Concerns, Comments, and Questions re
SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms
with commentary 30 April 2012

The Commentary is highlighted in red; the Best Practices Document in purple;
and our questions are given as bullet points.

A. Changes?

The **commentary** (p. 2) says: "*The only change to the Istanbul Statement is the addition of section numbers to allow easier reference to points within the Statement*"…as well as "*Transparency and clarity in all aspects of translation are important factors in establishing and maintaining good relationships with all potential partners* " (6.1 & p. 12).

We desire the "good relationships" noted.

- How, then, to understand this discrepancy?

Recent document:

0.6 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 the implication of sexual activity by God as much as possible.
http://sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms_commentary_full.pdf

Original document:

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.
http://www.wrfnet.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=20&name=DLFE-72.pdf

It is perhaps true that it would be impossible to use a 'literal'/natural term for "Son" [like *huios*] and avoid all possible implication of sexual activity by God…since in the (encyclopaedic) network of meanings for the often 'normal word for Son' [like *huios*] is sexual procreation. This would set up the need (a requirement according to the IST document in the original form?) to avoid the literal, and has been criticized as too restrictive and not in accord with the NT pattern of word usage.

- Is that part of the reason for the unannounced editing in the current version?
- Why else has there been this change?

 "The main goal of the guided process in the Istanbul Statement was to limit translation alternatives to terms which (1) properly convey familial meaning, but (2) are not limited to a procreative relationship."
<http://sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms.htm; accessed 5 June 2012>

B. Skopos

0.7 "Translations should be evaluated in light of their intended audience and context."

- Does this set up an impossible situation if the *skopos* is an unbelieving audience?

- How does SIL respond to the PCA claim that the Bible is for God's people first of all, and so adapting it to "unbelieving audiences threaten the integrity of Bible translation"? (A CALL TO FAITHFUL WITNESS, Part 1, pp 50ff).

The **Commentary** (p. 4) notes that the "host communities play a key role in translation decisions, including the translation of key terms." Here "the full range of possible participants, including churches and individual believer" are taken together with the possible *skopos* of unbelievers.

- How is this position tenable?

- Are there any 'best practices" to guide the process where there is a conflict between the preferences of believers vs unbelievers, especially re the key DF terms of concern?

5.2 "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."

- Who are the stakeholders if the *skopos* is an unbelieving audience?

- Who decides?

C. Comprehension Checking and Accountability

1.1 "Comprehension in the target language determines the choice between renderings"

Commentary (p. 3): "This involves careful study of and extensive interaction with the worldview and conceptual framework of the receptor audience in order to ensure that the original meaning of the biblical text will be communicated as faithfully and appropriately as possible in their context."

"…every effort is made to 'ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation' "

- How are we to avoid submitting the renderings to the (unredeemed) worldview and conceptual framework of the receptor audience?

- Are not all worldviews and conceptual frameworks fallen, and thus not already sufficient in and of itself to comprehend that which is as new as the gospel, coming to us "from above," breaking in on our inherited situations?

- If that fallen, unbelieving conceptual framework is the standard, it seems one MUST compromise accuracy. True?

Again, we acknowledge the stated intention in the **Commentary**: "This is not a matter of adapting the meanings of the Scriptures to the culture and worldview of host communities, but rather a matter of expressing Biblical meaning as accurately and clearly as possible in the host language" (p. 4).

Checking is key to the enactment of these intentions and guidelines, as is accountability. Let's look at these two separately:

C1. Checking

We hear the desire to be faithful to the biblical text…as faithful "*as possible*"!   And we understand the role of 'checking' highlighted in the document. This is not a new procedure, and yet at the same time it has been necessary to declare that "One of the main outcomes of the [IST] consultation was that neither God's Messiah nor Word of God adequately conveys the "divine familial" meaning of Son of God. The purpose of the Istanbul Statement is to present a set of guidelines or best practices to ensure that the "divine familial" components of meaning are communicated well in the translated text itself, not just in the paratext" (p. 1).

- How will this error of the past not be repeated?

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

Commentary (p. 5): "Extensive testing and evaluation of critical terms must be carried out with as wide a variety of representatives from the language community as is possible in the specific socio-political situation, to ascertain whether they are being accurately understood."

Commentary (p. 10f): "Paratextual information plays a significant role as an aid in understanding the translated text, but it cannot be expected to solve all potential problems for readers or hearers of the translation. There is still a need for explanation of and teaching from the translation as individuals and communities seek to effectively understand the translated text."

- How are the individual and community interpersonal and teaching interactions included in this testing procedure?

C2. Accountability

Commentary (p. 7f): "It is, therefore, incumbent upon translation teams to document the process of selecting and testing familial terms for Father-Son. For all literal and non-literal renderings, a full description must be made of their uses and meanings in order to effectively build a case for their consideration as viable alternatives. This description must include not only the linguistic and sociocultural factors, but also the exegetical and theological considerations that informed the selection process. This information will be of critical importance to translation consultants who work with these teams.

