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Cognitive Interviewing with Asian Populations : Findings from Chinese and Korean Interviews

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Overview

- Background
- Methodology
- Recruitment and participants
- Findings
- Lessons

Background

- Survey materials are translated into other languages with the growth of multilingual surveys. However, we are not sure if these texts are delivered as intended.
- This study examines the translation of survey materials from English into multiple languages undertaken at the U.S. Census Bureau. This presentation focuses on Chinese and Korean interviews.
- We aim at contributing to survey research to soundly pretest the accuracy and validity of translated survey questionnaires and supporting documents.

Cognitive Pretesting of Translated Materials

- Cognitive interviews (Willis, 2005)
 - In-depth interview
 - Mental processes of comprehension
 - Probing techniques
- Respondents read the translated texts
- Probing questions to find out respondents' comprehension and interpretation

Methodology

- Cognitive interview with monolingual Chinese and Korean population to examine main message delivery such as survey purpose, confidentiality, statistical data use, mandatory survey, etc
- Material used: American Community Survey (ACS) Supporting Documents translated into Chinese and Korean

Protocol#1	Protocol#2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Introductory Letter■ Information Brochure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Thank You Letter■ Q&A Brochure

Procedure

- Organized panel of experts
- Developed recruiting plan, protocols, and study consent forms
- Trained interviewers for cognitive interviews
- Recruited and interviewed Round 1 participants (Feb – March 2006)
- Reviewed findings after the 1st round and prepared revised protocols
- Recruited and interviewed Round 2 participants (April – May, 2006)

Recruitment and Participants

- Recruiting target by demographics identified in ACS 2004 data - education achievement, year of entry, age & gender. For Chinese, additionally by major Chinese dialects (Mandarin, Cantonese, Fukanses)
- Recruiting Method: Posting ads in local ethnic newspapers/ethnic web-communities; Posting flyers in ethnic grocery stores, churches; Getting cooperation from community service centers and schools, and word-of-mouth.
- Monolingual speakers of the target language are recruited through screening questions to determine language dominance (The total of 24 participants per language across two rounds of interview)

Summary of Findings

- Findings from translated material
 - Name of survey (American Community Survey)
 - Confusion due to different communication style
 - Difficult concept (Confidentiality, Mandatory survey)
 - Inaccurate wording & High level vocabulary
 - Unnatural sentences
 - Incomplete translation
 - Layout and design

Findings from translated material (1)

: Name of ACS (American Community Survey)

- The current Chinese translation “美国社区调查 (The American Community Investigation)” gave the impression that the ACS is a social investigation.
 - This confusion disappeared with the new translation “美国社区问卷调查 (The American Community Questionnaire Survey/Investigation)”
- The current Korean translation “미국 지역사회 조사 (The American Community Survey)” aroused wonder about whether only U.S. citizens, not illegal immigrants/permanent residents, are eligible.
 - The new translation “미국의 지역사회에 대한 조사(Survey of Communities in the U.S.)” turned out to be equally misleading.

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from Translated materials (2)

: Confusion due to communication style

Dear Resident:

The U.S. Census Bureau is conducting the American Community Survey. A Census Bureau representative will contact you to help you complete the survey. I would appreciate your help, because the success of this survey depends on you.

- For English respondents, this message was clear and they understood it well. “This letter is trying to motivate people to participate in the survey.”
- Both Chinese and Korean respondents had difficulty understanding the purpose of the introductory letter. They thought that the letter was about community services.

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from Translated materials (2)

: Confusion due to communication style – Cont.

- Various cultures show different preferred discourse structures in writing (e.g., Hinds, 1990; Bhatia, 1997; Scollon and Scollon, 1995, 2002)
- Preferred discourse structure in English writing is deductive pattern: Main point → supporting details, reasons
- Preferred discourse structure in Asian cultures is inductive pattern: Background information (reasons, details) → main point
- Letter requests respondents to participate in the ACS at the beginning without enough explanation of the ACS — They expect to see the main idea at the end.
- This was more difficult for those who lack survey knowledge and those with a lower level of education.

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from translated material (3)

: Difficult concept - Confidentiality

- Legal statement about confidentiality by citing all the references of Title 13 looked too serious and intimidating.
- In stead of relief, this emphasis can cause doubt and fear because it conjured up thoughts of risk of participation such as legal enforcement and deportation.
- They regard a great part of the society as being ruled by human relations.
 - *동일한 법이 여러분이 제공하시는 정보의 기밀성을 보호합니다(The same law protects the confidentiality of the information that you provide)*

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from translated material (3)

: Difficult concept – Mandatory nature of survey.

- Parts describing “mandatory characteristics of the ACS” aroused negative feeling due to the direct way of communicating this message. This could be interpreted as overly direct or even rude in Korean culture.
 - 미국 법에 따라 귀하는 이 조사에 응답해야 합니다 (You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey)
- Koreans think highly of decorum and it is strange for Koreans to see this command-like text, under this culture.
- We recommend to use the text “Your survey participation conforms to the U.S. law and we ask you to respond to this survey.”

