



FORUM OF BIBLE
AGENCIES
INTERNATIONAL

Board Resolutions/Standards

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Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation

The following statement on “Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation” is subscribed to by all member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International. While the Forum agencies recognize that, depending upon the particular translation situation, these principles and procedures are often applied in different ways, this statement serves as the common set of principles and procedures under which member agencies carry out their translation activities.

As member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International, we affirm the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures and commit ourselves to the following goals.

Concerning translation principles, we endeavor insofar as possible:

1. To translate the Scriptures accurately, without loss, change, distortion or embellishment of the meaning of the original text. Accuracy in Bible translation is the faithful communication, as exactly as possible, of that meaning, determined according to sound principles of exegesis.
2. To communicate not only the informational content, but also the feelings and attitudes of the original text. The flavor and impact of the original should be re-expressed in forms that are consistent with normal usage in the receptor language.
3. To preserve the variety of the original. The literary forms employed in the original text, such as poetry, prophecy, narrative and exhortation, should be represented by corresponding forms with the similar communicative functions in the receptor language. The impact, interest, and mnemonic value of the original should be retained to the greatest extent possible.
4. To represent faithfully the original historical and cultural context. Historical facts and events should be expressed without distortion. Due to differences of situation and culture, in some passages the receptor audience may need access to additional background information in order to adequately understand the message that the original author was seeking to communicate to the original audience.
5. To make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation.

6. To recognize that it is often necessary to restructure the form of a text in order to achieve accuracy and maximal comprehension. Since grammatical categories and syntactic structures often do not correspond between different languages, it is often impossible or misleading to maintain the same form as the source text. Changes of form will also often be necessary when translating figurative language. A translation will employ as many or as few terms as are required to communicate the original meaning as accurately as possible.
7. To use the original language Scripture texts as the basis for translation, recognizing that these are always the primary authority. However, reliable Bible translations in other languages may be used as intermediary source texts.

Concerning translation procedures:

8. To determine, after careful linguistic and sociolinguistic research, the specific target audience for the translation and the kind of translation appropriate to that audience. It is recognized that different kinds of translation into a given language may be valid, depending on the local situation, including, for example, both more formal translations and common language translations.
9. To recognize that the transfer into the receptor language should be done by trained and competent translators who are translating into their mother tongue. Where this is not possible, mother-tongue speakers should be involved to the greatest extent possible in the translation process.
10. To give high priority to training mother-tongue speakers of the receptor language in translation principles and practice and to providing appropriate professional support.
11. To test the translation as extensively as possible in the receptor community to ensure that it communicates accurately, clearly and naturally, keeping in mind the sensitivities and experience of the receptor audience.
12. To assess the translation in light of feedback received from a qualified consultant review or equivalent process in order to enhance the quality and appropriateness of the final product.
13. To choose the media for the translation that are most appropriate for the specific target audience, whether audio, visual, electronic, print, or a combination of these. This may involve making adjustments of form that are appropriate to the medium and to the cultural setting, while ensuring that the translated message remains faithful to the original message.
14. To encourage the periodic review of translations to ascertain when revision or a new translation is needed.

Concerning partnership and cooperation:

15. To organize translation projects in a way that promotes and facilitates the active participation of the Christian and wider community, commensurate with local circumstances. Where there are existing churches, we will encourage these churches to be involved in the translation and to carry as much responsibility for the translation project as is feasible.

16. To partner and cooperate with others who are committed to the same goals.

Concerning Sign Language Bible Translation Standards and Best Practices:

17. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: The on screen signer must be Deaf
18. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: Signer and translation style must be approved by the community.

This confirms that the community will watch the signer and engage with the translation style, thus preventing the output of a product the community will not use.

19. Minimum Requirement: The signer is someone who signs naturally.
Best practice: The signer is a native “first language signer”. To sign naturally is a minimum requirement for a sign language translation and we recognize that first language signers tend to be the most fluent of signers. Being Deaf does not always imply that the person comes from a sign language background and therefore they would not be a native signer.

This ensures that the viewer will understand the content.

20. Minimum Requirement: The translation team must have at least 2 individuals on the team, and at least 50% of the team must always be Deaf.

Best Practice: The team should have at least 3 individuals and at least 66% of the team must be Deaf. New translation teams may be small at first. However, the majority of the team should always be Deaf.

This ensures ongoing community involvement in the translation project and protects the integrity of the project in the eyes of the Deaf community. Hearing people and CODA's (Children of Deaf Adults) can be a part of the translation team but never the one who signs on camera.

21. Minimum Requirement: A certified translation consultant must check and approve the translation and check it according to their organization's standards.

