

Fortifying the 2015 Auslan Translation Guidelines

Deaf Australia

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements - Page 3

Author Contributions - Page 3

Summary - Page 4

Report - Page 5

Method - Page 5

How do Auslan translation practitioners use the 2015 Auslan Guidelines? - Page 5

What are the barriers to using the 2015 Guidelines? - Page 6

What are the gaps in the 2015 Guidelines? - Page 9

What are good experiences of Auslan translation practitioners? -Page 12

What are the risks to Auslan translation practitioners? - Page 13

What are the mechanisms for change identified? - Page 15

What are emerging Auslan-first alternatives to Auslan translations? - Page 18

Do Deafblind viewers prefer Auslan translations and/or transcreations? - Page 18

Conclusion - Page 19

References - Page 20

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Author Contributions

Gabrielle Hodge and former Deaf Australia CEO Jen Blyth conceptualised the study and developed the methods. Paula Thornton led the interviews with the Deafblind community members and Auslan translation practitioners. Paula Thornton and Stef Linder reviewed report, in collaboration with Consortium members Ben McAtamney, Ntannis Davi, Debbie Kennewell, Catherine Dunn and Avni Dauti.

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Summary

Since the release of the original [ACCAN Auslan Translation Guidelines](#) in 2015, the Auslan translation landscape has changed dramatically, with an unprecedented rise in digital communications and increased demand for Auslan translations by Deaf, Deafblind and hard of hearing people who use Auslan. This shift has been driven by a range of Government programs and reviews, including the roll-out and review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Disability Royal Commission, and the Multicultural Framework Review. National and global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic have also significantly reshaped Auslan user needs. This ACCAN-funded project [Fortifying the 2015 Auslan Translation Guidelines](#) was designed to review the 2015 Auslan Guidelines and determine their current effectiveness.

We had three aims: (1) review current usage and compliance with the 2015 Guidelines, to better understand the barriers to using the 2015 Guidelines and any gaps identified by translation practitioners; (2) incorporate low vision Deafblind Auslan users' needs into the Guidelines, to better support their access to Auslan translations online; and (3) analyse emerging Auslan-first videos, which are often seen as a better alternative to Auslan translations and interpretations. We envisioned updated Auslan translation Guidelines to fit current and foreseeable requirements, including mechanisms for compliance and evaluation processes; better consideration of low vision Deafblind people's preferences for engaging with Auslan translations online; and an understanding of when Auslan-first videos versus Auslan translations are preferred.

This report summarises the findings regarding current usage of the 2015 Guidelines by Auslan translation practitioners (see Hodge, Goswell, Whynot, Linder & Clark, 2015a). Through discussions with ten Auslan translation practitioners, we identified how Auslan translation practitioners have used the 2015 Guidelines now and in the past, such as for client education and advocacy. We also identified key barriers to the uptake of the 2015 Guidelines, including lack of resources and absence of professional feedback, and key gaps at this point ten years after they were originally published, such as lack of information about preferred video durations, and the significance of NAATI credentials, a governance body, and appropriate training and curriculum.

We also documented useful information about what good translation practice experiences look like, and the professional and personal risks to translation practitioners when good practices are not followed, including professional misrepresentation, reputational damage, and unpaid labour. The interviews also offered several mechanisms for improving how the Guidelines are used, including:

1. The creation of an oversight body for ensuring the quality of Auslan translations;
2. The creation of a central repository for Auslan translations;
3. Development of legislation and tiered standards for Auslan translations;
4. Auslan curriculum development, promotion and community involvement;
5. Advocacy and funding to back up these mechanisms.

This report also summarises our findings regarding new Auslan-first alternatives to Auslan translations and low vision Deafblind people's preferences for viewing Auslan translations online.



Report

Methodology

Paula Thornton invited 10 different Auslan translation industry stakeholders for an interview on Zoom or in person. All practitioners were sighted Deaf people, most of whom have at least 10 years experience working as qualified interpreters and translators. Paula interviewed them about their use of the 2015 Auslan translation Guidelines (Hodge, Goswell, Whynot, Linder & Clark, 2015b), including any barriers to using the Guidelines and any gaps within these Guidelines. Paula also asked translation practitioners about their good experiences with creating Auslan translations, the risks involved to them in producing such videos, and any mechanisms the practitioners would suggest for improving their uptake.

All recorded interviews were filmed in Auslan and then confidentially transcribed from Auslan to English by a small team of Auslan/English translators who signed a confidentiality form. Hodge then used qualitative data analysis software Nvivo to analyse ~150 pages of interview transcripts according to the interview questions and themes within these questions. NVivo is a software program that helps researchers organise, analyse and visualise qualitative data such as interviews.

The transcript sections relating to each question were then fed into a safe, secure and responsible generative language model ELM with the following request: *Please identify the main themes relating to each question. Can you give me more detail about each theme and with examples?* The language model was questioned until no more relevant themes could be identified.^[1] The aim was for the language model to assist in making sure all relevant themes were captured. Hodge then reread the transcripts and compared them to each theme identified, editing and amending themes where necessary. Each interview question and the themed responses are summarised below.

^[1] The generative AI program used is called the Edinburgh (access to) Language Models (ELM). ELM supports the use of generative AI that is safe, secure, responsible, inclusive, equitable and responsive. For example, it does not allow data that is input into the programme to be retained by OpenAI. This means researchers can use the ELM without worrying that the data will end up being used in other generative AI programs such as ChatGPT. The ELM was primarily used during the preparation of this report to double-check the content analysis and understanding of a large quantity of interview transcripts. After using the ELM, the data was reviewed and edited further. Hodge takes full responsibility for the content of the publication, including any errors.

How do Auslan translation practitioners use the 2015 Auslan Guidelines?

Auslan translation practitioners reported engaging with the 2015 Auslan Guidelines initially as the key reference, then later for occasional consultation. They also use the Guidelines to support their personal translation processes, for client education, and for advocacy.

Key Reference

- Some practitioners read the Guidelines when they were first published, but have rarely returned to them since. In practice, the translation process is primarily dictated by the needs of the client and the resources available to them.

