

# NatCen

National Centre *for* Social Research

## **Challenges in designing and testing questionnaires to be administered in multiple languages**

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## Outline

- Why are translated survey questions needed?
- Challenges and approaches in translation
- Why should cognitive testing be used?
- What can cognitive testing in target languages tell you about questionnaires?
- Challenges in cognitive testing in multiple languages
- Are there alternatives?
- Two examples from NatCen
- Discussion

## Why are translated survey questions needed?

- Cross-national research
- May be more than one official language
- May be legal requirement for regional/national languages to be provided
- Members of some minority ethnic groups may not speak main or national language(s)

## Health Survey for England 2004

% interviews in translation by ethnic group

|             | <b>Men</b> | <b>Women</b> |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| Indian      | 8          | 13           |
| Pakistani   | 17         | 26           |
| Bangladeshi | 31         | 36           |
| Chinese     | 6          | 10           |

## Challenges in translation

- Which languages to translate into:
  - number
  - choice
  - dialects and non-written languages
- In UK:
  - no census data on prevalence of languages
  - large and changing number of minority languages
  - Political/ sensitivity issues
  - no written form/ multiple scripts for key languages
  - requirement to translate into Welsh

## 2008 Schools Census: Main languages spoken by at least 10,000 (0.2%) children

- Punjabi \*
- Urdu \*
- Bengali \*
- Gujarati \*
- Somali \*
- Polish
- Arabic \*
- Portuguese
- Turkish
- Tamil
- French
- Yoruba
- Chinese \*
- Spanish



## Translation and cultural issues

“It is precisely because language and culture are so intimately related that the problem of measurement equivalence in cross-cultural surveys is so intractable.” Blais and Gidengil (1993)

“If the data are to be used to make comparisons between groups then the questions must be conceptually and functionally equivalent and salient for all the groups compared.” Hunt and Bhopal (2004)



## Translation and cultural issues

- Emic and etic concepts
- Finalise source questionnaire first, or
- Devise language questionnaires in parallel?
- Is survey process culturally transferable?
- Does cognitive testing work for different groups?
- Conceptual equivalence rather than literal translation

## Approaches to translation

- Single translation (with checking)
- Iterative process (TRAPD)
- Back translation
- Comparison between target languages
- Hybrid approaches

## Translation by email



- Welsh reads: “I am not in the office at the moment. Send any work to be translated.”



## Why should cognitive testing of translated questions be used?

- Identify translation errors which even committee approaches can miss
- To test in survey context
- To test with target population
  - Translators tend to be more educated and acculturated
  - Translators are bilingual
  - To test with different language sub-groups
- Within language group there may be cultural differences
- Identify problems in source questions



## What can cognitive testing in target languages tell us?

- Source question/ general design errors
  - Translation problems
    - Human error in translation
    - Sub-optimal translation
    - Regional/ cultural variations within language
  - Characteristics of source question impede translation
  - Cultural issues
    - Emic v Etic concepts
    - Adaptation or culturally specific
- (Fitzgerald et al forthcoming, Levin et al, 2009)

## Questions raised by cognitive testing

- Should source questionnaire be changed or only target languages?
- When should testing of target languages take place?
- Should all languages be tested?
- Should monolingual sample be selected for testing?



## Practical challenges

- Availability of suitable staff
  - Cognitive interviewing skills and language skills
  - Bilingual researchers
- Number of languages
- Need to translate probes, interviewer notes/transcriptions
- Number of questions in survey
- Timetables
- Budgets

## Are there alternatives?

- Inclusion of language/ cultural experts in research team or steering group
- Extensive testing in English
  - Among general population
  - Among English speaking members of minority groups
- Round table discussions prior to translation
- Desk review of translations by survey interviewers
- Field piloting with debriefing questionnaire
- Cognitive testing in key language(s)

## Example: Communities Survey

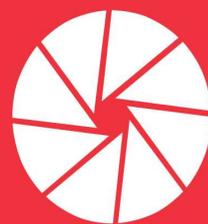
- Lack of time for cognitive testing in multiple languages
- Focus groups in English
- Revisions to questions
- Cognitive testing in English
- Meeting of researchers and four translators to discuss questionnaire in English
- Revisions to English questions prior to translation

## Example: UKHLS

- Household based individual panel survey
- 40,000 households, 100,000 respondents
- Ethnic boost: 10,000
- Translate into 9 languages using hybrid approach
- Extensive cognitive testing in English
  - Multiple questionnaires
  - Range of ethnic minorities included
- Translation into 2 languages for pilot
- Translation of 7 languages in parallel with dress rehearsal
- Re-translation after dress rehearsal
- Checking and formatting

## Discussion

- When should we pre-test?
  - Which types of questions and surveys?
  - Which languages/ cultural groups?
- How long should be allowed?
- Are there other alternatives?



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