

# Translation Principles and Procedures Manual

WORD Ministries  
ABWE

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## Introduction to WORD Ministries

WORD Ministries is a division of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) that oversees and provides training / consultant help for all ABWE fields in the areas of translation, literacy, and ESL (English as a Second Language).

The Translation Division of WORD Ministries accepts the following kinds of translation projects (not an exhaustive list):

- Scripture
- Tracts
- Song books
- Correspondence course materials
- Sunday school curricula
- Literacy primers
- Follow up materials for new readers
- Cassettes, videos, films, and filmstrips
- Training materials (lay, pastoral at both Bible institute and seminary level).
- Reference materials

WORD offers training of translators and field translation teams for the production of both printed materials as well as audio-visual materials. Consultants in the areas of translation, linguistics, and literacy are available to facilitate projects in every phase of literature production: from the initial linguistic and needs survey work, through training of translation teams, production, checking, testing, printing or recording, through promotion of literature usage.

Literacy consultants offer training of nationals and missionaries for primer construction, preparation of new-reader materials, teacher training, program establishment and follow up.

ESL consultants will provide teacher training sessions, professional development courses, program establishment, program evaluation, and recommendations of materials and methods.

The Resource Center of WORD Ministries, located at the ABWE home office in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania houses translation, literacy, and ESL materials, reference materials, lists of

materials available in a particular language (with ordering information), samples and simple English bases of materials recommended for use or for translation by ABWE missionaries, and computer programs that facilitate translation, literacy, and ESL programs.

## WORD Ministries Translation Policy Statement

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as originally written were God-breathed, both verbally and in every part. We believe God, who is Truth, communicated through Spirit-controlled men so that the Scriptures are without error and therefore authoritative in all they teach and in all matters they touch. We believe the Bible is the supreme revelation of God's will for man and constitutes the only infallible guide for faith and life. The following are not part of the original text: punctuation, verse numbers, chapter divisions, upper/lower case letters, and section headings.

We enter into the work of Bible translation with the realization that we need to call on God for help and guidance in this endeavor. We will base our work upon the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. We will translate the Bible as literally as possible without distorting the meaning of the original text.

The goal of translation of Scriptures and other evangelism and discipleship materials is to promote church planting through developing believers grounded in God's Word and equipped to evangelize, disciple and serve as church leaders. The average time needed for translation of the New Testament is ten years; normally, another ten years is needed for the translation of the Old Testament.

## General Translation Principles

We make the distinction between general translation projects and Scripture translation.

Translation principles are much more rigid for Scripture translation projects. In order to produce high-quality translations, we will follow these general translation principles.

1. Translations will be done with the goal of accuracy, naturalness, and clarity.
  - a. The meaning of the original text is to be translated accurately, exactly.
  - b. The meaning of ideas will be translated, not word-for-word translation.
  - c. Meaning will have priority over form.
  - d. Naturalness of expression will have priority over form.
  - e. Translated materials should sound natural and be readily understood by native speakers of the target language. This includes word order, grammar, sentence length, idiomatic phrases, word pictures, and figurative expressions.
  - f. Vocabulary will be carefully chosen, with common words preferred over archaic and with the goal of producing a translation that is clearly and correctly understood by all speakers of that language, regardless of age, sex, education level, geographical location, dialect, etc.
  - g. The translation should be understood by non-Christians as well as Christians. Christian jargon will be avoided along with vocabulary with incorrect connotations.
2. Translations will be faithful to the original text.
  - a. There will be no omissions, additions or changes in Scripture translations; any done in other materials will be handled with care and with authorization from the original authors.
  - b. The translation should not have added interpretation, explanation, or application. The translation should not reflect the translator's bias or beliefs.
  - c. Contextualization: The situation, culture, and language of the original audience must be considered BUT facts must not be changed. Scriptures will not be updated or revised; Scriptures will not be changed to be more understandable or to fit today's context.

- d. A carefully monitored series of checks for accuracy will be carried out by the translation team. Note requirements for translator and translation team:
  - i. Primary (first draft) translators must be native speakers of the target language. Translator should have good knowledge of source language culture and language as well as receptor language and culture.
  - ii. Other translation team members must include at least three native speakers of the target language who are involved in checking the translation.
  - iii. Other translation team members and project consultant may be proficient non-native speakers of the target language.
  - iv. Testing of the translation will be carried out in both oral and written tests with a wide variety of people who are native speakers of the target language.
- e. Translation from a simple base improves accuracy of translation and is strongly advised when possible.
  - i. Model or simple base is prepared in language known to translator.
  - ii. Bible translation models are available from Bibles International in English, French, and Spanish.
  - iii. A thorough check by a Bible translation consultant who is proficient in Biblical languages and the language of the simple base, working with one or more mother-tongue speakers of the target language, is required to ensure accuracy.