Occasional Consultation

- Some practitioners refer back to the Guidelines for specific project needs or client queries. As one translator told us, ***“They are a good reminder, and it can help me know whether I’m on the right track and alleviate any concerns that I might have.”***

Personal Translation Processes

- Many practitioners have developed their own translation methods, using the Guidelines as a general reference, rather than as a guideline with strict rules.
- However, practitioners have had to adapt the Guidelines to fit current technology and viewer preferences. As one practitioner told us, ***“The Guidelines are very easy to follow, but they’re too broad and don’t match my specific needs. It may not match other Auslan translation companies either, who probably have their own processes too.”***

Client Education

- The Guidelines are often used to educate clients about Auslan translations and best practices for creating them. As one practitioner told us, ***“It’s only when a client questions something, that I might refer to the Guidelines and show the relevant section to the client, although that happens less now.”***

Advocacy

- Despite being outdated in some aspects, the Guidelines remain helpful for advocating good practices. As one practitioner told us, ***“I will refer people who make Auslan resources to it, such as Government departments. I refer them to it if they want to film me producing a translation.”***
- Use of the Guidelines as an advocacy resource is necessary for clients who may have no concept of what is involved with creating Auslan translations. As one practitioner explained, ***“Often I’m being asked by people who have no idea at all in terms of what’s involved...they don’t understand the process or the amount of work that goes into it having to unpack the information, ensuring that the translation matches the voice over, having an interpreter on hand at the filming to ensure that the editing process will be smooth, and the footage edited appropriately...[T]here’s a lot of advocacy that has to happen prior to the resources being made.”***
- Sometimes advocacy can backfire when clients are too thorough, by creating more work for the practitioner. For example, one practitioner explained, ***“There has been one client who was fantastic. He read the Guidelines all the way through, and we had a lot of emails back and forth in terms of editing and the colour of the background. It was nice to have that engagement, but he was asking me quite a lot and for additional consultations that I wasn’t being paid for. I was only paid for my time to do the translation. The consultation showed that he was really interested in doing it properly, but it meant I was doing additional unpaid labour [educating him].”***
- Overall, Auslan translation practitioners have found the 2015 Auslan Guidelines useful as a key and initial reference, but tend to rely more on their professional expertise and evolving industry demands and innovations when creating translations. It is clear that the 2015 Auslan Guidelines continue to play a significant role in client education and advocacy. This suggests that any continued effectiveness depends on the new updated Guidelines being easy to find on a central website, so that practitioners can point clients directly to them and have them backed up by peak organisational endorsement such as Deaf Australia, ASLITA (Australian Sign Language Interpreters & Translators Association) and/or NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators & Interpreters).

What are the barriers to using the 2015 Guidelines?

Practitioners reported a number of barriers to using the 2015 Guidelines. These included not having sufficient resources to implement them; limited client motivation for compliance with the Guidelines; the absence of feedback mechanisms for their translation work; challenges with collaborating with practitioners across the industry; persistent issues with Auslan translations adhering too closely to English source texts; lack of clarity on how to target specific audiences; persistent source text and captioning constraints; cost concerns; a lack of support for addressing cultural gaps within source texts; and some missing technical details in the original Guidelines.

Lack of Resources

- There has been insufficient funding and personnel to implement the Guidelines fully. As one practitioner explained, ***“Often it comes down to funding and they just don’t have the money. It always comes back to that cost.”***
- Pay rates for translators continues to be a persistent issue, especially as the NAATI guides do not match the work that Auslan translators are required to do. As one practitioner explained, ***“The NAATI Translator guide was \$35/hour. No-one’s going to accept that. That fee is based on written language translations which are done anonymously. No-one sees who has written the translation, it’s just another document in a different language. Deaf translators have an additional responsibility. They are filmed, their faces are known, and they represent the translation. Deaf people will hold them accountable to the translation and will tell the translator ‘you told me...’, particularly those in our community with lower literacy levels. That additional layer of responsibility on Deaf translators means we need to pay them well.”***

Limited Interest for Compliance

- Some clients lack the motivation to comply with the Guidelines, especially if they view Auslan interpretations as faster and cheaper alternatives. As one practitioner explained, ***“The client’s view is that if you need that additional time, if you need a month, then we’ll just get an interpreter in, and they can do it on the spot [but it won’t be suitable for the Deaf audience who needs it].”***

Absence of Professional Feedback

- Practitioners explained it is difficult to undertake quality assurance and get professional feedback on the quality of their work from their target audiences. As one practitioner explained, ***“There is no follow up. I create the translations, send them off, I’m thanked for my work, and maybe they publish it, maybe they don’t. Maybe they put it on social media. Maybe no one ever sees it...It’s not my job to promote it either, in the same way that interpreters don’t promote their interpreting jobs.”***
- Practitioners perceive that Auslan translations are simply a ‘tick-box’ exercise for many clients. As another practitioner shared, ***“Just in the last 12 months I’ve created at least 160 projects with different organisations. How many of those have actually reached the Deaf Community? I have no idea. Some of those organisations are great. They ask us how they can reach the Deaf Community because they see that the number of views is quite small. Some organisations want to increase the viewing numbers, but many of them don’t. They’re just ticking a box on a form to show that they’ve followed their Disability Action Plan.”***

Collaboration Challenges

- Practitioners observed there are few opportunities to share translation processes and learn collaboratively across the industry. As one practitioner explained, ***“It’s difficult to talk with the other big service providers. There’s a risk because they are competitors and no-one wants to share their secrets. That is why we often get independent translators to come in who are not linked to any specific service provider.”***

Translation Issues

- There are persistent issues with Auslan translations following the English captions too closely, which adversely impacts users who do not have strong English literacies. As one practitioner told us, ***“A lot of Auslan videos are just signed in English order and they are hard to understand. This is an area where ASLITA, NAATI and the Deaf Community need to have an open dialogue about what is necessary in this space.”***
- This situation reflects the desires of clients to assess Auslan translations by inspecting the English caption files, not the Auslan itself. This limits the opportunity for translation practitioners to apply the Guidelines’ recommendations for Auslan natural structure. It also overlooks the visual narrative and spatial grammar that Auslan relies on.

Target Audiences

- There is a lack of clarity on appropriate content levels for specific target audiences. As one practitioner explained, ***“Most scripts have been created by hearing people without any awareness of Deaf culture or Auslan. Often, they’ve been written from a hearing lens, and we have to negotiate from a Deaf lens about what is required to suit a Deaf audience. Typically a direct literal translation isn’t going to fit the audience.”***
- There is a need to work with frequent clients to educate them on their current and future Auslan translation needs, to make them fit for purpose for the Deaf community. As one practitioner explained, ***“There’s a lot of work by Government departments in preparing their disability plans for the next 10 years and creating Auslan translation of those documents, but do they really want the entire plan translated? I think the Deaf Community prefers summaries rather than entire documents...I want something to show what the Deaf Community actually needs and wants.”***
- It is essential to resolve these issues with hearing-led scripts and unclear audience targeting, as both issues make it difficult to apply the Guidelines effectively. Emerging Auslan-first products are gaining traction and becoming more essential and popular in response to the issues with Translations and Target Audiences described here, although they are not yet well understood.

