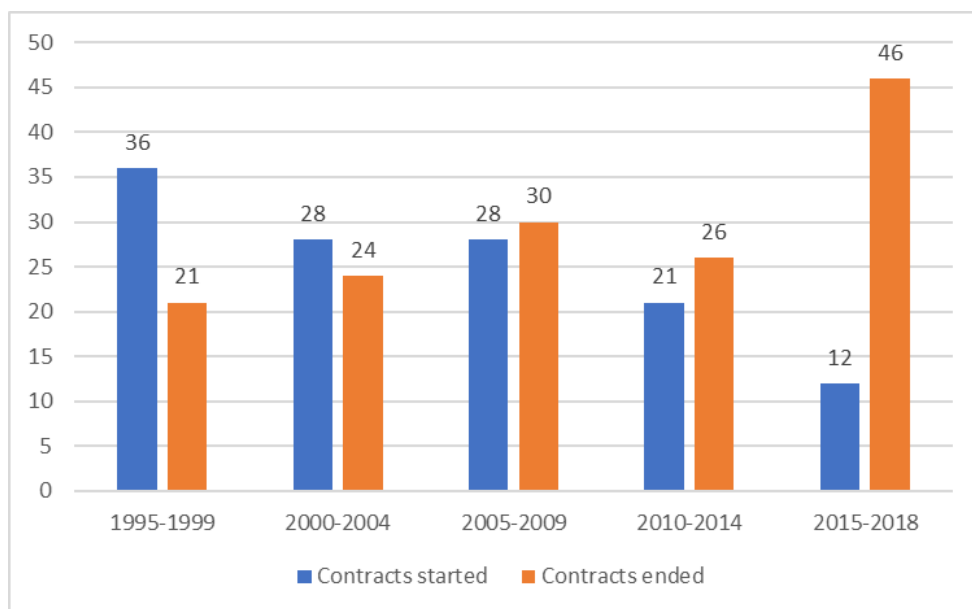
4 Results

4.1 The big picture: indications of outsourcing and other types of restructuring

As noted in Section 2.1, outsourcing has become increasingly common since the 1990s. This also shows in our data.

Firstly, if we consider the number of contracts started and ended each year, we can see that until 2005, the number of new contracts within each period exceeds that of contracts ended, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Contracts started/ended per year (n)



In the period 2005–2009, the figures are almost even, and after that there are more contracts ended than new contracts. This is not explained by respondent age in terms of retirement, and a voluntary migration from in-house jobs to freelancing does not seem to play a major role here, as the analysis below shows.

The data thus suggest a similar pattern in the Finnish translation industry to elsewhere: that in-house translation jobs have become less common. Contracts also seem to have become shorter: for contracts started in 1995–1999, the median length was 5.5 years, but for the period 2010–2014, this had dropped to 3.

The data also show some changes in employer types, as highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Employer types before and after 2009

Employer	1995–2008 (n)	2010–2018 (n)
Business		
- Translation (5 to 50 employees)	18	9
- Translation (50+ employees)	12	11
- Other business (50 to 250 employees)	17	22
- Other business (250+ employees)	34	38
Government (central)	35	29
Government (local)	7	17
Organisation (Finnish)	9	11
Organisation (internat.)	11	3
Co-operative	3	1
N/A	3	0
Total	149	141

As we can see, in the 2010s the number of small and medium-sized translation businesses as employers drops by half. This is in line with contemporary news of mergers and acquisitions,⁴ but also reflects an increasing focus on project management positions vis-à-vis translation positions, as indicated by the next section. In contrast, the 2010s also show an increase in the number of in-house positions within local government, and that 15 of

⁴ In 1986, the Association of Finnish Translation Companies had 25 members, and the number increased in the 1990s (Pohjola 2008). National and international mergers and acquisitions became common after 2005 (Rotko 2007; Mykkänen 2009). In August 2020, the Association of Finnish Language Service Providers had 19 member companies (<http://kielipalveluyritykset.fi/jasenet/>).

these 17 translators have Swedish as a working language. To our knowledge, this is due to retirement rather than an increased demand for Swedish translators. Finally, the pre-2010s show a large number of new in-house translation contracts at international organisations, more specifically in 1995 and 1996 due to Finland becoming a member in the European Union.

We also asked the respondents whether the ending of their former contracts involved **corporate or organisational restructuring** (such as the outsourcing or discontinuation of their unit or position). Here, we consider contracts that *ended*⁵ in 1995–2008, in our cut-off year of 2009 and in 2010–2018. For the first time period, there were 14 affirmative responses. In contrast, seven contracts ended due to organisational restructuring in 2009 alone, and in 2010–2018, as many as 32 contracts involved reorganisation. Further details were provided in 38 open comments, which allowed us to parse more qualitative information about the circumstances in question.

