



## **Language and Culture Archives**

Goals for translation: a proposal  
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## GOALS FOR TRANSLATION: A PROPOSAL

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This paper seeks to share proposals for what might be the standard goals for the completion of SIL's part in a translation project in which SIL has primary involvement. It is not an official document but your comments and suggestions could help in formulating a standard policy that is (1) right before God, (2) in keeping with the desires and needs of Christians and churches in the areas where we are working, and also (3) realistic and achievable.

The text is the draft for the translation section of a manual on completion that is currently being prepared by the Program Development section of the SIL International Administration.

### 1. Goals

#### 1.1 Translated Scripture

Before SIL's service in a given country or region can be considered completed, there should be some Scripture available in all languages of that area in which translation needs have been identified. An exception would be where work is in progress, or specifically planned, toward that goal by another Bible translation organization or under other auspices.

Depending on local circumstances, the goal for completed Scripture translation in a given language may be any of the following:

- (1) New Testament and some Old Testament.
- (2) Some Old Testament books and some New Testament books (or: selections from both Old and New Testament). This option may be appropriate in circumstances where the anticipated use does not seem to justify a full translation project, for example, where the language is dying, or there is a high degree of bilingualism in another language in which the Scriptures are available.
- (3) Complete Bible (Old and New Testaments). This option may be appropriate in circumstances where two or more of the following criteria apply:
  - The Scriptures already translated into the language are being used widely.
  - There is a strong desire on the part of the local people and churches to have a complete Bible and to take a

responsible part in the translation task through their personal involvement and support.

- The language is a prestige or trade language, spoken as a second language beyond the boundaries of the area where it is the first language and it is likely that a complete Bible might be used by others who speak the language as a second language.
- There is no access to the Old Testament in another language in which a high proportion of people are bilingual to the extent that they understand the Bible in that language.
- The Old Testament has potential to serve as a source language text for other related languages.

The specific objective for the amount of Scripture to be translated in each language should be decided through interaction between the entity administration, the translation team, and (where appropriate) the local church.

Published volumes of Scripture may include factual supplementary material to help the reader in understanding the Scripture text, such as a glossary, topical index, book introductions, footnotes, maps, and illustrations. See further section 1.3 below.

Scripture or Scripture-related publications should be published by a publisher other than SIL.

## **1.2 Scripture selections**

In addition to larger volumes (such as a full New Testament, mini-Bible or Bible) some Scripture should also be available in a form that can be widely distributed and that is likely to be readily received by the intended audience. This may include, for example:

- Scripture selections for a specific audience such as farmers, fishermen, children, or people of a particular religion.
- Selected Scriptures from Old and New Testament, presenting a panorama of the Bible.
- Life of Christ.
- Stories Jesus told (collected parables).
- Scripture in nonprint form (audio or video).
- Lectionary or Sunday School readings.

### 1.3 Bible background information and Scripture study aids

Supplementary materials may be prepared to help people understand the Scriptures, for example:

- A Bible background book such as *How the Jews Lived* explaining the Jewish way of life and religious customs.
- Glossary.
- Topical index.
- Concordance.

Such supplementary materials may be included in a volume of translated Scriptures or published separately. Size will be an important factor in making this decision.

### 1.4 Scripture-related material

Depending on local circumstances and on policies of the entity concerned, the following may also be produced:

- Hymn book.
- Scripture songs on cassette.
- Bible stories.
- Scripture comics.
- Widely accepted biblically-based Christian literature, such as an adaptation of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

### 1.5 Trained people

At the local level, i.e., in each language area:

There should be a core group of nationals who are able to lead and teach others in studying and applying the Scriptures.

There should also be a core group of nationals trained in Bible translation principles who will be able to continue translation (e.g., Old Testament translation), revise existing translations, and prepare new publications.

At the national or entity level:

There should be a responsible body, such as an NBTO or Bible Society, who will be able to take leadership in ensuring that Scriptures will continue to be available in the languages of that area. This body would also relate to other organizations with similar goals in that part of the world.

Ideally, there should be at least one national translation consultant, or equivalent, serving as a member of this national body. In countries where there is a large number of languages, the number should be proportionately higher.

### **1.6 Ongoing system for providing and distributing Scripture**

There should be a system in place for ongoing translation and revision of the Scriptures, for reprinting, and for producing new publications.

There should be a storage and distribution system to ensure that the published Scriptures are readily available where they are needed.

## **2. Principles**

While it is recognized that situations differ widely, and that not all of the goals listed in section 1 will be feasible in every situation, the following general principles express our aim:

- (1) We aim to see the Scriptures available to the speakers of the language in a form which they can readily read and understand and to see those Scriptures being used by the churches and in evangelism.
- (2) Provision should be made for ongoing translation work, revision, and preparation of further Scripture-related publications. Therefore national people need to be trained and to have had experience in taking a responsible role in the work.
- (3) The translation should be locally owned. This will be achieved through maximum participation in the projects by local people. Responsibility for decision making in planning and organizing the project should be in the hands of the local people to the greatest extent that is feasible in each situation.

## **3. Implementation**

In order to achieve our goals, the following action is needed:

- (1) The local churches and community should be as fully involved as the situation allows, and from as early as possible, in the process of (a) planning the translation project, (b) preparing the translation, (c) testing and checking the translation, and (d) distributing the Scriptures.
- (2) To the extent that the situation allows, meetings and training courses will need to be arranged so that church leaders and others have an opportunity to understand the basic

principles of Bible translation, and to realize more fully what is involved in a Bible translation project.

- (3) We need to be alert to recognize national colleagues who have the potential to be trained for fuller responsibility in translation-related activities: at the local level, people who can be trained as translators and reviewers; at the national level, translators who have potential to be trained as trainers, advisors, and consultants. We are committed to do everything possible to help such development.
- (4) Wherever possible, training programs for mother-tongue translators and reviewers need to be organized, both at the local level (for one language) and, in some cases, at more central points (to serve two or more languages). Individual on-the-job training for national colleagues will be very important in all situations.
- (5) Courses should be held to encourage the use of the translated Scriptures ("Scripture Use Courses"), or alternatively similar help needs to be given on an individual basis.