

# Asians - are they the same?

## Findings from cognitive interviews with Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese Americans

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# Background

- Growing interest in pretesting translation with the intended audience
- Monolingual speakers of Asian languages are rarely included in U.S. surveys, despite their population growth.
- As a result, our understanding of surveys administered in Asian languages is limited.
- This study examines the reactions to the translated texts from English into Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

# Methodology

- We used data from the ACS (American Community Survey) sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Dataset: interview summary reports based on cognitive interviews - 24 in Chinese, 24 in Korean and 24 in Vietnamese
- Sites: Washington, D.C. and Chicago Metro areas, Madison, WI, and Raleigh, NC
- Dates: Year 2006 for Chinese and Korean interviews, Year 2008 for Vietnamese interviews
- Testing materials: Translated ACS supporting documents (Introductory Letter, Thank You Letter, Q&A Brochure, and Informational Brochure)
- Protocol
  - Developed a protocol guide in English and translated it into target languages
  - Gave respondents testing materials for review and then administered cognitive interview protocols

# Respondents

- Respondents: Monolingual speakers of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese
- Recruitment target: We followed recruiting demographics target identified in the previous ACS data, including education, year of entry, age, and gender. For Chinese, major Chinese dialects were also considered.
- Recruiting Methods: Posted ads in local ethnic newspapers/ethnic web-communities; flyers in ethnic grocery stores and churches. Obtained cooperation from community service centers and schools and by word-of-mouth.
- Monolingual speakers of the target language were recruited through screening questions to determine language dominance.

# Analysis

- We reviewed the reactions to key messages across three language groups
  - Request for participation
  - What is ACS?
  - Survey purpose
  - Mandatory nature of the ACS participation
  - Confidentiality

# 1) Request for survey participation

*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.*

- Most of our respondents (Rs) from 3 languages missed the main point of the introductory letter (requesting participation in the ACS), although it is stated in the first paragraph of the letter.
- When asked the main message, they mainly answered how they understood the ACS.

# 1) Request for survey participation – cont'd

## Why?

- **Different communication style in Asian languages:**

These Asian language groups' preferred style when asking for help is to attend to the politeness aspect of communication and to establish common ground first. The main message will come towards the end of letter

- **Lack of knowledge of the ACS:**

The first paragraph starts with a request without any explanation/ definition of the ACS. Many of our Rs who did not have prior knowledge of the survey had no clue about what was being asked in the letter.

## 2) What is ACS?

*The American Community Survey is a survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. It provides information each year about the social, economic, and housing characteristics of the United States. Previously, this information was available only when the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a population census every 10 years.*

- Compared to the Korean Rs, the Chinese and the Vietnamese Rs had more difficulty in understanding what the ACS was.
- The Korean Rs were mainly confusing the ACS with the Decennial Census and said its purpose was to count the population. In addition, some of the Chinese and the Vietnamese Rs thought the ACS was a social investigation or social welfare program.

## 2) What is ACS? – cont'd

### **Why?**

- The Korean Rs were more familiar with the concept of a survey than the other language groups. Their confusion is caused by lack of description of what kinds of questions are asked in the ACS on the material.
- The Chinese and the Vietnamese respondents' misunderstanding seems to be based on different things: One is unfamiliarity with the concept of a survey and the other is incomplete translations.

## 2) What is ACS? – cont'd

- **Chinese example:**

American Community Survey is translated to “美国社区调查”. “调查” has two meanings: One is “investigation,” and the other is “survey.”

- **Vietnamese example:**

American Community Survey is translated to “Khảo sát cộng đồng Mỹ” with high level vocabulary, which is back translated to “American Community Survey”.

U.S. Census Bureau is translated to “ăn phòng Kiểm tra Dân số Hoa Kỳ” which is back translated to “U.S. Office of Examining Population”

### 3) Survey Purpose

*The ACS produces critical, up-to-date information that is used to meet the needs of communities across the United States. For example, results from this survey are used to decide where new schools, hospitals, and fire stations are needed. Survey data are used by federal, state, local, and tribal governments to make decisions and to develop programs that will provide health care, education, and transportation services that affect you and your community. This survey information helps communities plan for emergency situations that might affect you and your neighbors.*

### 3) Survey Purpose – cont'd

- Most of our Rs from the three Asian groups understood the ACS survey data would be used to help communities in general.
- However, they did not have a clear understanding of how the data collected from the ACS would be connected with the local community's development.
- This misunderstanding is because the materials did not describe the type of questions included in the ACS and they did not fully understand the ACS as survey.
- Their lack of social experience in their home countries where individuals' self-reports in surveys are part of decision-making process for government policies is another factor.

