

Co-editors' Preface

Mandy Sha and Tim Gabel

This book discusses the role of language in survey research when comparisons across groups, cultures, and countries are of interest. Language use in surveys is dynamic, including words, symbols (e.g., arrows), and even emojis. Language users, such as survey respondents and interviewers, must speak the same language literally and figuratively to interact with each other. As diversity grows in the United States and globally, interviewers and respondents may speak a different language or speak the same language differently in a way that reflects their own cultural norms of communication.

The entire survey life cycle is carried out through language. Researchers write or translate questions and instructions that will address research questions and then pretest them using various techniques, including qualitative inquiry that focuses on context beyond just “the numbers.” Human or virtual data collectors use persuasive messages to communicate with survey respondents and encourage their survey participation. Respondents must comprehend and interpret survey questions and instructions to provide a response. All of these survey processes and products contribute to data quality, and the role of language is essential.

Organization of the Book

We have divided the book into two parts. The first six chapters in Part I focus on language influences on survey responses and data quality, and the next six chapters in Part II discuss sociolinguistic factors that inform survey design and implementation, including qualitative and innovative methods. We organized the book this way to acknowledge that language functions within social and cultural contexts. To reach the target populations, we must understand the underlying theories and current practices surrounding language influences on survey responses and data quality (Part I) before advancing existing or innovative methods to design and implement surveys (Part II). The book is structured to help the reader develop this understanding, consider the relevant quantitative and qualitative methods, and come away with forward-looking perspectives. At

the end of the book, the afterword relates each chapter to the survey life cycle through the multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) framework.

We begin each of the two parts with a chapter focused on theory and/or prior published literature. The remainder of the chapters demonstrate a comparative perspective or challenge, as well as the strategies that were undertaken to address them. Some of the literature is reviewed in more than one chapter to establish a connection between the theories and the specific topic under study.

Part I. Language Influences on Survey Responses and Data Quality

In Chapter 1, Emilia Peytcheva applies the existing response formation model to a cross-cultural and multilingual context. Her chapter combines theories from psycholinguistics and survey methodology and can serve as a primer for readers who are new to cross-cultural surveys or survey research in general.

In Chapter 2, Evgenia Kapousouz, Tim Johnson, and Allyson Holbrook examine behavior coded survey interviews conducted in English, Spanish, and Korean to see whether characteristics of the interviewer (e.g., same sex as respondent) and factors related to the respondent (e.g., demographics, acculturation, language of the interview) predict whether respondents request clarifications regarding deliberately problematic questions. Overall, only language was predictive, such that respondents who were interviewed in Korean or Spanish were more likely to ask for clarifications. But few respondents in any language asked for clarifications of problematic survey questions. Thus, they encourage researchers to carefully design questionnaires and pretest them with each of the cultural groups that will be surveyed.

In Chapter 3, Heather Kitada Smalley investigates the effects of household language on data quality in the American Community Survey (ACS). Using publicly available microdata from 2006 through 2017, Heather provides a longitudinal, quantitative perspective. The sequential aspect of ACS survey mode phases and translation aids across modes led to significant differences in mode distribution across five major language groups: English, Spanish, Other Indo-European, Asian and Pacific Island, and a final group that encompasses other languages. Heather also provides data science education by sharing the R code she developed for the weighting scheme and the data visualization techniques.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine interview language from different perspectives. In Chapter 4, Sunghee Lee and colleagues illustrate an assessment of measurement equivalence between English and Spanish response scale translation by randomizing interview language with bilingual English- and Spanish-speaking Latino American respondents. They conclude that overall there was a language effect when bilingual Latinos were interviewed in English as opposed to in Spanish. Chapter 5, by Charles Q. Lau, Stephanie Eckman, Luis Sevilla-Kreysa, and Benjamin Piper, also examines issues surrounding interview language in Africa. Many Africans are multilingual. This means respondents and interviewers may not share the same home (native) language. Although the respondent and interviewer may speak a common language for the interview, that language may not be the native language for either of them. By describing patterns of survey language use in 36 African countries that participated in Afrobarometer Round 6, Charles and his coauthors have deepened our knowledge about language choice in African survey research and methodological considerations on data quality. Chapter 6 is a research brief by Nicholas Heck-Grosseck and Sonila Dardha, who study interview language from the angle of language barriers. In large-scale comparative surveys in Europe, one of the criteria to be an eligible household is the ability to speak the official language(s) of the country. Nicholas and Sonila find that migrant communities with language barriers are “hidden segments” in the three largest European countries. For example, in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, sampling units with a language barrier tend to have poor living conditions. These migrants might differ significantly from the general population on demographic, attitudinal, or behavioral traits, but inferences cannot be reliably made until the “void of the voiceless” is addressed in study design.

