

Report to WEA for Conveyance to Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL Int'l
from the WEA Global Review Panel
An Abridgment for the Bridging the Divide Consultation 2013

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1. **Introduction**

- a. Description of WEA leadership's agreement to facilitate an independent external review of Wycliffe and SIL International's practice of the translation of the words for "God the Father" and "Son of God."
- b. How panelists were selected.
- c. Panel preparation, process, meetings held, and list of final panel members.

2. **Report on Divine Familial Terms**

- a. Its belief in identifying overarching principles to govern translation efforts.
- b. It identifies the four primary contexts for accurate and clear translation
 - i. The four are: OT; NT; Translators' culture; Intended audience
- c. In light of these contexts, the Panel makes 10 recommendations.
 - i. Recommendations 1-3 concern translation
 - ii. Recommendation 4 concern use of other kinds of literature besides Bible translations in ministry to Muslims
 - iii. Recommendations 5-10 concern guided processes for ensuring accuracy and accountability in Bible translation

3. **Recommendation 1**

[W]hen the words for "father" and "son" refer to God the Father and to the Son of God, these words always be translated with the most directly equivalent familial words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients. In the case of languages that have multiple words for "father" and "son," translators should choose the most suitable words in light of the semantics of the target language.

4. **Recommendation 2**

[C]onsider the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, prepositional phrases, or similar modifiers) to the directly-translated words for "father" and "son," in order to avoid misunderstanding....Also...to use paratextual material to clarify and avoid misunderstanding in these cases.

5. **Recommendation 3**

[W]hen and if necessary, ... convey nuances of meaning from the biblical context in the translation through the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, or prepositional phrases).

6. **Recommendation 4**

[I]n addition to translating Scripture, ...consider additional ways of communicating the message of Jesus to Muslim audiences. These can include such literary genres as tafsir (commentary), quas al-anbiya (stories of the prophets), and sirah (life stories). But these should not be considered or presented as biblical translations unless they abide by the first three recommendations.

7. **Recommendation 5**

[I]ncorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines related to ensuring that translators determine what context should serve as the controlling principle for the translation of divine familial terms, including:

- a. Local testing of peoples' reactions to a translation, seeing to it that local expertise -- exegetical, linguistic and historical -- are at the outset part of the team in designing the feedback mechanism for testing reactions of the targeted group to translation of divine familial terms.
- b. Enabling translation teams to account not only for the particular audience for whom the translation is being prepared, but also how to consider the impact on local groups with secondary exposure to the translation (overhearers such as existing local churches, close language groups, and so on).

8. Recommendation 6

[I]ncorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines for the translation team on differentiating the translation of divine familial passages when the primary audience of the Bible translation is local believers versus when the primary audience is local unbelievers (including how to determine when this is necessary and how to accomplish it when it is deemed necessary).

9. Recommendation 7

[I]ncorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines on a process by which likely divine familial language controversies are to be handled and personnel held accountable for those translations where Wycliffe and/or SIL has a major stake. Especially for translations over which controversy is likely to ensue, the guidelines should:

- a. Give the translation team a process to determine when Wycliffe and/or SIL might institute some type of “familial language audit group” (or other appropriate title) utilizing both internal (local believers/ informed culture bearers who may or may not be Christians) and external (translation experts) resources.
- b. Address such things as the composition, task/limitations, and process of the “familial language audit group”:
 - i. Composition: ...[W]henever possible the group should include local believers from a variety of perspectives and disciplines and also local experts who may not be believers but know the cultural and linguistic nuances of their mother tongue.
 - ii. Task/limitations: For example, the “familial language audit group” would focus their audit on the controversial familial language passages of the translation.
 - iii. Process: This would include how such audit groups might be constituted, how they determine their decisions, how they communicate the decision, Wycliffe and SIL policies on the public/confidential nature of any audit reports that are generated, and so on.