Best Practice: A certified translation consultant must check the translation and check the entire translated text, not just spot check. The consultant should be fluent in a major sign language. Translation consultants are responsible for checking the accuracy part of the translation. Depending on the skill of the consultant, they may also offer video or linguistic suggestions as well.

This requirement ensures the accuracy of the translation and its faithfulness to the original text. Having fluency in a signed language ensures the consultants understand the nature of the projects they are dealing with.

22. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: The translation consultant must be affiliated with one of FOBAI's member agencies or be affirmed by the Deaf Development Group.

This is to make sure the translation consultant has met the minimum standards to be a consultant.

23. Minimum Requirement: The translation must go through a community check process.

Best Practice: The community check process must use a format that makes sure at least 3 people are present during the check. This check should include Deaf community members who are Christian and non-Christian. The whole translation should go through this process.

The community check helps the translators verify that the translation is (C)lear, (A)ccurate (N)atural, and (A)cceptable to the community. This process should be one that verifies C,A,N,A for the translation.

24. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: Sign Language translation projects that use a written form of a signed language should follow the minimum requirements and best practices for written translation.

The Deaf Development Group notes that, presently, the vast majority of sign language translations are using video. There are only a few translations that are publishing the text using a written form of a signed language, but none of them are associated with a FOBAI member agency. The Deaf Development Group takes no position on the value of a translation using a written form of a signed language. The decision how to package the translation is one for the local community to decide.

25. Minimum Requirement: All photos, maps, and other visuals included in the translation material must be checked by a translation consultant.

Best Practice: All photos, maps, and other visuals included in the translation material must be checked by a translation consultant.

This is to prevent communicating a conflicting or inaccurate message to the viewers.

26. Minimum Requirement: All translations must use proper methods of Biblical exegesis so that the resulting signed translation accurately reflects the meaning of the original text.

Best Practice: All translations must use proper methods of Biblical exegesis so that the resulting signed translation accurately reflects the meaning of the original text, and the team must include someone who can explain the biblical text (whether a facilitator, interpreter, or exegetical advisor). This person can be either hearing or Deaf.

The goal of any translation project should be to have an accurate and faithful representation of the original text so that the Deaf can understand God's Word. Having someone on the team who can understand spoken language translations will help the team when they are using a spoken language text as their source text. As sign language source texts become available, the translation team will still need a person who can understand the sign language translation being used as the source text.

27. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: The translation team must receive minimal training in sign language linguistics, biblical exegesis, and translation principles.

Many Deaf do not understand how their language works. They may also think that their language is not good enough. So linguistic training helps them understand how their language works and why it is valuable. This will help make their translation clearer, more natural, and acceptable. Biblical exegesis and translation principles will help them

improve the accuracy of their translation.

28. Minimum Requirement: the translation must involve the community in the translation process as much as possible.

Best Practice: Before beginning a translation, the team should form a translation committee composed of members of the community, church leadership, etc.

This committee can support community checks and distribution. Without the involvement of the community it is possible or even likely the scripture engagement aspect of the project will fail.

29. Minimum Requirement and Best Practice: The signing must be what the community is using, usually the most common variant or most accepted variant.

Unless sociolinguistic factors force it, the translation team should avoid using a variant that is too “educated” or too “rural”. The translation team should use the more common or more accepted variant so that the most people will understand the translation.

Further Best Practices (Sign Language)

- Translations should use visuals like maps, photos, and illustrations that help the viewer understand the text better. When you use these visuals there should be someone explaining the visual in some way. Deaf often do not have access to additional resource materials that describe the geography, history, or culture of the Bible. So including these elements in the translation or in an introduction of some kind will help the Deaf viewer better understand the text.
- The translation team should continue to receive training in computer software that will assist their project or computer skills in general. Computers make the task easier, but only if we know how to use the computer. Having additional training will make the team’s work easier.
- The translation should use a minimum video resolution of 720p. Technology standards are changing all the time. It is best if the team can continue to improve the technology they use.
- A translation team is usually composed of 1 – 3 signers, a videographer/editor, exegetical assistant, and leader/facilitator. The team may also include an artist, interpreter, a person doing the back translation, and someone who can help with video software.

See also the separate statement by the Forum of Bible Agencies International on ‘Qualifications for Translation Consultants’ which outlines standards for translation consultants that are recognized by all member agencies, laying a basis for the sharing of translation consultants.

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ⁱ *The signer must be Deaf since a sign language translation is intended for the Deaf community. Having a Deaf signer ensures the most natural signs and form of communication. Deaf communities are more apt to use natural translations.*