

SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms

August 2011

Preamble

Bible Translation is an integral part of the worldwide Church's participation in God's mission.

Our desire is for Scripture in the language that people understand best.

Scriptures need to be accurate, clear and natural and in a form that is appropriate in the language community.

The host community plays a key role in translation decisions, including the translation of key terms.

While no translation can completely communicate the whole meaning of the original text, the translation must be as accurate as possible, and sufficiently accurate to be accepted by the community as authoritative.

We affirm the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and require that it be preserved in all translations. Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term "Son of God" in all its richness, including his filial relationship with the Father, while avoiding any possible implication of sexual activity by God.

Given the richness of meaning in the Scriptures and the diversity of audiences, SIL supports various styles of translation. Translations should be evaluated in light of their intended audience and context.

Definition: Paratext—supportive or explanatory material included along with the translated text in order to aid in understanding. For example: footnotes, side-notes, introductions, glossaries, section headings and illustrations.

What are the principles for choosing between different renderings in translation of divine familial terms?

Comprehension in the target language determines the choice between renderings, and the rendering used must be in conformity with scholarly, exegetical consensus within Christian orthodoxy.

Avoid theological bias, but have sufficient depth and integrity to allow for theological reflection.

The form or forms used should make it possible to build up the full range of meaning of this term in the source text by observing their use in the various contexts in Scripture.

The proposed terms should be carefully researched, tested extensively and evaluated over time as the translation product goes into use.

There should be a guided process, by the following steps, for working through the rendering options:

1. Consider the literal rendering for the text and add necessary paratext, then test (text+paratext) in the local community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.
2. Consider clearly familial, but non-literal options for the text (e.g. “God’s one-and-only” [Son implied]) and find several options. For each of these add the necessary paratext, test with community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.
3. Review all options from steps 1&2 and then choose the one which is most effective in communicating meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product.
4. If no possible option has been identified through this process, non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form.

Throughout the process there should be consultation with other local partners, and the translation consultant needs particular sensitivity not to impose his or her own preferences.

What are best practices for making exegetical decisions?

Exegetical decisions should be made by translation teams in dialogue with their communities, partner organizations, and respected ecclesial authorities, on the basis of thorough Biblical-theological understanding of Scripture, which includes use of original texts, versions, credible commentaries, and respected Biblical scholarship, both local and global.

Translation consultants play an important role in supporting the translation process and are expected to operate according to best practices. SIL will hold its consultants accountable for operating in such a manner.

What are the best practices for establishing concordance with regards to ‘Son of God’ and familial terminology?

If necessary the introduction may explain terminology used for ‘Son of God’ and related familial terminology or direct the reader to the place where such explanations may be found.

Recognizable concordance (i.e., similarity of rendering in all passages) for the term ‘Son of God’ and related familial language should normally be maintained in the text but should not be insisted upon at the expense of comprehension.

Principles for Paratextual Information

Assumptions:

A translation of Scripture usually includes a text and paratext. The paratext consists of essential conceptual and background information needed by the readers to understand the translated text. It is produced by the translators with the expectation that the text will not be published without it. Paratextual information may be provided in a variety of ways including glossaries, footnotes, side-notes, mini-articles, section headings, introductions, cross-references, illustrations, and maps. In audio and visual scriptures, necessary paratextual information would be delivered in segment introductions.

Best practices for the paratext

The primary purpose of the paratext is to help the reader to infer the intended meaning from the text. It also presents more literal translations of phrases used in the text.

The text and paratext should be crafted and tested together to achieve maximum understanding of the biblical meaning.

When a key term is translated in a literal form in the text, the role of the paratext is to clarify its biblical meaning. When a key term is translated less literally in the text, the role of the paratext is to present a literal form of the key term as well as clarify its meaning.

The paratext may also present common understandings for the reader's consideration, but not teach them as doctrines and practices.

Principles for different translations for different audiences and purposes

Where there are two (or more) socio-cultural communities within the same language group, we recognize that multiple translations may be needed.

The decision should be made on the basis of the widest degree of agreement possible among the stakeholders, ensuring that there is a significant voice from the language community.

We recognize the concern that multiple translations following different policies may cause confusion among local sub-communities. Therefore, through an appropriate forum, concerned groups should identify and agree on a strategy for adequate Scripture access for all parties concerned.

Additional considerations

For the sake of clarity, transparency and good relationships-- any translation that SIL supports needs to be clearly identified as to its nature (literal, transitional, audience specific, etc.).

When working in complex situations, it is especially important to give careful consideration to many significant parameters when a project is initiated, including project *skopos* (i.e. intended purpose of the translation), organizational relationships and power structures.