Of the 2010–2018 respondents, ten specified that reorganisation did not involve dismissal but rather a translator being relocated to a new unit within the same company or organisation under a new contract. There was one similar report in the 2009 group and two in the 1995–2008 group. All of these cases involved government translators, and most of them were translators who in 2015 were transferred from individual ministries to a single central unit (see Virtanen 2019: 29–30). Some were happy with this change as it enhanced a sense of belonging among the translators. Others felt it pushed translators into an isolated support function (see Ruokonen & Hjort 2019: 102–103).

Furthermore, there were 14 comments clearly suggesting a lay-off for downsizing or production-related reasons. All of them concerned contracts that ended in or after 2009 (2 and 12, respectively). Out of these, five involved a language service provider. One former employee paints a rather alarming picture of the end of their contract (in the 2010s):

- (1) “The LSP fired most of its in-house translators and replaced them with freelancers (or tried to get us former in-house translators to work for them as freelancers). Under very unfavourable terms.” (Respondent #54).

Five of these comments stated that the reorganisation involved outsourcing an entire translation function to an LSP, all after 2009. A further six respondents (out of whom 4 in or after 2009) had been affected by outsourcing, but rather than being laid off, they had changed employers under a transfer of undertakings. To our knowledge (and suggested by the data), several of these positions were terminated within 1–3 years of the transfer. In another case, employment continued for seven more years but involved a gradual change in duties and finally resulted in termination:

- (2) I was a translator at [an industrial company]. The documentation unit was outsourced to [a support services provider]. Towards the end, there was less and less translation and I had to take on other duties. (Respondent #88)

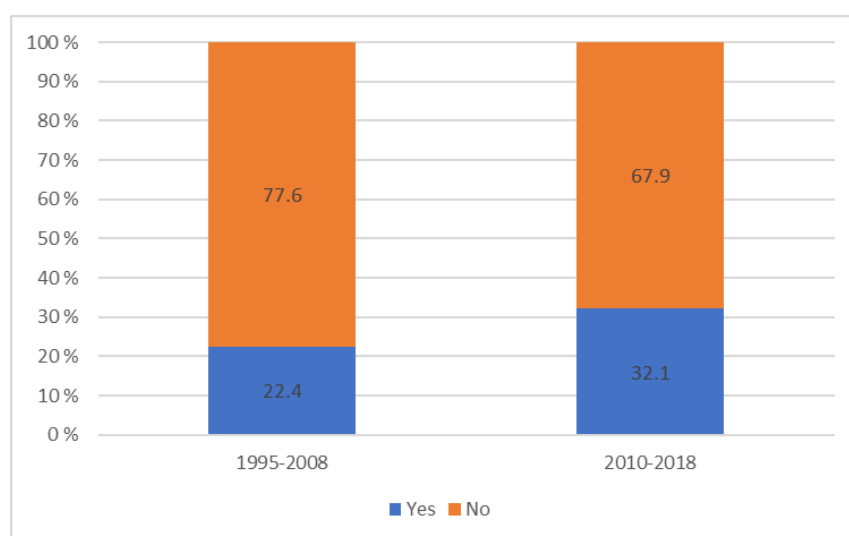
⁵ As the focus here is on ended contracts, contracts that started before 1995 are included if they ended in 1995 or after. The total number of contracts in our study is 353, of which 52 started before 1995.

Reorganisation measures were thus a common, but not the most typical, reason for the end of a translator's contract. The trends induced by the financial crisis are reflected in the open comments. The analysis points not only to a migration of in-house translators from business employers to LSPs but also from large LSPs to freelancing or other employers. This indicates that not even the businesses for whom translation is a core competence provided secure employment for in-house practitioners.

4.2 Changes in translators' responsibilities

For each contract (ended or ongoing), we asked the respondents to estimate the proportions of translation, other multilingual communication tasks and other tasks in each role. Finally, we asked them to consider whether there had been changes in these proportions during each contract. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of the responses regarding changes, distinguishing contracts that started **and** ended between 1995 and 2008 from contracts started in the 2010s. This division highlights the differences between the two periods.

Figure 2: Changes in responsibilities (%)



Changes in the proportions of responsibilities were reported more frequently in the 2010s. This could partly be explained by the respondents having fresher recollections of more recent changes. However, the qualitative analysis supports the interpretation that the changes reflect global developments. Of the open comments to this item, in 16 the tenor was 'less translation, more project management', and in 35 comments an increase in other multilingual tasks:

- (3) In the early 2000s, I translated 80% of the time and my title was Coordinator, now I translate 20% of the time and my title is Translator. (#70, contract started in 2000, ongoing)

- (4) In the beginning, I didn't do project management or revise other translators' texts, I just translated. (#98, contract started in 1996, ongoing)
- (5) Planning is increasing, for example tracking translation volumes, systematising the translation process, etc. (#51, contract started in 2017, ongoing)

In contrast, only five respondents commented that the proportion of translation had remained the same or increased. There were also cases where producing original content had become more common (n=5) or where the respondents' responsibilities had changed due to promotion to a supervisory position (n=4).

