

Brief compilation on Translation

by Universal House of Justice

Compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.
1999-08-03

To: Universal House of Justice
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From: Research Department

Compilations on Translation

The Research Department has studied the request from Mr. _____ in his email message of 17 April 1999 to the Bahá'í World Centre. He states that, in discussions with Bahá'ís both in person and on the Internet, he has noticed “a wide variety of views on the nature of translations of the Writings, including such issues as whether the Guardian's English translations incorporate infallible interpretations and the status of provisional translations”. He asks for a compilation, preferably in electronic format, of statements from the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice on the subject of translating the Writings. The following is our response.

As Mr. _____ is doubtless well aware, the subject of translation of the Holy Writings is a very complex one. From time to time the Research Department has prepared a compilation in response to particular questions or concerns of individuals and institutions but there is, at present, no one compilation that covers all aspects of the translation process and the policies and procedures relating to it.

The Translations of Shoghi Effendi

Regarding the Guardian's English translations, we have attached a compilation prepared earlier entitled “Selected Extracts from Letters written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi and by or on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice on Translation”.¹ These extracts make frequent reference to principles which infused Shoghi Effendi's translations. Regarding whether his translations are “infallible”, it seems to us that this issue is addressed in extract [2] of the compilation and in the following statements from letters to individuals written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, respectively:

Concerning the different translations of the Words: It is surely the original text that should never be changed. The translations will continue to vary as more and better translations are made. Shoghi Effendi does not consider even his own translations as final, how much more translations made in the early days of the Cause in the West when no competent translators existed.

(14 August 1930)

As regards English, the beloved Guardian's translations are obviously the most authentic and should be used. If for some particular reason, a Bahá'í author, when quoting a passage of the Sacred Text which has been rendered into English by the Guardian, wishes to use a translation other than that made by the beloved Guardian, his request

1 Available online at “Baha'i Library Online” : http://bahai-library.com/compilation_provisional_translations

may be referred to the Universal House of Justice. Passages from the Sacred Text not translated by Shoghi Effendi, but already in English and published with approval, may be used. If an author wishes to make his own translation of a passage not already translated by Shoghi Effendi, the new translation may be submitted to the Universal House of Justice for approval.

(3 November 1996)

Status of Provisional Translations

The Research Department is not aware of any compilations on the subject of provisional translations. However, this subject has been under study by the Universal House of Justice, and some new policies have recently been announced. We have attached a copy of Appendix II: "Policies Governing Authorized and Provisional Translations of the Bahá'í Holy Writings into English and their Publication", 4 July 1999.²

Universal House of Justice Research Department

2 Available online at "Baha'i Library Online" : http://bahai-library.com/compilation_provisional_translations