

Questions Frequently Asked by Other Translators

The following are intended as a helpful yet short summation for translators of a few key points from the longer document entitled, [“Contextualization in Translation: A Closer Look.”](#) As with that document, those who have signed the [Arlington Statement](#) are signing based on what is written in the statement itself; some might not fully agree with what is written here or the wording of other related documents. These questions are based on conversations that initial signers have had where clarifications were found to be helpful.

Are you saying that *kyrios* should be translated with the same term in every instance?

The statement emphasizes the value of maintaining the “interwoven meaning” of key terms by striving for a “high degree of consistency” in translation. It also says that in the case of *kyrios*, the referent being God the Father versus Jesus (or to put it more technically, the “intra-Trinitarian referent”) should not be considered relevant to translation choice. To treat *kyrios* differently based on whether translators determine the referent to be God the Father or Jesus is to obscure the equality of the Father and the Son. This is especially true when a “higher status” word like *Allah* is used to translate *kyrios* in reference to the Father, but a “lower status” word (for instance, *sayyid*) is used in reference to Jesus. But even differentiating between the two with words of roughly equal status does unnecessary damage to the Trinitarian framework of the key term *kyrios*.

Though the statement emphasizes the value of consistency in general for key terms, it does not require 100% consistency as an absolute rule. This is because, as one of the points in the preamble states, “language structures and the semantic range of words or phrases vary from language to language.” In particular, the semantic range of *kyrios* is fairly broad—it is used as a polite term of address for a male stranger, a title of divine Lordship, and as a title for masters of slaves or owners of property. Not all languages can properly match this range without serious distortion to the meaning. (For example, nearly all English translations translate *kyrios* as “Sir” rather than “Lord” in John 4:11, 5:7, 12:21, and 20:15.) However, the value placed on consistency in the statement means that translators should seek to find a term that can apply quite broadly, even if it may not fully match the semantic range of the Greek term. (See Section 4.4.4 of

[“Contextualization in Translation: A Closer Look”](#) for further details on this point in relation to *kyrios*.)

In summary, while the statement does not strictly require 100% consistency at all times, it does value consistency as something translators should make serious effort to strive for. Additionally, the statement requires that the intra-Trinitarian referent not be taken into account when translating *kyrios*, since, as a matter of theological principle, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all equally “Lord,” as shown by the Holy Spirit’s choice that this term be applied to all three.

Should direct translations for Divine Familial Terms really be used even when readers understand this term to imply or require sexual procreation?

In contexts where such a misunderstanding about the divine Father-Son relationship is dominant, care should be taken to clarify in the paratext that such an idea is as blasphemous to Christians as it is to them. However, the paratext should not treat these familial terms as merely “idiomatic,” or deny that God truly is Father, Son, and Spirit, and we are God’s true sons or children by adoption.

But even in the case of misunderstanding on this point, we believe direct translations—that is, translations that “us[e] the same terms that are normally used to express the human father-son relationship,” without qualifying language such as “spiritual son” or “son who comes from God”—are necessary. God existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before he ever made human fathers and sons. He made human fathers and sons partly so they would act as a reflection or shadow of the perfect divine Father-Son relationship (see for example Ephesians 3:14-15). The ways in which human father-son relationships act as a reflection of the divine Father-Son relationship entail many elements of normal, biological human father-son relationships, such as having the same substance, resembling each other, the idea of natural inheritance and the birthright of the firstborn, etc. If these biological elements are blocked, the meaning communicated by these terms is seriously obscured. Therefore, blocking the biological component of the divine Father-Son relationship will result in greater loss than gain in meaning. This issue is best dealt with in teaching and paratext, so that the full and beautiful, God-breathed meaning remains unblocked for readers. See Section 4.1 of [“Contextualization in Translation: A Closer Look”](#) for further detail.

Are you opposed to the inclusion of the first half of the Shahada because of the word *Allah*?

The Arabic word *Allah* is a common, traditional term used as a translation of the Hebrew *elohim* and the Greek *theos* by Christian and Jewish Arabs since before Islam arose, and is still used today by millions of faithful Arab Christians to refer to the Triune God of the Bible. The Arlington Statement's objection to the use of the first half of the *Shahada* (that is, *La ilaha ill' Allah*) is based on the meaning and connotations of this phrase not matching the biblical phrases from which it has been translated, such as Psalm 18:31 or 1 Kings 18:39 among many others. See Section 2.1 of ["Contextualization in Translation: A Closer Look"](#) for further detail.