

# Issues in Questionnaire Translation

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# Why focus on Questionnaire Translation?

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The purpose of questionnaire translation is to produce instruments that **maintain equivalence of measurement** across languages/dialects, to achieve a functionally equivalent and culturally appropriate version of the original instrument.

Only in this way will it be possible to achieve results that are **comparable cross-nationally**.

# When is Questionnaire Translation Necessary?

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- ✓ Cross-national studies
- ✓ National studies by Federal Statistical Agencies that will include multiple local cultures and capture the diversity of emerging immigrant populations
- ✓ Studies of special populations – for example, Hispanic populations in the US that would involve different national varieties/dialects of Spanish (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Haitian etc.)

# Defining Target Audience

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- ✓ Language minorities
- ✓ Immigrant populations
- ✓ Monolingual (or at least not bilingual)
- ✓ Language different from designers'
- ✓ Lower level of education
- ✓ Hybrid culture
- ✓ Different degrees of acculturation

# Questions to Consider in Translation

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- ✓ Matching meaning?
- ✓ Matching measurement?
- ✓ Asking the same question?
- ✓ When does "close" count?

# Effects of Overly Close Translation

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- ✓ Focus on meaning of words rather than meaning of questions
- ✓ Respondents are inadvertently asked a different question
- ✓ Processing is more complex
- ✓ Translated questionnaire sounds unidiomatic

# Survey Translation

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- ✓ One translator – one translation
- ✓ Multiple translators – one translation (split committee)
- ✓ Multiple translators – multiple parallel translations (parallel committee)
- ✓ A note on back translation

# Committee Approach

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- ✓ Three translators prepare translations independently (split or parallel)
- ✓ Reconciliation meeting with referee
- ✓ Qualitative research with monolinguals (focus groups and/or cognitive interviews)



# Steps in producing and testing question translations

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- ✓ Translation
- ✓ Translation review
- ✓ Decisions/Adjudication
- ✓ Quality control
- ✓ Qualitative research
- ✓ Pretesting
- ✓ Documentation

# Reconciliation Meeting

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- ✓ Question-by-question review
- ✓ Reaching consensus when possible
- ✓ Providing alternatives if no consensus possible
- ✓ Identifying terms/items for qualitative research

# Referee's role

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- ✓ Resolves style disagreements
- ✓ Manages interaction
- ✓ Brings survey researcher perspective
- ✓ Keeps an eye on source version
- ✓ Pushes for global decisions
- ✓ Liaison with research team for consultation and documentation

# Focus groups

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- ✓ Allow for the ability to distinguish what is idiosyncratic
- ✓ Allow us to listen to how Respondents use language
- ✓ Allow to include more people in a shorter time
- ✓ Allow to include different national origin Respondents and see if they reach consensus

# Cognitive Interviews

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- ✓ Allow to administer all or part of instrument
- ✓ Give a glimpse into thought processes
- ✓ Allow to see how different alternative terms work

# Advantages of Approach

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- ✓ Group process benefits
- ✓ Include different varieties of language in translation team
- ✓ Incorporates target population into process
- ✓ Relatively low cost
- ✓ Relatively quick

# What is wrong with back translation?

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Back Translation is a black box: we know what went in, we know what came out, yet we know nothing about the adequacy of the translated version.

It consists of 2 consecutive individual translations – compounding the weaknesses of the translator's idiosyncrasies and possible uneven skills in both languages.

# Efforts to Standardize Translation Procedures

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- ✓ Census Bureau Translation Guidelines
- ✓ International Social Survey Program
- ✓ European Social Survey
- ✓ Survey Research Organizations



# Standardizing Translated Versions of the Same Questions

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## Issues:

- ✓ Maintaining longitudinal comparability vs. improving questions
- ✓ Is priority to compare with past translations or with original English questionnaire?
- ✓ Is there a strong will to overcome political (& power) issues?
- ✓ Negotiations can be arduous