Source Text Constraints

- Practitioners are often faced with tight constraints around altering pre-approved source texts such as English scripts. As one practitioner explained, ***“Often clients are giving us documents that have ‘Final Approval’...We are not typically able to alter pre-approved scripts. When we have attempted to just change one sentence around, we’ve been told no, the information is wrong – but it’s the same, we just switched two sentences. Unfortunately the script has been approved from a legal perspective and it cannot be changed...It’s difficult to have negotiations without anything backing us up.”***
- Another issue relates to the trend for clients to request stand-alone Auslan videos that are separate from the mainstream English language video they also release. As one practitioner explained, ***“You often see mainstream videos that have all kinds of information and graphics. And then the ‘Auslan version’ is a plain 5-minute monologue. If I knew ahead of time that they were going to be two separate videos like that, I might not have said yes. Because often the Deaf ones are very, very boring when they are produced that way, particularly when you see them compared with the mainstream videos that have additional visual information that unpacks the various concepts being discussed.”***
- This tendency risks Deaf target audiences missing out on information later on, when mainstream videos are updated but Auslan videos are not. As another practitioner observed, ***“I don’t understand the philosophy of creating separate materials and resources all the time. The NDIS does this a lot. There will be an NDIS video and then another with [Auslan version] next to the title. Why are there two different versions? The ‘normal’ version and then the Auslan version. Why aren’t the Auslan versions the norm if it’s the same information. Why is it being produced separately? The result is that people can’t find the Auslan version...You have to hunt for the Auslan version.”***

Captioning Constraints

- Practitioners also experience persistent issues with clients assessing the quality of Auslan translations by reading the captions file, necessitating some creative solutions to how videos are presented, such as minor changes to the Auslan structure. Yet these changes still may not be enough for target audiences. As one practitioner explained, ***“Clients want to make sure that everything has been covered. This means that if the translation has been very free, the captions will be different from the script we’ve been given, and then companies get anxious. They’ve had the scripts legally vetted and it looks like we’ve changed them. This means we tend to keep the captions the same and make minor changes to the structure for the Auslan translation, e.g., a sentence or two might swap places and it’s comfortable to watch in Auslan, but we’re still close to the captions.”***

Cost Concerns

- Practitioners observed that compliance with the Guidelines can be prohibitively expensive for clients. As one practitioner explained, ***“Sometimes the clients comment on how expensive it is to create an Auslan translation. So there may be some places where we can put cuts in place, without breaking the Guidelines to minimise the expense. If we follow those Guidelines to the letter, the cost for clients would be exorbitant to the point where most clients wouldn’t agree to pay for the service, or quite a lot of negotiation would occur. This affects accessibility for the Deaf community.”***
- Cost constraints have a context in that clients often do not think of translations until the later stage of projects. As one practitioner explained, ***“Clients are only looking at producing an Auslan translation when the last little bit of their budget is left, when the deadline is almost upon them. They then want pages and pages of text to be translated. That’s not a workable system.”***

Cultural Gaps

- Clients often give practitioners source texts which lack understanding of Deaf culture and target audiences in terms of the background information and context that needs to be included, and which would take time for practitioners to make more culturally appropriate. As one practitioner explained, ***"Sometimes the clients will give me a background that is not appropriate, in which case I say no, and will give them some more appropriate suggestions."***
- Practitioners reported that it is vital for the Auslan translation industry to invest in building capacities across a wide range of practitioners, in order to effectively address these cultural gaps. As one practitioner explained, ***"Translations take time. And it needs to be given to people of different backgrounds and races as well... We need more young people, more older people. It seems to be the same quite small group of translators. We want to see representation of different races, ages and genders. We need representation the same way that the hearing community strives for diversity."***

Lack of Technical Details

- Practitioners commented on the lack of specificity within the 2015 Guidelines, such as in colour usage. As one practitioner explained, "It needs to be more specific. For example, the technical information about avoiding certain colours. There needs to be more specificity about the colours, such as avoid teal and green, and also show examples of the colours."
- Another area of specificity required relates to the need for consecutive ordering of visual information on the screen. As one practitioner explained, ***"There needs to be time allowed to look at the visual information and then to look at the signer, in the same way we do when we deliver presentations. We put up a slide in English, we allow time for the audience to look at that slide, and then we talk about it. That way we're not splitting visual attention. If you've put up an animation and then you start signing about it straight away, the Deaf audience hasn't had a chance to look at it yet."*** This issue also affects Deafblind audiences.

Together these barriers hinder the widespread adoption and effective use of the 2015 Auslan Guidelines. Yet the most significant barriers are financial and institutional. As one practitioner told us, ***"There isn't the resourcing, the funding, the people involved to be following these steps. Few organisations and businesses have an appetite to follow them."*** This points to a need for financial and capacity building incentives to support compliance with the Guidelines by Deaf Service providers, translation practitioners, and interpreting agencies alike.

What are the gaps in the 2015 Guidelines?

Auslan translation practitioners reported several areas were lacking within the 2015 Guidelines, including:

Collaboration Processes

- There is a lack of guidance on translators working together on processes, such as how Deaf and hearing practitioners can effectively work together with their respective language skills. As one practitioner explained, ***"At the end of the day, it's about who can provide the better output, and that could be the hearing interpreter. It depends on the person, and they need to be truly fluent in both languages."***
- Better understanding of each others' skills and roles with a translation team would result in better translations. As one practitioner explained, ***"I would love to see that we have more understanding of our individual skills. So that if a translation request comes in, instead of just accepting the job straight away, take a moment to consider what we bring to that job."***
- There is also a need for practitioners to drive the translation process, not clients. As one practitioner explained, ***"The Guidelines need to stress that it's on the translator to determine how that process will occur, it is not for the client to say."***

Standards

- It was suggested there could be tiered standards from basic to high-level translations, to assist practitioners in advocating for different types of translations. As one practitioner explained, ***“There should be different levels of standards, like the incredible ‘blue sky’ standards, then also minimum standards of what is required, in situations where there isn’t a high level of resourcing and funding.”***

Target Audiences

- The 2015 Guidelines did not contain information specific for low vision Deafblind people’s needs. As one practitioner explained, ***“The Guidelines should address Deaf and Deafblind signing diversity and language deprivation, especially since the Guidelines are useful advocacy documents too.”***
- This also relates also to who presents the Auslan information on screen. As one practitioner explained, ***“For a broader audience, you need Deaf people. They understand their community more than hearing interpreters do. Hearing interpreters may engage with the Deaf community, but they don’t have the lived experience.”***

NAATI Credentials

- The 2015 Guidelines were missing information on current NAATI credentials and their limitations, which needs to be updated in the new version.

