



Statement on qualifications for translation consultants¹ **Forum of Bible Agencies International**

One of the ways in which the member organizations of the Forum of Bible Translation Agencies can cooperate is in sharing our translation consultant resources, as local situations, organizational policies and availability permit. Consultants from member organizations may wish to collaborate for various purposes such as educating church leaders, program planning and design, training translators, quality assurance (of content, format), etc.

The goal of this statement is to define a jointly agreed set of minimum qualifications for translation consultants as a basis for sharing consultant resources in situations where this is deemed appropriate. This agreement recognizes that each organization maintains its own internal standards for consultant recognition, and thus there will need to be different levels of application between organizations to accommodate differences in their own policies. Organizations may wish to define specific requirements more explicitly in their own bilateral agreements.

In particular, where an organization is a publishing partner in a joint project, this agreement recognizes that the organization may require that final checking and sign-off on publication be restricted to

- (a) those who meet the higher internal qualifications it requires of its own translation consultants and
- (b) those to whom also it specifically extends this recognition.

The agreement aims to ensure a standard of qualifications, skills, and experience that is acceptable to all organizations for sharing consultant resources in collaborative projects. The statement focuses on professional qualifications. It is understood that all cooperating organizations, as members of the Forum, have identified themselves as being within the mainstream of historical Christianity.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Some of the most important qualifications for a translation consultant are in the field of interpersonal relations. Consultants must have the ability to relate well with others of different cultural backgrounds. Consultants must be sensitive to different situations, tolerant of different viewpoints, able to listen and learn, and also able to give an appropriate lead when needed. They must be good teachers and able to communicate effectively, both in writing and in speaking.

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

Linguistics: A minimum of one academic year of training (or equivalent) in descriptive linguistics. Areas to be covered include sociolinguistics, phonology, grammar, discourse studies, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, semantics, and language typology.

¹ *Original draft, April 26, 1994, updated April 18, 1996, formally accepted April 24, 1997; further revision April 2005, April 2006.*

Cross-cultural studies: At least one graduate (or upper undergraduate) level course in anthropology or cross-cultural studies.

Biblical languages: A good knowledge of New Testament Greek and/or Biblical Hebrew (preferably both).

More precisely, the minimum standard expected is a basic knowledge of the morphology, syntax and discourse structure of the language. One should be to read the original text with understanding (with the help of reference tools) and to use commentaries that refer directly to the original text. There should be an ongoing commitment to use and develop this knowledge.

Biblical studies: A minimum of one academic year of concentrated study at the graduate (or upper undergraduate) level in Old Testament and New Testament. Areas to be covered include Biblical languages (see above), principles and practice of Biblical exegesis, and the historical and cultural background of the Bible.

Translation consultants should normally have an M.A. or a Ph.D. or the equivalent in one of the above areas (or a related discipline), and the minimum described above in the others. Formal qualifications may, however, occasionally be waived where the person concerned has other special strengths and/or has demonstrated his or her competence through long service and/or through the publications he or she has authored.²

TRANSLATION SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

A consultant should:

- (a) have received training in translation principles (either through participating in a formal course or through personal tutoring from an experienced consultant) and have participated in translation workshops and training programs on the field;
- (b) have had in-depth experience working in a translation project in one language over a prolonged period of time;
- (c) be committed to the principles of functional equivalence/meaning-based translation while also showing sensitivity to local attitudes and situations regarding specific translation styles.

LANGUAGE AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

A consultant should have an understanding of the characteristics of the languages in the area of expected service. Usually a consultant should also understand and be able to speak fluently at least one language of the area, including any major language spoken in the area which is likely to be a medium of interaction with translation teams and church leaders. (Language learning may often be combined with the experience of working with one translation project in depth over a period of time. This could in some cases be a major language of the area.)

A consultant should have had experience of living for an extended period of time in a culture different from his or her own.

SKILLS IN ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

A consultant should have demonstrated ability to organize personal study projects and have had personal experience of cooperating in the planning and organization of a translation project.

² The “grandfather clause”: In talking about qualifications, the question is often raised of translation consultants who have had many years of effective service and experience but who may not have the formal qualifications listed below. Experience weighs heavy on the scales! Such consultants should never be discounted—their contribution and their input in training younger consultants is invaluable. The above statement on qualifications for translation consultants does allow for this.

CONSULTANCY SKILLS

A consultant should have received training that includes an orientation to the role and responsibilities of a translation consultant, interpersonal skills, and consulting techniques. This will usually be through participating in a consultant training seminar and also through a close association with a senior consultant over a period of time in an apprenticeship or mentoring relationship.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Translation consultants must have a high standard of professional integrity and an ongoing commitment to increase their knowledge and develop their skills in ways that will help them to become increasingly effective in their service as consultants.

The processes that contribute to consultant development will usually include:

- Formal training**, as described above
- Personal reading and study
- Experience in translation and consulting
- Participation in a translation consultant training seminar
- Apprenticeship/mentoring relationship with one or more experienced consultants

Formal recognition of consultants

This agreement seeks to define for those organizations participating in the International Forum of Bible Agencies the minimal qualifications needed for mutual recognition of consultants participating in collaborative projects. It does not seek to define roles, responsibilities nor qualifications for consultants who are not involved in joint projects.

In order for a consultant to be formally recognized by Forum partners in a given region or area, their qualifications will be reviewed by the Regional or Area translation coordinator or equivalent officers for UBS and SIL, and the equivalent officers for whatever other Bible translation organizations are active in the area or region concerned. This action is initiated on the recommendation of the local administration of the organization with which the person concerned is working, and in consultation with that local administration.