3. Translation projects will often call for literacy work in the same language.

## Preliminary Steps for a Translation Project

### 1. Survey of translation needs

- a. Gather data on target language including speaker population size, literacy rate, etc.
- b. Survey literature that is available or in progress in the target language.
- c. Secure commitment of sponsoring group for project and funding.

### 2. Choice of material to translate

#### a. Scripture translation

##### i. The choice of scripture portion to translate first.

1. Option #1: Follow the “normal” order for translation of Scriptures, e.g. Mark, John, James, etc.
2. Option #2: Order varies depending on language, field, needs, predominant religion, background of audience, availability of materials. For example, beginning with a translation of an Old Testament portion in a predominately Muslim area.

##### ii. The scope of translation project for the first phase needs to be determined, e.g., a scripture portion, the New Testament, or the complete Bible.

#### b. Other translation projects

- i. Determine the needs (and felt needs) of the audience in the target language.
- ii. Consider the availability of appropriate materials to translate.
- iii. Original writing of source text by native speakers is preferable when possible.
- iv. Determine the availability of funds to print completed project.

### 3. Specific factors to consider when planning a translation project

#### a. Target audience demographics

1. Number of languages used in the speech community (what languages are spoken, what language is considered the primary language, what language is a trade language, number of speakers, etc.)

2. Level of bilingualism among audience
3. Education level / literacy level
4. Age
5. Gender
6. Social level
7. Religious background

b. Dialect choice

1. Prestige language / dialect
2. Standard form
3. Regional dialect
4. Religious dialect
5. Geographical dialect

c. Language style choice

1. Literary form
2. Spoken form

d. Alphabet to be used

1. Option #1: Use an existing alphabet that is appropriate for that particular region and culture.
2. Option #2: Create a new alphabet.
3. Linguistic and Literacy consultants will work with native speakers in determining the best choice.

e. The purpose of the translation project

1. Teaching / Discipleship (lay, Bible institute, seminary level)
2. Evangelism
3. Other

4. Assembling the Translation Team

- a. Secure support of the project and participation from local churches on field.
- b. Secure support from sponsoring group, e.g. the field council or other group.
- c. Translator(s) and second reader (i.e. the “second”) will be chosen according to standards set by WORD ministries and includes, but is not limited to, spiritual maturity, Bible training, and linguistic ability. The translator and “second” must be native speakers of the target language.
- d. Translator trainers will be sent by WORD ministries to train translation

- team members in translation procedures and linguistics.
- e. Translation team will be chosen to help the translator with checking for clarity, naturalness, and accuracy in the target language. These members must include a majority of native speakers of the target language, but can include proficient non-native speakers. The team normally includes 8-12 members.
  - f. A translation consultant (source language expert) from WORD ministries will meet with the translation team to check on the accuracy of the translation according to the source language.
  - g. A Project coordinator, preferably on-site, will oversee the project and work closely with the translation team and serve as a liaison with WORD ministries.
  - h. Checkers and Testers are those who assist the translation team by checking and testing the translation for clarity, naturalness, and accuracy in the target language.
  - i. A Printer or Publisher will be chosen to publish the trial editions (if necessary) and final edition of project.
  - j. Office workers will assist the project team by doing things such as computer input, photocopying, collating, entering corrections, sending out manuscripts to team members, etc.
  - k. Distributors will be used to send out trial editions and/or final copies of project to the community.
  - l. Scripture use promoters will be those who encourage the use of the new translation in church and devotional activities in the community.
  - m. Literacy workers (i.e., the WORD ministry literacy consultant and literacy team) will work concurrently with the translation team to construct primers and new reader materials, teacher trainers, teachers, program overseer, etc. and then put the primers to use by teaching native language speakers to read.

## 5. Securing materials and equipment for project

- a. A work space for translator and reviewing / consultant groups should be found.
- b. A computer for the main translator is recommended. A printer and means of photocopying is also recommended.
- c. Recommended software for the translation project computer:
  - i. Bible software (a searchable program such as BibleWorks)
  - ii. Word processing (Microsoft Word or program compatible with U.S. ABWE consultants)
- d. Reference materials should be collected for translation team to use. This should include dictionaries of target and source language, thesaurus, Bible reference/commentaries, etc.
- e. Office supplies should be available for translation team such as paper, pens, computer floppy disks, etc.