Video Length

- The 2015 Guidelines did not have any recommendations for optimal video durations for engagement. As one practitioner explained, ***“There should be some agreement on the length of time of an Auslan translation. I see 20-30 minute long Auslan videos and I wonder why? Anything longer than that should be broken up into segments, Deaf people won’t watch it...The SBS vodcasts were 20-30 minutes long. We know that most people watched the first 5-7 minutes and then didn’t watch the rest.”*** Deafblind people reported strong preferences for shorter videos and summaries too.

Governance Body

- The lack of a governance body for quality assurance in translation and interpreting creates issues for practitioners, as there is no mechanism with teeth that will support them in their work. As one practitioner explained, ***“We need to have some kind of overseeing body, some kind of Government commitment to oversee interpreting and translations, to ensure that there are quality checks, to make sure that there is a standard that is being met.”*** Many people outside the Auslan interpreting and translation space assume this is the function of NAATI, but it is not.
- This would be useful for many cases, including workplace and marketing issues. One practitioner gave the example of a governance body being able to address difficult situations between Deaf translators, hearing interpreters, and clients. As one practitioner explained, ***“Sometimes freelance translators do the Auslan work and then the English captions or voiceover are done later by poor quality interpreters, providing an English text that is then used by the client to question the Deaf translator’s work. There needs to be a best practice guide for clients around the use of that type of spying behaviour because that’s essentially using hearing interpreters to oppress Deaf translators.”***

Training and Curriculum

- There is no stand-alone and established curriculum or training opportunities for developing and building translation skills. There are only translation units available in Deaf Interpreting courses run by RMIT and Deaf Connect, in addition to training provided by independent businesses such as Auslan Stage Left. As one practitioner explained, ***“Another thing that is missing is a curriculum of sorts. While we have training for interpreting, we need something about translation to build those skills. Translation needs to be modelled in the curriculum...What does formal training look like? We haven’t really had formal training.”***

- NAATI has a strong role to play in both curriculum development and credentialing to support the ongoing development of practitioners in the industry. As one practitioner explained, ***“It’s part of the NAATI recognition process, we need training for people who are attaining it. We have a lot of young people coming in to do translations, and it’ll be quite a small thing that I’m filming them do, but I need them to do it again and again, and they’re making a lot of errors. I’ve been doing translations for a long time, and I want to be growing the pool of people that can do it. But we also need to make sure that it is being done as a professional job, not just a hobby. I want to see people who are doing it as a career. That we have Deaf people who are working as interpreters and translators as their career.”***
- Public Skills Australia manages the content of public service training packages, which the Diploma of Auslan and associated interpreting qualifications fall under. Public Skills Australia are currently conducting a review of these courses so the curriculum development concerns mentioned here should be communicated to them too.

Target Audience Clarity

- The Guidelines are not sufficiently clear on how practitioners can target and include diverse signing target audiences (see Hodge & Goswell, 2021). In particular, low vision Deafblind people and Deaf people who have experienced language deprivation. As one practitioner explained, ***“There is a question about how do we make sure that we’re clearly and consistently targeting diverse Deaf and Deafblind audiences and that we’re not excluding anyone? It’s impossible to do that, but how do we make sure of that as much as possible?”***

Emerging Auslan-first Approaches

- As the Guidelines are now ten years old, they do not include newer products such as emerging Auslan-first approaches to creating accessible Auslan videos. As one practitioner explained, ***“There’s nothing in the Guidelines about Auslan-first approaches, including what topics may not be suitable for it. There’s some information that one person might prefer to have in a more English way, or via an Auslan interpretation, that someone else might prefer to view in an Auslan-first video.”*** This highlights the need for clearer guidance and reflects a shift in that Auslan-first approaches are becoming more recognised. The updated Guidelines aim to better support this direction.

Production Practices

- Practitioners raised a number of areas relating to production practices that were missing from the 2015 Guidelines, including the efficacy of back translation processes; screen presentation and background elements within Auslan videos; videos that prioritise English speakers over any other languages on screen; and clarifying the minimum time that could be allocated to specific stages of translation, in order to better educate clients about the resources required for creating good Auslan translations. Practitioners offered a range of views on these aspects.
- As one practitioner explained, ***“For videos that contain serious information, for example government messaging, I would rather have the screen split with 2/3 on the Auslan translation and 1/3 on the speaker or slides. What I often see, and what I find quite annoying, is that the speaker is given precedence, or the signer and additional visual information are switched back and forth – so the viewer looks at text, then the signer, then back to text, and so on.”***
- ***“If there are elements moving around in the background, then I then miss things because that’s splitting my attention. I would prefer to have any of that visual information being kept smaller, to the side and I can choose to look at it or not. We need more options, so that Deaf and Deafblind people have a choice of what they want to watch, rather than trying to have all of that information clamouring for our attention at the same time.”***

- ***"If we are prioritising the speaker who is using English, then that's showing that the English is taking precedence."***
- ***"Would like to see more examples of everything in the Guidelines, e.g., examples of quotes for Auslan translations, questions to ask clients, different video editing options and formatting."***
- ***"A client booking checklist would be good too, This would be especially useful for freelancers."***
- ***"Easy English takes a long time as well. They charge two or three times what I charge for Auslan translations."***
- ***"Contact information like phone numbers, emails, website addresses, I don't think they need to be signed. The translator can say here's the phone number and point at where it will appear on the screen."***
- ***"We should be able to toggle all of the options on and off, captions, signing, voice-over. One version with different options we can turn on and off to suit our needs."***
- ***"There should also be a minimum amount of time included for each of the tasks involved. There is a minimum amount of time required for research, for translation, for editing. 72 hours, 72 business hours, not consecutive hours in a row...Each of these parts of the pathway (research, pre-production, production and post-production) needs a time allocation. We have to consider the impact on the community. There's no power, there's no authority to provide evidence of why time is required."***
- ***"Clients could consider the Auslan translation as part of the production process rather than an add-on afterwards. If there's going to be Auslan, it's much easier to have considered it ahead of time and have space for where the Auslan will go on the screen." So much of what seems unachievable appears so because of the limited time and attention given to this right at the end of a project."***

Cultural Sensitivity

Practitioners reported the Guidelines do not address cultural sensitivities or diversity representation within Auslan translations. As some practitioners explained:

- ***"Cultural sensitivity should be added to the Guidelines. If it's content related to First Nations people, then it should be First Nations Deaf people doing those translations. Same as for other communities such as Muslim Deaf people."***
- ***"Language deprivation within our Deaf community has huge impacts on the cognitive understanding of many Auslan videos. Many Deaf and Deafblind people simply don't understand the information if it's delivered by an interpreter just throwing the information at them."***
- ***"We don't see a lot of different ethnicities across Auslan translators. I try to give other people opportunities to do translations for me. But a lot of them aren't confident because they feel that their skills aren't there yet."***

What are good experiences of Auslan translation practitioners?