Part II. Survey Questionnaire Development and Implementation

Pretesting is crucial to the questionnaire design process in any language prior to survey implementation. In the second part of the book, Eva Aizpurua provides an extensive literature review (Chapter 7) on the current state of pretesting methods in cross-cultural surveys, including a section on combining multiple methods. Many of these methods produce qualitative information, and there is an existing gap in the literature about evaluating focus groups and translation expert reviews as comparative research methods.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 fill this gap. In Chapter 8, Mandy Sha, Hyunjoo Park, Yuling Pan, and Jennifer Kim demonstrate that focus groups can be used as a credible research method, despite notable cross-cultural differences in focus group interactions they have identified. Using a coding scheme based on sociolinguistic theory, they analyze the linguistic behavior of speakers of five languages (English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese) and those speakers' participatory patterns in a focus group discussion about survey data collection materials. Chapters 9 and 10 introduce the reader to translation evaluations prior to data collection and advocate for the expert review model. Chapter 9 is a collaboration between scholars in the United States and China. Led by Maichou Lor, the authors explore the assumptions and implications of using "back translation," a common procedure of translating a document *from* the source language (e.g., English) into the target language (e.g., Hmong) and *back* to the source language. The purpose of back translation is to identify discrepancies between the source and the back translation to assess the translation quality in the target language. However, using examples from Hmong and Chinese, they find that back translation is inappropriate as a quality assessment tool. Instead, they recommend that the international research community follow modern survey translation methodology that inherently includes translation expert review. Chapter 10 is a collaboration between scholars from Spain and the United States. Led by Nereida Congost-Maestre, the authors question the applicability of a previously developed Spanish translation in the United States to other Spanish-speaking countries in which it is now used. Specifically, evaluation of the Spanish translation of the internationally recognized Quality of Well-Being Scale–Self-Administered (QWB-SA) through an expert review demonstrates that the QWB-SA cannot be readily adopted for use in Spain. The chapter provides many poignant examples, from the perspective of the reviewer in Spain, showing translation issues at both linguistic and sociocultural levels in the QWB-SA.

Chapters 11 and 12 provide a glimpse into what the future holds for language and its users in designing and implementing survey research. In Chapter 11, Arundati Dandapani presents a research brief about emerging uses and the best practices for designing chatbot surveys. Arundati describes a chatbot as a computer program that uses artificial intelligence (AI) "to communicate via text or audio, simulating the conversation of humans through messaging apps, websites, mobile apps, smart devices, or even

through the telephone.” The innovative use of AI-powered chatbots opens up new possibilities to survey specific populations and to collect qualitative insights. The final chapter is a research brief written by a team of UX researchers and designers led by Aaron Sedley. Instead of presenting a satisfaction scale that uses translated labels or is numerical, Aaron and his colleagues at Google use smiley faces (emojis) and examine their performance across six cultural and language settings: United States (English), Germany (German), Spain (Spanish), Brazil (Portuguese), India (English), and Japan (Japanese).

In these 12 chapters, we show the essential role of language in survey responses, data quality, and questionnaire development and implementation across national, linguistic, and social boundaries and among multicultural populations within one nation. By disseminating survey theories and methods in accessible content and format, this book addresses a pressing need among researchers and practitioners to reach the increasingly diverse target populations with clearer survey questions, greater sensitivity, and more effective data collection methods.