

# Tek Educational: Overview of translation models employed in the industry



## *Translation Models*

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Buyers of translation services seem to be rethinking their strategy and seem to want more transparency and control over budgets and deliveries and, most importantly, over the linguistic data such as translation memories and terminology.

Various different translation models are being employed, depending on the client base, the geographical location of the company, the flow and profile of a specific project or program, the technology available and the maturity of the LSP (language service provider).

This paper brings together the various types of model plus the advantages as well as disadvantages of using one model or the other. We shall discuss here the following five models:

1. Full outsourcing of all translations and language related tasks to an In-country partner or SLV (single language vendor), traditionally known as TEP (translation, editing and proofreading).
2. Outsourcing of translation tasks to freelance translators with review or edit being carried out by a separate translator to assure integrity of translation. Using online translation technology to facilitate this process can deliver higher reuse and lower costs - more about this later.
3. In-house translation team employed for a specific language or group of languages and for a project or specific client program.
4. In-country TU (translation unit) where an employee of the company located within the Locale pulls together a group of freelance translators to work on a specific programme on either a full time or 'as needed' basis.
5. In-house post editing team where MT (machine translation) is being employed to complete a 'raw' translations pass.

## **Full outsourcing of all translations and language related tasks to an In-country partner or SLV (single language vendor)**

This model is probably the most common and employed by most of the larger LSP's. The pros and cons of this model are:

## *Benefits*

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This model is highly scalable as the SLV/translation partner assumes the risk of scaling up or down depending on the demand. The aggregate demand from all its clients ensures that it can be cost effective and allows for the smoothing out of the spikes and troughs in the demand. The LSP can therefore minimize its internal costs as less administration/Project Management and language management time is needed to execute in this environment than with a host of freelance translators. Finding and managing the individual translators required is the role of the In-Country SLV and this eliminates a big overhead of admin and management tasks that otherwise the LSP would have to own.

## *Downsides*

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The drawback of this model is the fact that the SLV margin will eat into the LSP translation margin and therefore this can be seen as a costly model particularly when so many clients and so much of the supply chain is under price and competitive pressures in the current environment. Also, this model requires a different mindset and a different approach from the LSP in assessing and assuring the quality, however the age old concern of 'putting all eggs in one basket' remains. Furthermore, there exists also the risk of the SLV going directly to the client and cutting out the 'middle-man/value adder', but a robust SLA (service level agreement) will generally take care of this.

## **Outsourcing of translation tasks to freelance translators with review or edit being carried out by a separate translator to assure integrity of translation**

This model is probably the second most widely used and employed particularly by smaller and mid-sized LSP's depending on what they consider their core competency to be. On-line translation technology (TMS tool) is being deployed more to enable this model and provides better management, better quality through real time terminology deployment and better re-use thus lowering costs of translation.

## *Benefits*

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This model will work well wherever repetitive and frequent volumes of translations exist and where a high level of content leverage exists. Where TMS technology is not employed then no more than one to three translators engaged on one project should be utilized to maintain a level of consistency throughout the target content. This can be especially cost effective for smaller amounts of content. The translation quality can be assured once the translator builds up knowledge of the project and works on future versions and the quality of terminology and integrity of the TM (translation memory) continues to improve.

## *Downsides*

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1. Having a second translator - a reviewer - rework the quality is not the optimum process as the original translator generally does not learn from this serial process and does not really own the final quality of the product.
2. Retaining the individual translators is a challenge unless continuous, ongoing work.
3. It requires heavy admin by Vendor Management (VM) part to keep adding translators to the database.
4. Not easy to co-ordinate for a PM and generally requires heavy PM admin time where larger amounts of content are being translated in a constricted timeframe.

## **In-house translation team employed for a specific language or group of languages and for a project or specific client program**

This model was widely used when the translation industry started to grow back in the 80's. It was seen as a differentiator to be able to tell your clients that one's translators were all in-house and thereby better qualified and more committed to quality and available for quick turn-around of projects. Leveraging product knowledge over future releases was also seen as a big differentiator.

It is currently not widely used except in certain cases where the translator's availability for the specific language is a challenge and/or where the workflow for a particular program is conducive to this.