Practitioners reported positive professional experiences in their translation practices. These positive experiences have a number of qualities in common, including: (1) being able to engage in projects with meaningful content, i.e., high-budget projects with interesting topics, such as translating about climate-related hazards such as bushfires and floods; (2) freedom to draw on different creative processes, such as developing mind maps and visual aids to enhance translation clarity; (3) creating videos that have educational as well as translational impact, such as through teaching-style videos that promote target audience education; and (4) being able to collaborate with others and share expertise. These experiences highlight the rewarding aspects of translation practitioners' work in making information accessible.

James Blyth is one Auslan translation practitioner who shared his experience creating the Auslan translations for the National Emergency Management Project with Expression Australia in 2017:

The translation experience was fantastic and it's still one of the best experiences and best translation jobs that I've done. I was given academic papers and a brief to deliver free translations. And there was a big budget for the project too, which made it an easier process.

So, for example, the academic paper would talk about earthquakes and how earthquakes formed, tectonic plates and the shifting of the earth. And I'm quite interested in geology, so I enjoyed reading about them. How earthquakes are formed, who is responsible for monitoring and alert systems, things like that. Several pages of explanation.

After reading that, I made a mind map with earthquakes in the centre, expanding out into 'What is an earthquake' and dot points related to that; 'How earthquakes are created'; more dot points related to that – 'monitoring', etc. From that, I made a PowerPoint that followed the natural order of how you would deliver that information. Then I filmed it like I was teaching, as though I was delivering a lesson or a lecture about earthquakes to a deaf audience.

From that, the English translation was created. It was a fantastic experience. I created maybe 10 different topics linked to natural disasters, earthquakes, floods, cyclones, solar storms, meteors, bushfires. It was great, I still remember how great it was and it was maybe ten years ago. One of my best translation jobs.

What are the risks to Auslan translation practitioners?

Practitioners reported they face several risks to their professional and personal integrity if good translation practices are not followed or achieved due to the barriers and gaps outlined above.

Reputation Damage

- Errors in translation can impact on professional credibility. As one practitioner explained, ***"We had to really be sure of the translation for the content of each video, because that's going to come back on our reputations and have other negative effects if there was anything wrong with that."***

Cultural Appropriateness

- Practitioners reported they face a huge pressure in ensuring translations are suitable for diverse Deaf and Deafblind audiences. As one practitioner explained, ***"There is no 'one size fits all' scenario for an Auslan translation. We have to be quite deliberate about who we were targeting... there will definitely be Deaf and Deafblind people who do not understand the videos and miss out. Some people will still miss out because of their Auslan fluency, their English literacy, their education level. If they're not fluent in Auslan, it's probably going to go over their head. Or they might understand individual signs, but the concepts and meaning behind it may be difficult to understand because of their education level. There is a lot of difficult content."***

Unpaid Labour

- Practitioners often provide additional consultations without compensation. As one practitioner explained above, educating clients about Auslan translations often involves a lot of unpaid time and labour.

Client Communication

- Delays and misunderstandings can also hinder the translation process. As one practitioner explained, ***"Part of the problem is the communication with the client, you send an email with some questions to clarify and then it can take a few days to get a response from them. Sometimes you need to nudge them along every few days to get a response, and I'm quite direct at that point. I will say, 'Do you want me to do this translation? Then you need to give me XYZ.' All of that clarifying and getting the information required to do a translation can take a lot of time."***

Financial Challenges

- Underpayment and lack of fair remuneration, often from Deaf organisations, remains a serious risk to Auslan translation practitioners. As one practitioner explained, ***"They often want to pay you a very small amount for a five minute video, they aren't considering the preparation that goes into those five minutes. There's no sense of valuing our skill, and that includes Deaf organisations as well. Hearing organisations seem to be alright with whatever you're charging. It's the Deaf organisations that you get push back from. It's based on hours, but if I'm skilled at my job it may take me less time than someone else who needs to do retakes, etc, so if we're remunerated based on the amount of time it takes, I'm getting paid less. Not to mention all the negotiating going back and forth that often isn't accounted for. It feels exploitative. If I'm a professional who can do the work efficiently and expertly, I should be paid appropriately, not penalised because I'm not wasting time and requiring retakes. That's what I've noticed from the Deaf organisations."***
- The same is also true for hearing organisations who have experience booking and using hearing Auslan interpreters. As one practitioner explained, ***"It's based on hearing interpreters who turn up, listen and interpret at a live event, but I'm a professional translator, I'm putting time into researching and rehearsing ahead of the actual filming. The filming might have only taken five minutes but to be paid based on that small amount of time isn't fair. There should be a flat rate. The larger businesses can perhaps work differently, but I'm an independent business."***

Professional Misrepresentation

- There are risks to practitioners around the audience's misunderstanding the translators' and/or presenters' roles and responsibilities when presenting information online within a translation. As one practitioner explained, ***"Typically, if I get scripts from the Government, I sign them as though I am announcing this information from the Government, using space to indicate various referents. If it's from Deaf Connect, then we have Deaf Connect branding to make it clear who I'm representing. One example that made me feel uneasy was the NABS video that was recently released. I was given documents from the Government to translate, but people assumed it was a Deaf Connect video because it was me signing it."***

- It is important for audiences and clients alike to understand that the translator on screen is only the messenger, not the source. As one practitioner explained, ***"As a translator, I'm not the person who is providing the information, I didn't make the decision that's being announced. I'm purely translating that information and making it accessible."***
- It is possible this risk could be mitigated through disclaimers about source and target texts, much like Government ads with endorsement disclaimers.

Market Risks

- Increased demand for Auslan translations coupled with insufficient regulation or standardisation presents practitioners with a number of risks, including risks to quality of Auslan translations online and systemic undermining of the workforce. As one practitioner explained, ***"The translation workforce itself is very small. Now it is people doing whatever they want because of such huge demand. And there's no real thought to who's teaching or what they know, and people who barely know anything are going out and teaching Auslan."***
- Undermining of the workforce occurs when hearing clients do not understand why there should be a Deaf translator presenting rather than a hearing interpreter. As one practitioner explained, ***"I have one client who contacted my services to produce a translation. They wanted a specific hearing interpreter to do it, they would pay for them to be the signer. So, we provided that service and that hearing interpreter was filmed doing the translation. Later the client wanted me to give them the hearing interpreter's contact information for an ongoing collaboration. They used my business to get in contact with the hearing interpreter so they could continue to use them without my business."***

These risks affect both the quality of translations and impacts on practitioners' professional experiences. There are also flow on impacts of low quality translations, such as Deaf and Deafblind people not being made aware of changes that will impact them personally, or not being able to take advantage of opportunities to contribute to civic life, and so on.

