

Cross-Cultural Survey Methods and Translation



RTI International understands the importance of cultural and linguistic appropriateness in study design and implementation. Our experienced survey and language methodologists translate survey materials, design and pretest cross-cultural instruments, and provide advice on reaching linguistically isolated populations. We have extensive experience conducting surveys and research in multiple languages, particularly Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. We are also leaders in cross-cultural research, having established a line of literature in peer-reviewed journals, professional conferences, and publications.

Overview

RTI's survey and language methodologists inform questionnaire construction and implementation to minimize survey error introduced through translation and cultural factors that alter the meaning of questions. We have considerable expertise in pretesting survey materials and instruments in multiple languages. We also excel in cognitive appraisal coding, during which design and language experts perform a technical review of cross-cultural instruments and evaluate translation quality. Our translators are bilingual and bicultural, and we advocate a team approach to translation. These capabilities are supported by our specialized facilities, including a cognitive and usability testing laboratory and focus group rooms.

Areas of Expertise

Culturally Appropriate Translations

RTI language methodologists have the expertise and cultural background to translate, edit, and proof survey materials in Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. They have experience with a variety of topics, including education, information technology, health, drug and alcohol use, sexual behaviors, and HIV. The materials they translate

typically include questionnaires, consent forms, lead letters, brochures, training materials, contracts, focus group scripts, cognitive interview protocol guides, and reports.

Cognitive Interviewing and Focus Groups

Our staff have extensive experience conducting cognitive interviews and focus groups in non-English languages and effectively screening and recruiting non-English speakers and immigrants to join research studies. These in-depth cognitive interviews and focus groups provide valuable information as research studies are being designed—for example, whether the translation sounds natural and culturally appropriate, and how respondents view the question-answer process and interpret complex terminology in their sociocultural frame of reference.

Leader in Cross-Cultural Research

Existing cross-cultural measurement literature focuses on effective translation to achieve equivalent survey instruments. Our survey methodologists go beyond this focus on translation methods and examine various topics that advance the current literature. We have published and presented on the following: cognitive interviewing techniques across languages and cultures, efficiency and

evaluation of recruitment methods to reach non-English speakers, best practices in translation methods and quality appraisal, use of vignettes in evaluating multilingual questionnaires, and the role of language as a factor affecting the response formation process and cueing related cultural values and norms.

Questionnaire Appraisal System

RTI's Questionnaire Appraisal System (QAS) is a coding tool for pretesting instruments that can be used as a practical, inexpensive way to improve methodological practices in cross-cultural research. The QAS is supported by an item taxonomy of the cognitive demands of a question and documents features that may introduce response error. Results of the appraisal are used to revise question wording, response wording, questionnaire format, and question order. The QAS incorporates criteria for evaluating questions for multilingual and cross-cultural administration and identifies potential problems that result from cross-cultural or translation issues.

Non-English Language Support

Our language methodologists record questions used for audio computer-assisted interviewing (ACASI) surveys, lead bilingual interviewer trainings, and respond to incoming calls from non-English speaking study participants. They also create and edit non-English language questionnaires using professional desktop publishing software.

Translation Evaluation System

Our Translation Evaluation System guides language experts to conduct translation Expert Review through a systematic appraisal. Based on the cognitive appraisal coding concept developed by the QAS, the evaluation system is a coding tool that prompts users to consider whether a translation item exhibits lexical and syntactic features that lead to difficulties in respondent comprehension, cultural appropriateness, and survey-specific issues.

Bilingual Skills Assessment

Before interviewers are assessed as qualified to work on a project that requires language skills other than English, they must complete and pass a language skills assessment. The assessment evaluates the conversational fluency, reading, and writing skills of each interviewer candidate.

Project Highlights

The following studies demonstrate RTI's track record in designing, conducting, and reporting on surveys with cross-cultural research focus and considerations.

- **Pretesting Census 2010 Questionnaire in Five Languages.** RTI conducted cognitive interviews in English, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian to determine the accuracy and effectiveness of the translations of Census 2010 mailout/mailback self-administered questionnaires.
- **2010 Census Language Program: Bilingual Questionnaire Research.** RTI conducted cognitive interviews and focus groups in English and Spanish about the layout of a bilingual form and, subsequently, its Spanish translation developed for use in the decennial census.
- **Cognitive Testing of Translation of American Community Survey Instrument, Language Assistance Guide, and Supporting Materials in Multiple Languages.** RTI conducted over 1,000 cognitive interviews across several contracts for the U.S. Census Bureau to evaluate translations of lead letters, brochures, and questionnaires. Languages included Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, French, Haitian-Creole, Polish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and English.
- **National Survey on Drug Use and Health.** Since 1988, RTI has provided Spanish language support for this national study. Spanish components include questionnaire development, audio-recording for self-administered sections, testing, supplemental training for bilingual interviewers, data collection, and field observations.
- **World Trade Center Health Registry.** This project used a Web-based instrument in Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, and English to establish a baseline registry of over 71,000 individuals.

More Information

Marjorie Hinsdale-Shouse
Manager, Program for Research in Survey Methodology
919. 541.7368
mhs@rti.org

RTI International
3040 Cornwallis Road, PO Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194 USA

RTI 7587 0411



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