Only Korean

Findings from translated material (4)

: Inaccurate Wording & High Level Vocabulary

- Inaccurately translated words caused confusion.
 - 2개월 이상 이 주소에 거주하는 경우, 전체 설문서를 작성해야 합니다. 거주 기간이 2개월 이하인 경우라도, 지시사항에 따라 설문서의 일부를 작성해야 합니다 (If you are staying at the address for 2 months or more, you must complete the entire survey. If you are staying for 2 months or less, you must still complete a portion of the survey)
 - “Information”: There are two words for information in Chinese. One (信息) refers to public information; the other (资料) refers to personal information.
- Use of high level vocabulary also caused unnecessary difficulty for respondents.
 - “如果您有上网能力 ...” (If you have the ability to go on the internet)
→ “如果您能上网 ...” (If you can go on the internet ...)

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from translated material (5)

: Sentences that do not read naturally

- Direct or literal translations which didn't take into account the Chinese/Korean sentence structure were problematic.
 - “本项调查的成功取决于您和被选择参加本项调查的其他家庭的合作。” (The success of this survey is based on the cooperation between you and other families that are selected for this survey) → Add one phrase “(cooperation) provided by you and other families ...)
- There were sentences with inappropriate words with different connotation.
 - 귀하의 참여는 매우 소중합니다 (Your participation is greatly appreciated)
 - 가구에 대한 연락을 시도합니다 (the Census Bureau attempts to contact the household)

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from translated material (5)

: Sentences that do not read naturally – Cont.

- Long and complex sentence structure is used in the material.

- *이 법은 국장과 그 외 모든 인구조사국 조사원을 비롯한 인구조사국의 전 직원들이 선서를 해야 하며 귀하나 귀 가족의 신분을 드러낼 수 있는 일체의 정보를 공개할 경우 징역이나 벌금 또는 두가지 처벌을 모두 받을 수 있도록 규정하고 있습니다. (This law requires that every Census Bureau employee—including the Director and every Census Bureau representative—take an oath and be subject to a jail term, a fine, or both if he or she discloses ANY information that could identify you or your household)*

Common to Chinese and Korean

Findings from translated material (6) : *Incomplete translation*

- Incompletely translated words (written phonetically) did not facilitate clear understanding of their meanings.
 - *미합중국 법전 타이틀 13 섹션 9 (Title 13, United States Code, Section 9)*
 - *데이터의 개요를 간략히 보여주는 쿼크 테이블 (Quick tables that provide an overview of the data quickly)*
 - *시니어센터(senior center), 프로젝트(project), 시스템(system), 프로파일(profile), 이슈(Issue), etc*

Only Korean

Findings from translated material (7) : Layout and Design

- To conform with the Chinese letter-writing style, we should have indentation at the beginning of each paragraph *(Chinese Only)*.
- Left-aligned paragraph bothered them since Korean text is typically justified alignment. Also it was pointed that the current font is not appropriate in letters *(Korean only)*
- Appearance of materials (paragraph alignment, line change, spacing, font type/size and consistent editing) were important to Koreans and can be an indication of the importance of the ACS. *(Korean only)*

Lessons learned from Cognitive interview

: Recruitment Difficulty

- Recruiting people with lower education was the biggest challenge.
- Education is highly valued in Asian countries. They place much emphasis on academic achievement. Thus, having a child poor at school is often seen as family's shame.
- In this value system, it is hard for those who have lower education levels to admit this fact to strangers.

Common to Chinese and Korean

Lessons learned from Cognitive interview

: Screening Form Translation

- Koreans are considered one year old at birth and added another year at New Year's.
- Depending on the entry year into the U.S. or ethnic background of a conversation partner, some Koreans may use American age counting convention while others still follow Korean convention.
- To eliminate this confusion, Korean asked “만나이 (Man-nai)”: the same as the U.S. age counting convention.

Korean Only

Lessons learned from Cognitive interview

: Cognitive interview protocol preparation

- Koreans adjust their way of speaking depending on conversation partner. If a partner is older, the younger one should use honorific marker in the sentence ending to show their respect.
- Interviewers meet a lot of respondents from different age groups and it is difficult to have one universal script.
- Koreans avoid using names to call persons and this is regarded as rude unless they are close enough. They use social relationships or positions names instead.
- ACS team encountered difficulty in finding appropriate forms of address in translating interview protocols.

Korean Only

Lessons learned from Cognitive interview

: Difficulty expressing personal opinions

- Participants showed difficulty answering cognitive interview questions. They tended to read the statements or parts of statements repeatedly.
 - “How did you, yourself understand the statement?” “There is no correct/wrong answer and we just want to listen to your opinions” could elicit qualifying answers.
 - This may be caused by different education systems: Students are usually educated to memorize things written in the textbooks or what teachers taught
- ➔ Thus, they could believe they answered the questions well by reading a written paragraph instead of interpreting the statement in their own words.

Common to Chinese and Korean

Contact & Further Information

Thank you!

For questions or comments, contact mpark@rti.org

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