## 4) Mandatory Nature

*You are required by U.S. law to respond to this survey (Title 13, United States Code, Sections 141, 193, and 221).*

- Half of the Chinese and the Vietnamese Rs did not understand the mandatory characteristics of the ACS. They understood that a law required people to follow/obey something (unclear). This confusion is because of poor translation which did not specify “what” was required by law. Some Rs thought this meant that people should answer the survey honestly/accurately.
- The Korean Rs understood the meaning of mandatory nature texts relatively well. But they tended to understand the meaning just literally.

## 4) Mandatory Nature – cont'd

- In addition, the Korean Rs felt uncomfortable to see the expression in a direct manner. In Korean cultures, where politeness and interpersonal relationship are emphasized, they rarely use such a direct request.
- This is also Korean social convention.
- The difference among the Asian groups can be the result of the different political systems in these countries since World War II. That is, the Chinese and Vietnamese conventions might be distorted by communist control in those countries over years.

## 4) Mandatory Nature – cont'd

- Interestingly, the Korean Rs raised the question about who should participate in the ACS from the mandatory participation message.
- They commented that only U.S. Citizens, excluding permanent residents or undocumented people, should participate in the ACS since the participation is required by U.S. law.
- Vietnamese and Chinese Rs did not think that the mandatory message should exclude undocumented people from the ACS. Rather, they have similar issues from the translated ACS title.

# 5) Confidentiality

*Your answers are confidential by law (Title 13, United States Code, Section 9). This law requires that every Census Bureau employee—including the Director and every Census Bureau representative—take an oath and be subjected to a jail term, a fine, or both if he or she discloses ANY information that could identify you or your household.*

- In general, it was well understood that the respondents' answers are protected across three Asian language groups.
- Although most of the Rs were glad to find the detailed description of how to protect respondents' information, the emphasis on law resulted in two types of reactions: one was a fear of the law and the other was distrust of the law.

## 5) Confidentiality – cont'd

- **Fear of the law:** Rs thought the information they provided to the ACS would not be sensitive so the specific inclusion of law made them suspect there might be implicit risks. *ex. A Korean R mentioned abuse stories with the Korean central intelligence agency under the name of law during the period of tyranny and military government in Korea in the past.*
- **Distrust of the law:** Rs understood the meaning of the sentence, but they didn't believe what they read. *ex. 1 Chinese R said "For people who are newcomers, they may not believe in U.S. laws. There are differences between China and the U.S. in terms of laws. In China, they (the government) say they will keep (the information) confidential, but they don't really do it."*

## 5) Confidentiality – cont'd

- This is related to the different types of expectations people have towards the way a society is governed. In the U.S., most people see the society as being governed by law, whereas in these Asian societies, people regard a great part of the society as being governed by human relation.
- The distrust of law is also connected with the different relations between law and government. The Western conceptions of rule of law tend to emphasize the ways in which law limits the powers of the government and increases individual autonomy and freedom; while the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese tend to associate law as enhancing the power of the government.

# Summary

Messages	Socio-Cultural Factors	Reactions
<b>Request for ACS participation</b>	Shared cultural and literary traditions	Very similar; missed the main point of the message
<b>What is ACS?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar social experience between the Chinese and Vietnamese Rs</li> <li>• Different social experience with Korean Rs</li> </ul>	Better understanding by Korean Rs compared to Chinese and Vietnamese Rs – mistook ACS for social investigation/welfare.
<b>Survey Purpose</b>	Similar historical and social experience in home countries	Similar; misunderstanding of connection between the survey data and community development
<b>Mandatory nature of the ACS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar cultural-historical experience</li> <li>• Different politeness rules</li> </ul>	Similar; Korean Rs were uncomfortable with direct request
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Similar cultural-historical experience	Very similar; Rs showed distrust/fear of law

# Limitations

- Our findings are limited to monolingual speakers of target languages and thus should not be generalized.
- Our analysis is based on the interview summary reports, and for the most part is qualitative.
- The materials/protocols used in the cognitive interviews were not exactly identical. Thus, it was impossible to conduct a one-to-one comparison analysis.
- It will be also interesting to conduct future research with additional Asian languages to see if the common findings from this research will be the same in other languages.

# For More Information

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