What are the mechanisms for change identified?

Mechanisms for change identified by Auslan translation practitioners include creation of an oversight body for monitoring the quality of Auslan translations online; legislation to govern the development and use of Auslan translations; the possibility of tiered standards for different job requirements; curriculum development; the use of annual reviews; a central repository; advocacy and funding for Auslan translation quality assurance; promotion and awareness building of Auslan translations; and greater Deaf and Deafblind community involvement.

Oversight Body

- Practitioners suggested the establishment of a Government-funded regulatory or monitoring body to ensure Auslan translation quality and compliance with any Auslan translation Guidelines. As one practitioner explained, ***“There needs to be some kind of Government commitment to oversee interpreting and translations, to ensure that there are quality checks, to make sure that there is a standard that is being met.”*** Such a body could also be viewed as a watchdog, necessary for monitoring and regulating the market especially in light of renewed competition for Auslan translation services under the NDIS, although it is unclear how the process could work in a timely manner.
- An oversight body would also relate to qualifications and credentials. As one practitioner explained, ***“Now that they have the Recognised Practising Translator credential, which will hopefully become a Certified Translator credential in time for English to Auslan and Auslan to English. When we do finally have the RPT English to Auslan credential in place, it could be similar to interpreters. If you’re an interpreter, you must follow the ASLIA Code of Ethics. Could it be the case that if you’re a translator, you must follow these Guidelines? Instead of Guidelines, rename them as a Code of Ethics, or something like that, rename them to something more powerful.”***

Legislation

- Practitioners suggested the implementation of legislation to support or enforce Guidelines and quality standards in translations. As one practitioner explained, ***“If it’s legislated then you would have to comply more than you would if it is simply a commitment.”***
- Another practitioner referred to legislation about the provisioning of closed captioning through analogue television, and the vast improvements to access that has brought to many Australians since captioning legislation was implemented.

Tiered Standards

- One practitioner suggested that the creation of a system of minimum to high-level standards might promote excellence. ***“As I said before, a tier of standards might be necessary in the Guidelines too. Whether there’s a minimum standard, and then a gold or platinum level standard in terms of what can be achieved depending on the resourcing available.”***

Curriculum Development

- Practitioners observed there is an urgent need to integrate translation training into existing Auslan education programs. As one practitioner explained, ***“While we have training for interpreting, we need something about translation in order to build those skills. Translation needs to be modelled in the curriculum. There could be units on translation within the Diploma of Interpreting. I don’t think what’s in training packages is enough. We certainly don’t have enough translation workshops, particularly those that are practical and hands-on. It’s all individual translators doing what they think, which is why their quality is so varied.”***
- Another practitioner shared that, ***“A course would be beneficial. And if Deaf Connect has their Deaf Translation course, following an approved training package, then that will be an important step. Training is not currently part of the process for Recognition as a Translator through NAATI. But once there is training available, then there is the potential for Recognition to become Certification, as we’ve seen with Deaf Interpreting.”***

- Translation training opportunities also extend to Professional Development opportunities. As one practitioner explained, ***"We also need to think about how we deliver Professional Development. Especially now that we have a NAATI credential, so working with NAATI, working with ASLITA. But at the same time, we need to be assessing the language levels of Auslan translators as well. What happens is we go ahead with something without checking what the needs are, we set ourselves up for failure, in the exact same way the Auslan LOTE Curriculum was set up for failure. All this work went into a great curriculum, and it's fantastic, but we didn't actually check who could teach what's in the Auslan curriculum, or how we assess the people who can teach that curriculum, which sets it up for failure. The launch of the curriculum should have been held off until we had appropriate people to deliver it."***

Annual Reviews

- Practitioners suggested there could be an Annual Review process to regularly update the Guidelines to reflect continued technological and industry changes, with support from stakeholders across the sector. As one practitioner observed, ***"When the 2015 Guidelines were published, was there buy-in from organisations? I think that was missing and that's what needs to be pushed in terms of how these can be complied with and potentially legislated."***
- Annual Review processes could also assist with the Quality Assurance of various translation products. As one practitioner explained, ***"Quality Assurance is such a problem. I think we also must consider the measurement and how we measure quality? Who can look after that? Do we have the expertise and the oversight for that? And the aim to pilot the 2015 Guidelines with translation service providers for 12 months. What happened with that action?"***
- AI-powered technologies such as Google Analytics could also be useful for monitoring the use and evolution of Auslan translations. As one practitioner explained, ***"Google Analytics means we can see how many people are clicking on it, whether they're viewing it, how long they're viewing it for. All of that data can be collected. People might be saying that it's great to have an Auslan translation or an Auslan version, but are they actually using it? One of my projects last year looked at that, and we noticed that people were stopping after only 5 minutes of viewing. So, now our videos are only 5 to 7 minutes as opposed to the 20-to-30-minute videos we were producing last year."***

Central Repository

- Practitioners suggested it could be useful to develop a platform for accessing all Auslan translations. Auslan translations are often not included in webpage lists of language translations and are generally hard to find. As one practitioner explained, ***"It would be great if there was a central repository to be able to see all of these Auslan translations. We create videos for our own subscriber service website, but translations that are made for Government or other not for profit organisations, it's not appropriate to put them on a fee-for-service website. Our website is used quite a lot, by Deaf people, Auslan students and Interpreting students...In New Zealand they have a central website where all of the NZSL translations that are created by all the different Government departments are kept in one place."*** This makes it easier for NZSL users to access Government translations on a regular basis.