## *Benefits*

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This model can be cost effective if the team is in a low cost geographical area and if the availability of good translators is a challenge. If the margin on the language is tight, this model can provide benefits. It can also be beneficial, if there are specific programs that are continuous and if the team is utilized more than 80% continuously. Where there is opportunity to gain from shared TM's (translation memories) and from shared product knowledge, query resolution and tight team dynamics. On eventually leaving the company (which inevitably happens) translators are well trained and can perform as freelancers thereafter quite effectively.

Tek employs this model successfully for French translation in its Madrid office where there is a ready-made supply of French translators willing and eager to move to and work in a lower cost and potentially more flexible work environment. Tek already has a large number of French natives employed; as Project Managers, Engineers and Development resources so there is a ready-made French culture in existence which makes it easier for new French employees to culturally assimilate.

## *Downsides*

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The downsides to this models are that it adds to fixed costs and the team need to be managed, incentivized, and productivities driven with little down time. If productivity falls, then the benefits of lower word rates are eliminated.

There is a risk of high turn-over as translators can be mobile and once they acquire experience they prefer to work as freelancers with the more flexible working hours that this brings. Also, this model might not be scalable so if working on a shared major program, then issues of consistency need to be catered for. Furthermore, it might be difficult to attract good translators so product quality may be an issue. Once in a rework or quality improvement spiral then gains on word rates disappear. So this model is effective if well managed, well thought through and if the LSP is well located.

## **In-country translation unit (TU) where an employee of the company pulls together a group of freelance translators to work on a specific programme on either a full time or as needed basis**

This model is relatively new and innovative. It is designed to remove the fixed costs of an in-house model and still retain the trained, 'known good/same' translator for future product iterations. It is also cost effective if the volumes are strong and the team can be continuously utilized. The lead person is employed full time by the company and is located in the locale thus ensuring a level of stability.

### *Benefits*

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1. Cost effective and removes the challenge of having to populate a database with more and more translators just to have enough for spikes in demand.
2. As the lead person is based in-country they have a better feel for pricing, cost and also availability of good translators.
3. It can eliminate the quality checking normally done in house.
4. This team can be provided with proprietary tools like LQC which are then run at source.
5. The team will only work on the company's projects so not subject to availability problems as might be the case with freelancers and a better possibility of building detailed product knowledge.

### *Downsides*

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This requires a continuous flow program to make it effective. Also it presents a challenge to retain the good translators as by nature they like to work for different clients and on different programs.

Another challenge might be to find a good In-Country lead who will be loyal and stable. Predicting volumes and ensuring the team has advance info on spikes & troughs is key to this model but there is also a risk of losing the team to a competitor if correct structures are not in place. As the lead is remote from the execution centre it can be a challenge to retain, keep motivated etc.

### *Conclusion*

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All of the models discussed can be relevant and add value in certain cases and situations. What is certain is that the outsourcing of non core activities like translations for both client and LSP alike will continue apace as the dominant model in our industry. Even with the evolution of MT

and the need for dynamic quality assurance/post editing etc the dynamics of the owner managed service provider, being so well tried and tested will drive the model forward. In our world of shrinking distances, with more and more velocity in transactions and more applications of technology to everything we do the need for physically locating resource anywhere will continue to diminish and the virtual availability when needed wherever located will be prime.

However the companies that will grow and prosper will be those who can deploy the optimum model in any given situation whether that be in-house teams or fully outsourced teams. Clients will not be too concerned about how which of those models get deployed because their prime concern are not about this but about the same issues which have always been there:

1. Time to market and capability/availability of their 'core execution team'
2. Quality to meet the end client requirements
3. Cost

One other dimension that has always been key to the client/vendor relationship is trust. Can our client be confident that we as their prime supplier are continuously innovating with our supply chain and processes and with whatever models we use to continuously take out costs and shorten times for the benefit of our client without our client having to find ways to drive this. When this trust is fully manifested then the industry is ready for its next paradigm shift - BPO - business process outsourcing.

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## About Tek Translation International

Tek is a provider of globalization services to the world's leading enterprises. Delivering services and solutions through its unique OneWorld Platform, Tek enables enterprises to drive globalization strategies, processes, and operations, leveraging maximum benefit from their multilingual assets and localization technology investments. Tek is committed to achieving value for the marketplace by the best use of innovation, process, and technology.

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