

A.A. More and More Speaks the Languages of the World

There is A.A. literature in more than 80 languages, with the Big Book in 52 of them, opening the door of recovery to millions of alcoholics in the non-English-speaking world.

The work of overseeing translation is handled in a systematic fashion, the goal being to protect the integrity of the A.A. message while producing A.A. literature in foreign languages that is clear, accurate and true to the originals.

Translations come about in two basic ways. Sometimes A.A. members or nonalcoholic professionals in a country will contact Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc. (A.A.W.S.J, the publishing arm of General Service Office, New York, to request a translation of literature into that country's language. Mongolia in 2004, for example, made such a request.

More often, though, A.A. members in other countries start translating material on their *own*. A.A.W.S. advises starting with the basic recovery pamphlets, such as "Is A.A. for You," "44 Questions," or "A Newcomer Asks."

However, notes Liz Lopez, the (nonalcoholic) A.A.W.S. administrator in charge of licensing and copyrights, "everyone wants to dive into the Big Book."

The process may start with an offer from an A.A. member or entity in another country to undertake a translation. A.A.W.S. must first decide if there is a genuine need. The work of translation requires considerable resources, so A.A.W.S. cannot say yes to every offer by A.A. members to do translations.

If it is the Big Book that is being turned into the language of the other country, and A.A.W.S. recognizes the need for such a translation, it will request two or three sample chapters, including Chapter 5.

A.A.W.S. then sends these sections for assessment by its translation service it has been using for 14 years.

"The company we use to check the translations we receive from A.A. all over the world has developed a good sense of what we require, and the whole concept of A.A.," says Lopez. "They know what to look for."

Mark Porto, president of the translating company, says, "working with A.A., you just naturally want to pull together and do whatever it takes to produce top quality work. We realize this literature is a big part of the lifeline that A.A. extends to (those trying to help themselves from all parts of the world."

If the translation passes muster, that is, if it is at least good enough to work with, the A.A. members in the foreign country are given the green light to proceed. As Chris C., G.S.O.'s publications director, noted in a speech to the World Service Meeting last year, "It is better to have this review done before a lot of translations which, in the long run, may not be acceptable to the Fellowship."



Liz López (nonalcoholic), who is in charge of licensing and its, is a veteran of 30 years of service at the G.S.O.

If the translation (all short, then A.A.W.S. may undertake the task itself, using its translation service.

"The accuracy of translation is especially important when it comes to the writing of Bill W. Translations of our basic texts (*Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*) must capture the tone of spirit of Bill's original works," says Chris.

In all cases, A.A.W.S. holds the rights to the material, no matter who does the translation and no matter where in the world the material is printed or distributed. In this way, A.A. protects the integrity of the writings.

A.A.W.S. grants licenses, subject to renewal, to A.A. offices or entities in foreign countries. The licenses grant the foreign A.A.s permission either to translate, print or distribute specific A.A. literature. Established central offices like those in Japan or Portugal, as well as in many other countries, hold licenses to perform all three tasks, in many cases, though, A.A.W.S. prints and distributes the material.

A.A.W.S. holds the copyrights for about 650 various A.A. writings, from the Big Book to the pamphlet "44 Questions." Currently, there are about 20 translations underway of various pieces of A.A. literature.

"We try very hard to work with A.A.s doing translations around the world," says Lopez. There is always latitude in choosing the right words or phrases in translations, "If there is a disagreement between A.A. translators and those in another country, we give the A.A. members in the foreign country the benefit of the doubt," she says.

Uldis D., who was born in Riga, Latvia, and got sober