Advocacy and Funding

- Many practitioners expressed the need to lobby for better funding and support for Auslan translation projects. As one practitioner explained, ***"Give the Guidelines some actual teeth. It comes back to the Deaf Community supporting Deaf Australia. I would like to see Deaf Australia become stronger as a body and be the peak organisation that other organisations feel like they have to follow, they can't push them aside."***
- One way of doing this would be to create Auslan only and Auslan-first programming. As one practitioner explained, ***"In a perfect world, there would be a whole news programme for the Deaf community, but unfortunately the ABC News government only funded Expression Australia for 3 minutes of news every week. That was it, 3 minutes. And we had to try and work around that limitation. We wanted Auslan-first news. It was a huge opportunity to spotlight Auslan at the time because that hadn't happened in Australia prior to that point. But Expression Australia wasn't funded completely for that, there wasn't funding to cover everything that was required, which was why it was unfortunately cut."***

- Many practitioners reported that Auslan-first videos are essential and yet it's a process that is still under development. This development is hampered by a lack of funding, which means practitioners are forced to fall back on other processes such as interpreting or translating information. As one practitioner explained, ***"The funding ran out and the project wasn't extended and so again, we're a bit stuck and we go back to typical translation processes."***
- Greater investment in the Auslan translation industry would promote career opportunities for Deaf and Deafblind people. As one practitioner explained, ***"I think that there are more opportunities for Deaf and Deafblind people in the translation industry. For those that have the bilingual skills in English and Auslan, the opportunities are there. There are concerns about funding and we don't want to disrupt the interpreting industry, but I think there needs to be some balance between the two."***
- Yet the low pay and lack of pay scales commensurate with career progression remains an issue. As one practitioner explained, ***"The pay for translators is another issue. The NAATI Translator guide two years ago was \$35/hour. No-one's going to accept that."***
- Some practitioners explained this issue occurs at all levels from clients. As one practitioner explained, ***"Last week I was asked to translate two pages of content for the Council. I asked how much I would be paid to produce it. This was an Interpreting Service Provider who was asking me to do the job. And I know that they have charged a substantial amount of money to the Council and yet they were only going to pay me two hours to actually produce it. Do these organisations think we're stupid? We know that they are charging the Council an arm and a leg to provide this service, and yet the people that actually do the translations are seeing very little of the fee that's being charged. There should be more value placed on those who are doing the translations. I have a NAATI credential as a translator. I should be paid more than those who don't have this credential."***
- One practitioner suggested contacting the media units, ***"They have a style guide that has to be followed for publishing. Getting the Guidelines inserted into those style guides might be worth looking at. They lay out the font size, the colours, the standards for the organisation."***
- Another way to get information out is through translators themselves. As one practitioner explained, ***"Through workshops, conferences, ASLITA. You could also look at Universities and talk with media students. If media students take it on, that sows a seed, and later when they are out in industry, they'll remember. It's approaching from all angles, grassroots, peers, and from the top, from the Government. Agencies also need to be holding organisations to the Guidelines."***

Promotion

- Practitioners suggested there needs to be more promotion and information for Deaf, Deafblind and hearing people alike about Auslan translations and how to use the Guidelines. As one practitioner explained, ***"I think a lot of people aren't even aware of them. More engagement with businesses, with local Government and Councils about the Guidelines and how translations should be produced."***
- Examples of such engagement include both in person and online activities, and a central online website. As one practitioner explained, ***"We need workshops promoting the use of the Guidelines and a website that has information. Having information on the website, with each of the sections easily accessible. Downloading the Guidelines as a document is fine, but also having it easy to access online is important because that's the technological world we live in today. It allows us to easily show the relevant information to people."***
- Another suggestion is for Government-funded videos to include a disclaimer that any Auslan translations produced were in adherence to the Guidelines.
- National organisations representing Deaf and hearing practitioners are also essential to engagement. As one practitioner explained, ***"ASLITA also needs to promote Deaf and Deafblind people doing this work. For example, with some Deaf organisations, we often see hearing interpreters doing a lot of the translations. Why? There's plenty of Deaf and Deafblind people out there who can do that work. Given them those opportunities...Hearing interpreters should be turning down that work and promoting Deaf and Deafblind translators."***

Community Involvement

- Practitioners suggested that Deaf organisations need to engage with the Guidelines for greater buy-in and representation. As one practitioner explained, ***“Businesses are often just ticking a box that says they’ve provided access. Yet the Government is always checking in with First Nations people and ensuring that things are appropriate for First Nations people, and that’s because of huge advocacy efforts and lobbying that First Nations people have done. We need to do something similar in the Deaf and Deafblind community.”***
- Engagement and community involvement needs to be an ongoing process. As one practitioner explained, ***“There needs to be a constant process of updating and consultation around the Guidelines, not a promotion once and then that’s it. There needs to be some agreement about how often they are looked at and updated. With the speed of technology, does there need to be some kind of formal consultation every two or three years? In five years, who knows what the technology will look like? There’s been a lot of technological changes in the last 10 years. And in the next 5 years we’re going to see a lot more AI. We may see things like holograms, avatars, who knows?”***

What are emerging Auslan-first alternatives to Auslan translations?

Online Auslan transcreations are a new form of creating Auslan-first video content (Linder, 2024). A transcreation involves producing content ‘in’ sign language rather than ‘with’ sign language, i.e., creating in Auslan-first and not from English-first (Dhoest & Rijckaert, 2021). It begins with information collected from various sources and languages, and ends with authentic, authored Auslan content. This method better suits Deaf and Deafblind realities through authentic Auslan authorship (Linder, 2024; see also Hodge & Goswell, 2021).

As Linder explains, ***“Transcreations should be embraced for cultural resonance, coherent storytelling, enhanced clarity of target messages, and improved comprehension for target audiences”*** (Linder, 2024: 19). The most effective examples of Auslan transcreations to date are the weekly world news summaries produced by the ABC between 2020 and 2022, as well as selected Auslan-first videos about artworks – including the Archibald Prize – hosted at the Art Gallery of NSW in 2021 and available on the [Art Gallery of NSW Auslan channel](#). These Auslan-first videos were widely recognised within the Deaf community for their Deaf-led process, visual storytelling, and audience accessibility. They offer a benchmark for Auslan-first transcreations going forward.

Do Deafblind viewers prefer Auslan translations and/or transcreations?

This section summarises the responses from the 2026 ACCAN Auslan Translation Survey developed by Deaf Australia to test Deaf and low vision Deafblind Auslan signers’ preferences for viewing Auslan translations and transcreations online. Two surveys were developed (Survey A and Survey B) with each survey containing four videos (two translations, two transcreations) on four different topics, including climate change education, diabetes prevention, information about a new anti-bullying programme, and economic inflation. Topics were presented in the same order in each survey, so that all respondents avoided watching both a translation and a transcreation on the same topic, due to priming effects. In other words, two different groups of respondents were instead shown the two different surveys.