10. Recommendation 8

[I]ncorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines related to “ownership” of the translation.... and add guidelines in these areas:

- a. Negotiating the interests and demands of a) the end-users, b) believers in local contexts, c) scholarly and other relevant hermeneutical communities (including existing local church resources), d) patron donors behind the translation.
- b. The role(s) that foreign translators, missionaries and experts take in the process and choices made in translating familial language in the project.
- c. Handling situations in which different groups in a single locality have different opinions on the familial language translation choices and determining the local hermeneutical community that best represents the target audience.
- d. Guide translation teams on handling questions concerning the relationship between foreign funding of translations and resulting demands on translation decisions and practices.
- e. Establishing procedures that will ensure that the research on reception of the familial language translation actually reflects local understandings and asks the kinds of questions that will not skew the data towards researcher or patron community bias.

11. Recommendation 9

[C]onsider how to better publicly disclose translation decisions and considerations, including appropriate means of publicizing:

- a. What Wycliffe and/or SIL has done regarding those translations for which Wycliffe and/or SIL was responsible but which have not followed the Best Practices and the Panel’s recommendations.
- b. How Wycliffe/SIL will monitor compliance with the Best Practices statement and the Panel’s recommendations.

12. Recommendation 10

[W]ork with an external group or agency (such as WEA) to establish policies and procedures of accountability related to the Best Practices statement and the Panel’s recommendations including review by an external group or agency.

13. Rationale for Recommendation 1

- a. The words for “father” and “son” are among the most common ways the New Testament describes God and Jesus.
 - b. The words for “father” and “son” are among the most important ways the New Testament conveys the central truth that Jesus is and has always been in a relationship as Son to his Father—derived from God and possessing the same divine characteristics (and thus fully divine), and yet distinct from God the Father as well.
 - c. The word for “son” is among the most important ways the New Testament links believers to Jesus and at the same time distinguishes us from Jesus. He is the unique Son of God, and we become adopted sons (and daughters) through faith.
 - d. Father-son relationships are universal in human experience.
 - e. Most Muslims know that Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God and have heard that the Bible describes him as such. Non-direct translation of the words for “father” and “son” may create problems in that Muslims will think our new translations have altered the Scriptures.
- 14. Rationale for Recommendation 2**
- a. People in Islamic contexts may misunderstand father/son language as implying that God had sexual relations in order to beget Jesus, and they are taught to abhor the possibility that God could have a Son.
 - b. There is biblical precedent for the use of qualifying adjectives or phrases to avoid misunderstanding of the word for “father” when applied to God.
- 15. Rationale for Recommendation 3**
- a. There are several important aspects to the Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman background to the way the phrase for “Son of God” is used in the Bible.
 - b. The biblical precedent of adding qualifying adjectives or phrases to the word for “father” may be followed to add nuance to the word for “son” when applied to Jesus.
 - c. Conveying varied nuances of meaning through different qualifiers, while still retaining the same direct translations of the words for “father” and “son,” preserves consistency and enables readers to see the connection between various passages referring to God as Father and Son.
- 16. Rationale for Recommendation 4**
- a. Translation does not stand alone in the process of evangelism and discipleship.
 - b. Muslim and Christian views of Scripture and translation differ significantly.
- 17. Postscript**
- a. We offer these recommendations with the hope that they will not add to the divisions that currently exist, but that the Holy Spirit may use them to promote a more united and powerful witness on the part of ministers of the gospel in the Muslim world and beyond.
- 18. Tables listing SIL’s Best Practices Statement and the WEA Panel Response (recommendations) for each Best Practice.**
- a. Table 1: What are the principles for choosing between different renderings in translation of divine familial terms?
 - b. Table 2: What are best practices for making exegetical decisions?
 - c. Table 3: What are the best practices for establishing concordance with regards to 'Son of God' and familial terminology?
 - d. Table 4: Principles for Paratextual Information
 - e. Table 5: Principles for different translations for different audiences and purposes
 - f. Table 6: Additional Considerations
- 19. The Report concludes with several points of clarification**
- 20. The Panel members’ signatures**