6. Project funding

- a. Equipment, materials, supplies (e.g. computer, office supplies, etc.)
- b. Salary for translator and “second.”
- c. Travel expenses for reviewers.
- d. Onsite expenses for WORD ministries consultants (note: travel expenses to field will be covered by consultants).
- e. Postage to send manuscripts to and from translation checkers.
- f. Phone calls
- g. Printing costs:
  - i. Portions / trial editions
  - ii. New Testament
  - iii. Complete Bible

## WORD Ministries: Procedures for a Translation Project

### 1) Acceptance of project by WORD Ministries

- a. Field Council (FC) or other group recognizes need or potential need and desires help in determining if need exists and how it can be met.
- b. FC or other sponsoring group votes to pursue the possibility of ministry, accepting ownership of project and responsibility for personnel and funds.
- c. Administrator notified if applicable (for example, ABWE FC sponsoring project).
- d. Sponsoring group contacts WORD Ministry Coordinator with a request for information or help.
- e. WORD Ministry Coordinator contacts Administrator and verifies his and FC's sponsorship of project.
- f. Consultant assigned by Ministry Coordinator collects needed info about project: specific needs, personnel, resources, materials, etc. and takes application to WORD Executive Committee.
- g. Upon approval by Executive Committee of WORD, project is placed on list of accepted projects according to priority assigned to it by Executive Committee.

### 2) Preliminary steps by WORD Ministries after acceptance of project

- a. Ministry Coordinator matches need with appropriate, available facilitator based on language, geographical location, expertise needed, availability, etc.
- b. Consultant from WORD provides information or help via e-mail, mail, fax, phone, personal visits, etc.
- c. Consultant plans, with sponsoring group, the project steps, finances and timetable.
- d. WORD provides training of translation team members.
- e. WORD Ministry Coordinator maintains records and files on project, tracking progress.

### 3) After acceptance by WORD

- a. Preparation
  - i. Translation team preparation
    1. Training modules (linguistics, translation principles)
    2. Biblical training
    3. Computer training (optional)
    4. Checking procedures (e.g. how to complete checker forms)
  - ii. Project-specific preparation

1. Create file for project (project # assigned by WORD)
2. Language analysis (by WORD consultant)
3. Social/cultural analysis (by WORD consultant)
4. Materials checklist
5. Schedule for reviews and consultant checks
6. Checklists and Translation Model

b. Text Analysis

- i. Key words
  - ii. Study the grouping of the text
  - iii. Identifying the opening and closing of text
  - iv. Cohesive devices in the text
  - v. Semantic analysis (larger to smaller units; discourse analysis)

c. Translating into Target Language

- i. Initial draft done by native speaker
  1. Transfer from semantic analysis to initial draft
  2. Read through by translator
- ii. Reworking Initial Draft: Native language translator with second reader, who is his assistant read through draft, noting
  - a. Grammaticality (and style)
  - b. Sentence construction (good flow)
  - c. Word order
  - d. Word use (appropriate words, clarity, etc.)
  - e. Word /sentence meaning (look for ambiguities)
  - f. Anything that makes the text sound unnatural and foreign should be marked and reworked
  - g. Computer input
- iii. Checking done by translation team (checkers) (repeat steps 1-6 above)
  1. Individually filling out checker forms and submitting to coordinator.
  2. Discussing problem areas, disagreements, etc. as a group
  3. Changes as needed in manuscript
  4. Note: Literacy materials are being developed as needed simultaneously, and literacy programs are being established through local churches or adult centers.

d. Testing of translated manuscript

- i. Testing of manuscript is done to make sure the translation is accurate, clear, and natural.
  - ii. Self-check
  - iii. Back-translation for consultant check
  - iv. Read-and-review committee (comprehension testing, naturalness testing, readability testing)
  - v. Consistency check (use checklists)
  - vi. Consultant check (use checklists; comparison with source text)
- e. Finalization, printing, and distribution of translated manuscript
- i. Final revisions by team
  - ii. Finalization of manuscript for testing booklet; recording audio cassettes
  - iii. Final testing for accuracy, clarity, naturalness
  - iv. Final revisions
  - v. Finalization
  - vi. Printing, recording
  - vii. Distribution
  - viii. Follow up testing, feedback collection / revisions
  - ix. Revised printing, often with other portions
  - x. Scriptures in use

## Translator Qualifications

The work of Bible translation should be seen as both a ministry and as a detailed task. Great care should be taken when choosing the right person for this important endeavor. The translator should exhibit the following characteristics:

- Spiritual maturity:
  - o Salvation
  - o Spiritual discernment
  - o Evidence of a spirit-filled life
  - o Good knowledge of the Bible and the culture of the biblical era.
  - o Good work ethic (e.g. hard worker, detail oriented, self-motivated, works well with committee, accepts correction, etc.)
  - o Sees translation work as a service to God
- Linguistic ability:
  - o A native speaker of the target language.
  - o Knowledge of native language grammar and vocabulary.
  - o Knowledge of source language grammar and vocabulary.
  - o Training in basic linguistic theory and methods.