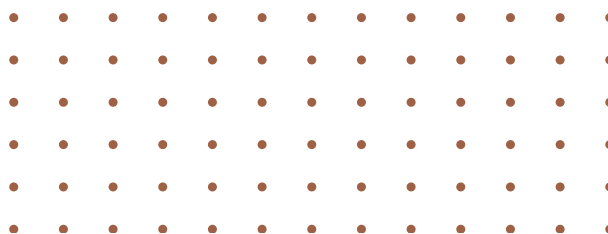
We received 40 complete responses to the surveys in total, including 30 Deaf people, 9 Deafblind people and 1 person who described themselves as Deaf Wheelchair. Survey A received 23 complete responses (including from 5 Deafblind people) and Survey B received 17 complete responses (including from 4 Deafblind people and one Deaf Wheelchair person). However, the results from this survey were inconclusive in terms of whether Auslan transcreations or Auslan translations are strongly preferred for all topics. Instead, it seems that Auslan transcreations are often preferred by low vision Deafblind Auslan users, although Auslan translations are also acceptable in some cases. Overall, the survey represents a starting step in deeply analysing which types of Auslan videos are most comprehensible for which topics.

When originally released in 2015, the ACCAN Guidelines were a valuable resource at a time when Auslan translations were becoming increasingly important to the Deaf community. As technology and research have advanced, so too have the expectations and needs within the community. From the outset of this project, our goal was to include low vision Deafblind perspectives and explore new directions to better serve the diversity of the Deaf community.

We were enthusiastic about introducing the Auslan-first concept. After extensive interviews with industry and Deafblind stakeholders, and through the survey results, we gathered a wide range of feedback. This feedback showed that while Auslan-first is a promising approach, it is still in its early stages and may not suit all types of text sources or audiences. The Deaf community is made up of individuals with varied backgrounds and needs, reinforcing the importance of offering flexible approaches rather than a single solution. Recognising this, we shifted direction later in the project. Instead of a full revamp, we made targeted adjustments to the 2015 Guidelines, focusing on providing a range of translation methods and placing greater emphasis on findings from our stakeholder consultations. This approach ensures the 2026 Guidelines remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of a wide range of Auslan users in the Deaf and Deafblind community (Hodge, Thornton & Linder, 2026).

Conclusion

This project identified both key gaps and persistent issues with the 2015 Guidelines and clear directions for future actions. Access to accurate and timely information is a cornerstone of all human rights and this is not currently being provided to a significant number of Deaf and Deafblind Auslan users nationwide. This report and the companion 2026 Guidelines document may be used to reignite actions for improving and developing the quality of Auslan videos online, for the benefit of all Auslan users. They also highlight the need for ongoing support such as funding and the development of training opportunities for Auslan translation and transcreation development.



We acknowledge and respect the members of the Deaf and Deafblind Community in Australia, who preserve our rich heritage, culture, and language Auslan. We acknowledge our Auslan teachers and educators, who work to promote awareness and equality for deaf and deafblind signing peoples, and access through our sign language.

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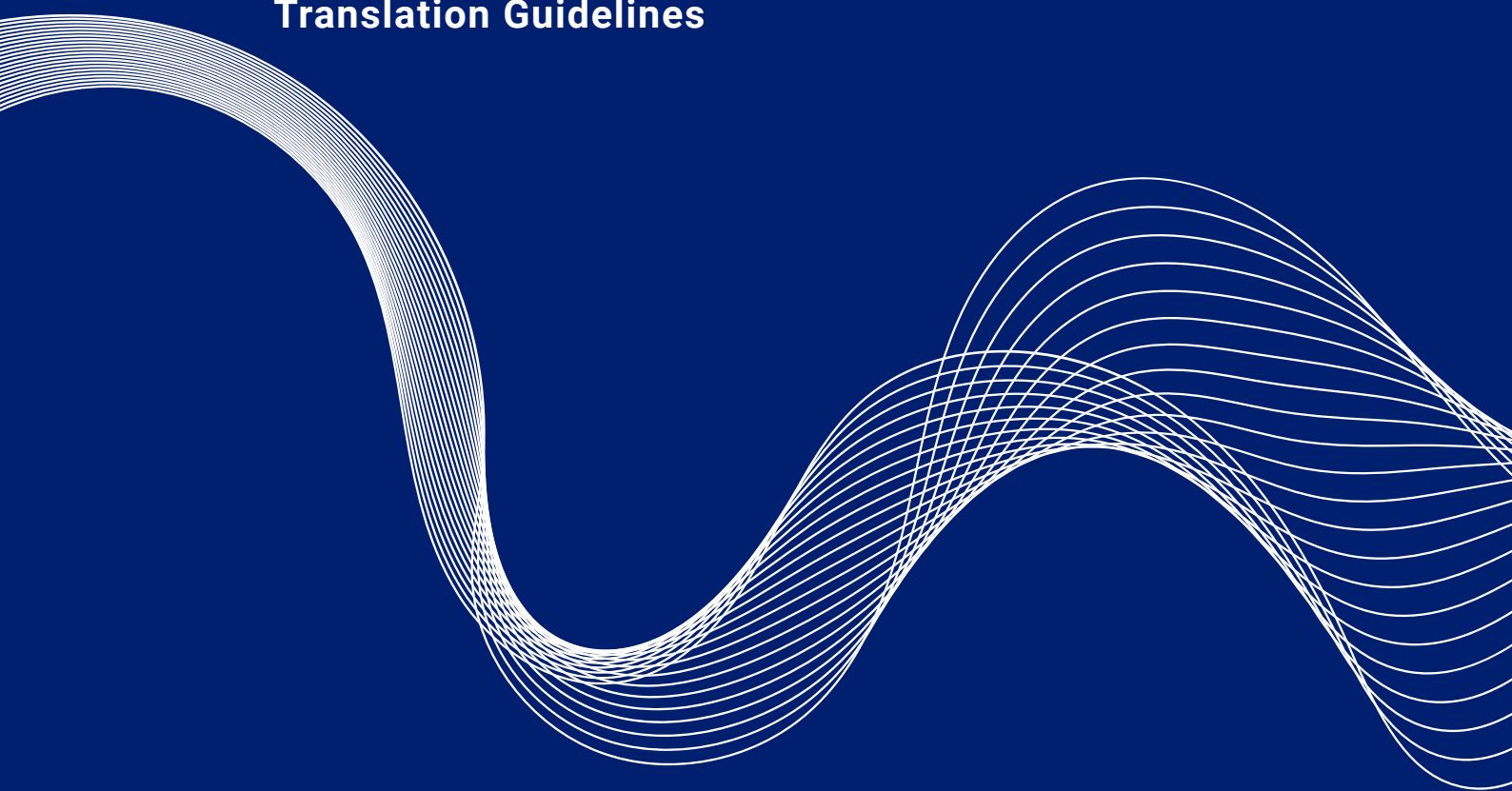
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Fortifying the 2015 Auslan
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