Questionnaire Design in a Hurry – Statistics Canada’s 2011 Census Redesign

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Overview of Canadian Census
Census Questionnaire Development Process
2011 Census - Changes
Questionnaire Redesign and Evaluation
Test Results
Future
Canada’s Census of Population

- Every 5 years
- Household based
- Mandatory to respond
- Paper & Internet questionnaires
- Interviewer follow-up
- Two questionnaires
  - Short form (2A) - 80% of households
  - Long form (2B) - 20% of households
Census Questionnaires

- **Short form (2A) - 80% households**
  - Names of all household members
  - Age, Sex, Marital status, Common-law status, Language, Relationship to “person 1” (adult), Willingness to share data in future

- **Data we are mandated to collect under the Statistics Act** - population count & demographics
Long form (2B) - 20% households

- Same info as the short form plus much more
- Education (detailed), Activity limitations, Languages, Place of birth, Citizenship, Ethnicity, Labour market activities (detailed), Mobility, Income (detailed), Dwelling info, etc.
Questionnaire Development Process

- 4 year process
- Starts 5 years before Census day
- Consult stakeholders, researchers, data users, etc.
- Research questions, draft wording
- Qualitative testing
- Quantitative testing – National Census Test
- Final questionnaires 1 year before collection
- All plans were in place
- Short form very similar to 2006
- Long form updated and thoroughly tested
- Government decides to make long form voluntary
2011 Census Changes

- Long form is no longer part of the Census
  - Birth of the National Household Survey
- A lot of changes to sampling methodology, collection strategies, processing plans, etc.
- Minimal changes to questionnaires (at first)
- Court battle
- 3 language questions added to short form
2011 Census Questionnaires

- **Long form**
  - No longer part of Census
  - Now the National Household Survey
  - Questionnaire very, very similar

- **Short form**
  - Add 3 questions on language
2011 Census Short Form Options

- Smaller font to make it fit
- Larger paper (perhaps legal size)
- Add pages (perhaps a booklet like long form)
- Add pages (more complex fold-out)
2011 Census Short Form Limitations

- Printers

- Questions already approved
  - Wording cannot change
- Questions had all been tested (approved)
- Several instructions changed
- New multi-fold form layout
  - Risk that if not completely unfolded, respondents will miss 5 questions, including the language questions
Testing the Redesigned Questionnaire

- 3 phases of testing
  - 2 phases for the Short form paper questionnaire
  - 1 phase for the Internet questionnaire
- Phase I
  - 36 cognitive interviews in 2 cities
- Phase II
  - 48 cognitive interviews in 4 cities
- Phase II
  - 30 cognitive interviews in 2 cities
Testing the Redesigned Questionnaire

- Phase I used 2 versions of test questionnaires
  - Systematically rotated amongst interviews
- Various methods employed to catch attention
  - Side banner (in different colors)
  - Bottom banner (with & without arrows)
  - Instructions
  - Colour (background of page)
  - Colour (person labels)
  - Back page reminder to answer all questions
Results of Questionnaire Testing

- Main question – do respondents completely unfold the questionnaire?
  - About 15% did not
    - All 1 or 2 person households
Results of Questionnaire Testing

- Anything outside the “border” is ignored
  - Side banner
  - Bottom banners
- Colour change helps
  - Both background of page and person labels
  - But mainly for 3+ person households
- Instruction after question 1 most useful
  - Thought of adding a symbol
  - Confirmed in phase 2 of testing
Summary

- Visual design
  - Stay within the box, particularly if coloured
  - Make important instructions look like questions

- It is possible to test a questionnaire quickly
  - Need to limit the focus of the test
  - Need a cooperative, decisive client who can prioritize, work long hours and has appropriate design tools
Future

- 2016 Census forms
  - Printing limitations gone
  - Parliament approval limitation gone
    - Still have plenty of time

But, historical comparability …
For more information, please contact:

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