



Policy on IHTSDO's Role in Translation

Title: IHTSDO's Role in Translation

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Owner: Management Board

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Policy Statement

IHTSDO is committed to enabling the translation of SNOMED CT into multiple languages and the use of the terminology in different socio-cultural contexts. IHTSDO's role with regards to translation is as follows:

- IHTSDO will continue to support the Translation Special Interest Group (SIG) and its associated Project Groups in the development of Standards, Guidelines, and other shared resources that will broadly assist those engaged in translation efforts, as agreed through the annual Work Plan process.
- IHTSDO will procure and integrate a set of translation tools into the Workbench and commit to their on-going maintenance and associated user support.
- Through the Member Exchange, IHTSDO will work to facilitate the easy sharing of translation resources developed by Members with each other, without the requirement that these translations be brought into the International Release.
- IHTSDO will continue to require that anyone undertaking a research and evaluation scale translation [criteria for approval agreed by the Management Board in April 2010 – see Appendix] commit to making that translation available at no cost to current or future Members who may wish to use it as a starting point for a translation effort.
- IHTSDO will encourage those undertaking translation efforts to submit requests for changes to existing concepts in the International Release based on review of the terminology undertaken in the course of translation efforts, as well as to actively address such requests when received.
- Through harmonization agreements, IHTSDO will continue to pursue options to facilitate the translation effort for Members (e.g. by negotiating for the ability to use translations of vocabularies and classifications that will be mapped and/or integrated with SNOMED CT for the development and maintenance of translations of SNOMED CT).
- As requested by the General Assembly and based on agreed criteria (see below), IHTSDO will undertake the on-going maintenance and development, including quality assurance, of translations as part of the International Release. In general, this would apply only to the language translation and International Release documentation, not associated crossmaps or reference sets.

Definitions



Affiliate: An Affiliate of IHTSDO in accordance with IHTSDO’s *Articles of Association*, i.e. a person or organization to which the International Release of SNOMED CT (whether on its own or as part of a Member’s National Release of SNOMED CT) is distributed or otherwise made available under the *Articles of Association*.

Namespace Identifier: A code or that part of a code that identifies the organization responsible for creating and maintaining a standards-based extension or a standards-based derivative. It is an element of SNOMED CT concept identifiers.

Context

Technically, SNOMED CT’s International Release is a language independent set of concepts and relationships, as represented in US English. From the beginning, IHTSDO has been committed to enabling the translation of SNOMED CT into multiple languages and the use of the terminology in different socio-cultural contexts. IHTSDO is required to produce a Spanish translation of each International Release through its contract with the National Library of Medicine. In addition, IHTSDO owns an older German translation of portions of what is now SNOMED CT. A review of the status of this translation and what would be required to update it is currently underway.

According to the *Articles of Association*, additional translations may be undertaken with the permission of the Management Board. A number of additional translations are underway or complete. These translations are being prepared by Members and Affiliate Licensees. Formally, such translations are considered “extensions” under the *Articles of Association*.

Criteria for Language Translations to Become Part of the International Release of SNOMED CT

According to the *Articles of Association*, the creator of an extension typically owns the intellectual property rights in that extension (there are conditions or exceptions in the case of extensions created by Affiliates). However:

- If requested by the Member who distributes the Affiliate License (or IHTSDO for centrally-distributed licenses), the Affiliate shall transfer to the Member or its nominee all of its intellectual property rights in standards-based extensions or parts thereof created by the Affiliate¹
- If requested by the IHTSDO, a Member shall transfer to IHTSDO all of its intellectual property rights in standards-based extensions or parts thereof

In either case, the organization to which the intellectual property rights were transferred assumes responsibility for maintenance and distribution of the extension. That content then becomes part of the Members’ National Extension (if transferred to a Member) or of the International Release (if transferred to the IHTSDO).

It is agreed that a language translation would become part of the International Release of SNOMED CT when required as part of contractual agreements with a Member (i.e. the current Spanish translation) and would be *considered* if all of the following apply:

¹ IHTSDO can also initiate such a request via a Member.



- At least three Member countries have active plans to implement SNOMED CT in health and/or social care settings that require the use of the language in question in the next three years;
- A high quality translation of all, or a substantial portion, of SNOMED CT has been completed and is, or is potentially, available to the IHTSDO (i.e. IHTSDO would typically not undertake the initial translation effort for a new language and the translation would need to be of a quality deemed suitable by Members countries with plans to use it);
- Member countries planning to use the language translation in question present a coordinated proposal to the IHTSDO that the association should undertake the on-going development and maintenance of that translation;
- A sustainable source of resources and appropriate expertise to support the on-going development and maintenance of that translation, including quality assurance, has been identified (this might take various forms, including a commitment by interested Members to maintain the translation); AND
- The General Assembly reviews a proposal from Member countries that addresses the issues outlined above, proposed translation maintenance and quality assurance processes, and an associated budget and agrees that IHTSDO should undertake the on-going development and maintenance of the language translation in question.