"It is also incumbent upon anyone involved in the evaluation of proposed terms to study all the available documentation in order to avoid either acceptance of or dismissal of possible renderings solely on the basis of an English or other major language translation.

"The evaluator must develop as complete an understanding as possible of the terms being proposed in order to make the best decision regarding their suitability. If questions remain or if further information is needed, the translation team's leadership should be contacted to facilitate consultation with the team."

- What infrastructures, checks-and-balances, etc., are or will be in place?
- How will those outside SIL have a voice in this process?
- What will happen when 'disputes' arise, as has been the case already?
- Will this "information" be available for examination?
- What to do when outsiders are met with 'this is not available due to security issues'?
- Might some secure system of checks-and-balances be established?
- Might BtD be of service here?

D. Concordance

1.3 "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."

3.2 "**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."

We wonder what principles guide a meaning-based translation philosophy as to:

- What counts as "recognizable" and what not?
- What are the standards and bounds and limits of "normally"?
- Are there 'exceptions' to this 'normally', lest this just be perceived as a loop hole, an escape clause?
- How is this to be tested, verified, validated, confirmed?

> …such that there is guidance as to when and how to maintain that concordance.

0.6 "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."

- What is this "**all its richness**"?
- or from 1.3, "**the full range of meaning of this term**"?
- Would not "**recognizable concordance**" play an essential role in making that richness accessible via intra- and inter-textual connections, allusions, cross-referencing, and commentary…the traditional principles of "Scripture interpreting Scripture" (which operates with non-sacred texts as well)?
- Again, what principled guidance do meaning-based translation philosophies/theories give us for wisely/appropriately maintaining the recommended "recognizable concordance" and even determining in the first place which are the cases of concordance to be maintained?

Finally, 3.2 says, "[concordance] should not be insisted upon at the expense of **comprehension**". There's another side to this: Aren't there cases where the **comprehension** of the richness of biblical/textual meaning w/could be seriously compromised, if not voided, by a failure to maintain concordance. Here the goal of '**comprehension**' is conflicted.

- How are we to distinguish these cases?
- And which "comprehension" are we concerned to not disrupt…only the local textual meaning?
- What about larger patterns of meaning?

That is, there is an intricate fabric of textual meanings and relations that seem to be intrinsic to the meaning that is to be translated, and concordance is one indication of such a fabric. (There are others, like the fabric of imagery, sound patterns, all sorts of discourse structures, etc., each presenting its own challenge.)

- What 'best practices' are there to honour all this intricate fabric of textual meanings and relations that may be (is?) intrinsic to the meaning that is to be translated

E. re Paratext

Commentary (p. 10): "A translation team's philosophy or style of translation will determine the preferred purpose for various kinds of paratextual information."

- What parameters/guidelines/constraints/best practices are there re this decision as to what to put where? …specifically with respect to the familial language: This is the hot button.

- When the Commentary acknowledges 'meaning' vs 'form' based differences in philosophy or style of translation, does this not leave the entire DFT matter unaddressed? For instance, do not MIT, meaning-based translations still claim, after IST, that they are in compliance with that document and its principles?

Many are saying on both sides, 'nothing has changed'.

- Is this true?

- If not, how so?

Commentary (p. 10f): "Paratextual information plays a significant role as an aid in understanding the translated text, but it cannot be expected to solve all potential problems for readers or hearers of the translation. There is still a need for explanation of and teaching from the translation as individuals and communities seek to effectively understand the translated text."

- What principled guidance is there about the interplay of text, paratext and the personal and teaching relations involving "individuals and communities"?

- What proportions?

- And how does the testing procedure include the role of "individuals and communities"?

F. The Significance of 'Procreative Meaning'

See point "A" above.

- What is "wrong procreative meaning"? (Commentary, p. 7) ...and why?

- Would SIL agree with the PCA preference for 'biological meaning' (quoted below)?

  'While Jesus' eternal begotten-ness and incarnate Sonship lack the sexual connotations of human sonship, nevertheless Scripture employs common biological sonship terms to convey important truths about Jesus' nature, function, and vocation. Readers lose this information when biological kinship terms are substituted either with a "social son" term (e.g., "Unique Beloved One" or "Representative") or with a less comprehensive term like "Messiah" '
  (A CALL TO FAITHFUL WITNESS, Part 1, pp 9).

- If not, why not?

G. The 4 Steps (1.5)

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

1.5.1 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.

1.5.2 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.

1.5.3 Review all options from steps 1 and 2 and then choose the one with which is most effective in communicating meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product.

1.5.4 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.

- Is this an ordered list of preferences or not?
- If Step 1 is adequate, do we move on to the other steps? What would "adequate" be?
- Is 'the literal' just one of the options to be considered or a priority-preference?
- How does one decide which is preferred? Testing? (See concerns in Section C1 above)
- Can you give any actual situations in which 1.5.4 has come into play?

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