A lot of the changes described thus echo tendencies described in previous research (e.g. Kuznik & Verd 2010; Risku et al. 2013; Virtanen 2019). Of course, changes may be due to other factors: in some cases, respondents may have begun revising and managing translations due to experience and career progression. In other cases, more revision may indicate an increase in outsourcing (e.g., due to downsizing of in-house resources or new demand) and the translator's role as a gatekeeper. Indications of technologisation are also present, as several respondents mentioned an increase in CAT management tasks.

4.3 Changes in physical location and organisational position

From the perspective of organisational structure, translation teams persist. When asked whether there was a translation unit or team in the respondent's organisation, most respondents answered in the affirmative (Table 3).

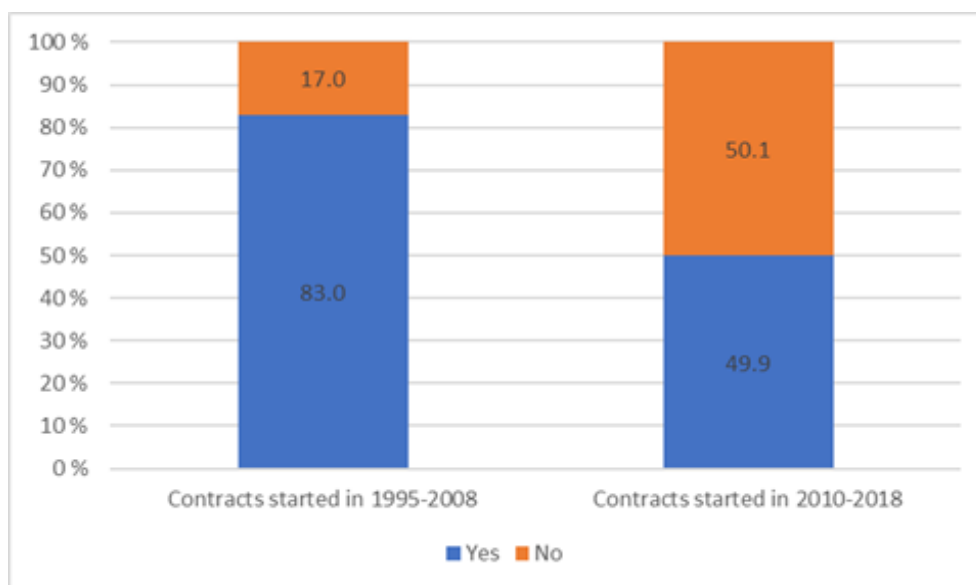
Table 3: Is/Was there a translation team or unit in the employer's organisational structure?

	Contracts started and ended 1995–2008 (n)	Contracts started 2010–2018 (n)
Yes	34	101
No	14	38
Total	48	139

In both periods, ca. 70% of the respondents recall there being a translation team. The proportion remains the same if we consider all contracts started in 1995–2008 (ended or ongoing).

In contrast, what seems to have changed is the location of the translation team. When asked whether the physical location of the translation team was or is the same as that of the organisational unit to which the translation team belongs, we received the following responses:

Figure 3: Is/Was the physical location of the translation team the same as that of its organisational unit? (%)



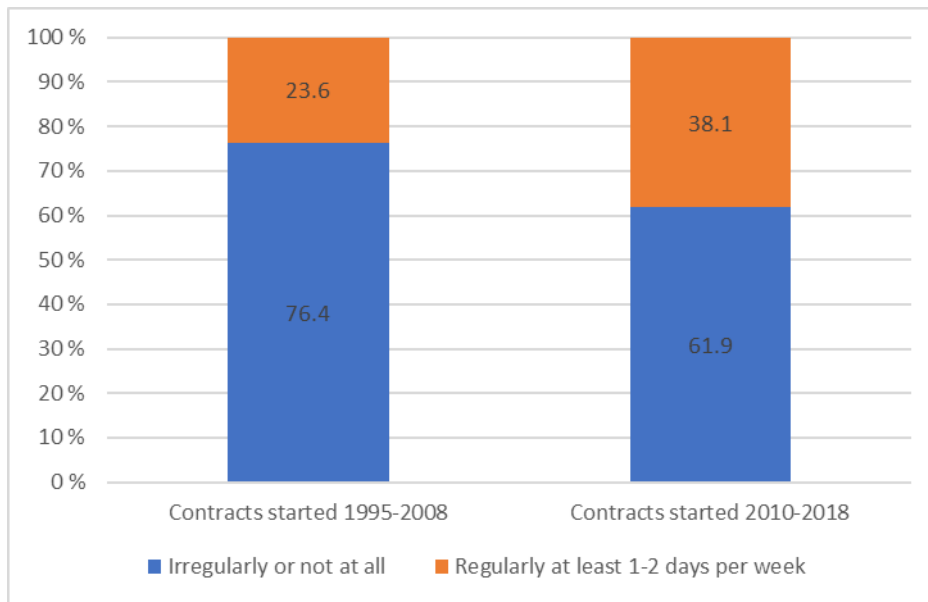
As we can see, before 2009, translation teams were physically placed close to their organisational entities. In contrast, in the 2010s half of the translation teams in the respondents' organisations are physically located outside their organisational unit.