Note: it is possible that IHTSDO would undertake to maintain a translation of a sub-set of the terminology for some languages, rather than a translation of the full SNOMED CT. Appropriate adjustments to the above criteria (particularly the second) could be made in this context.

Additional Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

Based on the criteria outlined above, IHTSDO would only include a language translation in the International Release of SNOMED CT if several countries were planning to use it. Just as with the current English version, it is likely that there would be cultural and linguistic variations between such countries, as well as differences in priorities for translation and timelines.

A key challenge would be the development of the initial language translation. It is proposed that IHTSDO would strongly encourage cooperative efforts to undertake translations in ways that are open, transparent, and fair. To this end, IHTSDO will encourage all countries interested in using a particular language translation to cooperate in:

- Establishing an open process that would be inclusive of all Members interested in using SNOMED CT in the language in question
- Agreeing on decision-making process for an initial cooperative translation effort²

² One option would be to establish an IHTSDO Project Group, with the decision processes inherent in such a structure.



- Agreeing on priorities and plans for an initial cooperative translation effort (the former might be guided by short-and medium-term implementation plans, resources contributed, and other factors)
- Contributing existing translations of some or all of SNOMED CT towards a cooperative translation effort through the Member Exchange
- Agreeing on processes and tools that will be used in the initial translation effort³
- Agreeing on quality assurance processes and criteria for deeming the quality of a translation in the language in question of sufficient quality to be included in the International Release of SNOMED CT

In addition, it will be important to set key parameters for the initial translation effort. A key question is likely to be the dialect used for the translation that is to be included in the International Release. Based on the experience with English, a large proportion of the translation is likely to be the same in different dialects but there will be clinically important differences for certain concepts. In some cases, it may be possible to address this issue through the use of synonyms. In other cases, national releases which specify preferred terms in different contexts may be required.

A number of approaches could be used to determine which dialect will be used for the initial translation. These include but are not limited to:

- Use a trusted third party (e.g. previous decisions that have been taken by other international organizations or a reference to an international cultural organization with a focus on the language in question);
- Consider contributions of resources relative to the wealth of a country (i.e. those contributing a higher share of resources to the translation effort get more say); and
- Make a pragmatic decision based on dialects used in previous translations and/or where current translation efforts are taking place.

It is proposed that IHTSDO would not take a position on what the most appropriate dialect would be but would rather seek to encourage interested Members to arrive at a consensus decision.

References

- IHTSDO *Articles of Association*

Document Control

The principles underlying this policy were approved by the IHTSDO General Assembly on April 26, 2010 and are subject to regular review according to IHTSDO's policy review processes.

³ One option would be to use the IHTSDO Workbench and the Collabnet Platform to allow for cooperative translation efforts.



Appendix

Criteria for Approval of Research and Evaluation Scale Translations

Under the Affiliate License, anyone wishing to translate the International Release of SNOMED CT must receive advance written permission from the IHTSDO. The IHTSDO will consider approving requests for research and evaluation scale translations when the requestor is an Affiliate Licensee and all of the following apply:

- The request is purely for research and evaluation and of the noted scale (i.e. under 5-10,000 concepts);
- Permission to undertake the translation is granted for a time-limited period consistent with the research and evaluation intent (e.g. up to 2 years);
- There will be no distribution of the translation for deployment in health information systems unless the Management Board agrees or the country in which the Licensee is based becomes a Member of IHTSDO and the Member approves such distribution;
- The Licensee has or will apply for a Namespace for the purposes of the translation;
- The Licensee has support in principle from relevant government authorities or other organizations that are candidates to become Member of IHTSDO to conduct this translation;
- The Licensee has reviewed IHTSDO Guidelines relevant to translation, indicates that they have quality assurance processes in place to ensure a translation that is fit-for-purpose, and commits to provide feedback to IHTSDO through the Translation Special Interest Group on their experiences during the translation process;
- The Licensee is advised about the process that is underway to procure translation tooling functionality in conjunction with the IHTSDO Workbench (or once it is available that such tooling functionality is available); AND
- The Licensee commits to making the translation available at no cost to current or future Members who may wish to use it as a starting point for a translation effort.

Requests falling outside of these parameters may be considered by the Management Board.