The open comments offer several explanations for this. In some cases, translators were located close to their internal 'clients'. However, comments indicative of complex organisations with offices in several locations were more common in the 2010s. This ties in with the mergers and acquisitions in the Finnish translation industry, and the effects of outsourcing and technologisation (Section 2.1 above).

An even more dramatic change seems to have occurred in teleworking. When the respondents were asked how frequently they teleworked, a clear difference emerged between contracts started in 1995–2008 and in the 2010s (see Figure 4 on the next page). Concerning contracts started in 1995–2008, 76.4% of the respondents reported teleworking only irregularly or not at all, while in the 2010s this proportion had decreased to 61.9%. Moreover, those 48 respondents whose contracts started and ended by 2008 all reported teleworking only irregularly or not at all. There is thus a clear increase in frequency. Out of those 12 respondents who reported that their work consisted solely of teleworking, however, half had begun their contracts before 2010 and half in the 2010s.

There are a number of potential explanations for this, and several can arguably be at play at once: while technological advancement has enabled increasingly flexible and secure teleworking practices, working cultures have become more favourable toward working from home. Combined with the growing popularity of multi-purpose offices and 'hot-desking', these practices have also presented employers with cost-cutting opportunities. This appears to be a key reason behind the teleworking of at least one respondent, a former LSP employee, who after years of working at the office was transferred to full-time teleworking for the last years of their contract.

Figure 4: Frequency of teleworking (%)



When a reason for full-time or near full-time teleworking was given, it was typically related to physical location: for example, two respondents quoted air quality issues at the workplace, while two others mentioned being located in another town or country than their unit. Two respondents – who rarely or never teleworked – discussed such arrangements critically in view of preferred proximity to clients/colleagues (see also Ruokonen & Hjort 2019):

- (6) It's also beneficial that translators work in the same place as everybody else. I wouldn't want to telework or be stationed elsewhere. It's easy to contact the author of the source text when you can just knock on their door. (#79)

The Covid-19 pandemic, which continues to have a devastating effect across the globe at the time of the completion of this paper, has greatly affected working life, fast-tracking the adoption of teleworking at workplaces, and the trend is expected to continue post-Covid (ILO 2020). As translation is easily performed remotely, this is also likely to continue to impact on the work of in-house translators.

5 Conclusion

In the present article, we have explored changes in the content, organisation and location of professional translators' work from 1995 to 2018 by using the year 2009 as the pivoting point. Based on the results, changes in Finland are in line with those of the industry at large. The respondent reports indicate some decrease in the number of in-house translators, at least partly due to downsizing and outsourcing. Changes in responsibilities also mainly follow a trend familiar from previous research: in-house translators now spend more time on other tasks than translation, such as managing translations, clients and technology or producing multilingual content.

Organisationally, translation teams remain a typical unit but are increasingly physically located apart from hierarchically higher organisational units, often due to complex, multi-location structures. This could reflect the notion of translation as a secondary activity that is easy to relegate to a peripheral location (e.g. Koskinen 2008, Dam & Zethsen 2012). On the other hand, increased teleworking could suggest either translators' peripherality or autonomy, depending whose initiative such arrangements stemmed from. Further investigation of translators' experiences of their physical location would therefore be relevant. The perception of translation as a peripheral activity has likely also contributed to outsourcing. However, not even being an expert in the core services of a business fully protects in-house translators, as the LSPs in our data also commonly laid off their employees.

Thus far, we have examined our data comparatively, juxtaposing time periods. A promising next step would be to look at individual respondents' career trajectories based on, for example, year of graduation, type of employer and working languages. This could be complemented by interviews or on-site data collection with selected representatives of the emerging sub-groups in the data.

Based on our analysis thus far, we conclude that in-house translators as a species are diminishing and evolving – but not endangered.

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