

## The Use of Vignettes in Evaluating Multilingual Questionnaires

Mandy Sha, RTI International  
Yuling Pan, U.S. Census Bureau

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009  
AAPOR Conference

## Vignettes and Multilingual Questionnaires

- Vignettes as part of cognitive interviewing
  - Hypothetical situations (story, scenario, or description) presented to cognitive interview participants
  - Can compensate for recruiting rare subgroups of participants or to direct participants for reviewing multiple topics
  - Used previously in evaluating English and Spanish language questionnaires (Martin 2004, Caspar and Goerman 2007)
- Vignettes and this study
  - Little is known about vignette's application to non-English and non-Spanish languages
  - Research question:  
*Are vignettes effective in evaluating multilingual questionnaires?*

## Definition of Effectiveness

- Vignettes can generate the right information to satisfy the research objectives of the evaluation
  - Detect and correct translation issues
  - Identify and reveal issues at lexical, semantic, and pragmatic levels
- Examined by:
  - Able to complete the task by reviewing the vignettes and forming a reaction or response?
  - Findings from the followup probes help with identifying comprehension issues related to translation?



## U.S. Census Bureau Cognitive Testing Project

- 2010 Census form
  - Pretest of the translations of the Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian languages
  - “Short form”: age, gender, name, Hispanic origin, race, tenure, and household enumeration
  - Self-administered
- Language experts identified specific key terms that could pose comprehension issues
- Cognitive interview participants
  - Interviewed in Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian languages; as a comparison, some in English
  - Spoke little or no English



## Cognitive Interview Methodology

- 92 non-English language cognitive interviews, 16 in English over two rounds of interviewing
- Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian speaking language experts and cognitive interviewers
- Diverse range of participants: education, age, sex, year of entry in US, and birthplace
- Greater Washington D.C. area, Illinois, and North Carolina
- Protocol guide: informed consent, cognitive interview probes, vignettes, show cards, and debriefing
- Interview data documented in interview summary reports



## Two Vignettes Under Study

- Age reporting question
  - One vignette about the “baby instruction”
- Relationship question
  - Four vignettes to examine comprehension of less common and nonkin relationship terms identified by language experts
  - Followup probes
- Why use vignettes to test these two items?
  - Would have required recruiting rare subgroups of participants per language
  - Topics might not be covered when discussing about the participants’ own household (and hard to verify)



## Vignette: Baby Instruction

### 7. What is Person 1's age and what is Person 1's date of birth?

*Please report babies as age 0 when the child is less than 1 year old.*

*Print numbers in boxes.*

Age on February 1, 2008

Month

Day

Year of birth

- “Baby instruction” prompts R to put “0”
- Vignette situation:

The instruction in Question 7 says: “Please report babies as age 0 when the child is less than 1 year old.” If a person has a 4-month old baby girl, what age should she write here?



## Vignette: Baby Instruction, Cont'd

- Nearly all participants able to complete vignette task
- Some did not provide the intended answer, “0”
  - Did not conform to perception of common practice, most pronounced among Vietnamese participants
- Participants with Asian descent cited “plus 1” age counting convention according to the Lunar calendar
  - More frequently among Korean participants
  - Baby instruction actually helped to provide intended answer
- Stronger context of the baby instruction in the vignette is necessary in order to solicit relevant response



## Vignette: Relationship Terms

2. How is this person related to Person 1? Mark  ONE box.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Husband or wife            | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-in-law                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biological son or daughter | <input type="checkbox"/> Son-in-law or daughter-in-law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted son or daughter    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other relative                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stepson or stepdaughter    | <input type="checkbox"/> Roomer or boarder             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brother or sister          | <input type="checkbox"/> Housemate or roommate         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father or mother           | <input type="checkbox"/> Unmarried partner             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grandchild                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other nonrelative             |

- Four vignettes
  - e.g. Mary lives in an apartment with her best friend Nancy. They share all their housing expenses equally. How is Mary related to Nancy?
- Followup probes
  - How did you choose that answer?
  - What do you think they mean by ...?
  - (R1) Is there another term you would use to describe this relationship?
  - (R2) Which of the following terms would you use to describe this relationship?



### Problems with...

- 1: completing vignette task
- 2: choosing intended answer
- 3: identifying comprehension issues through followup probes

Vignette Language	Housemate or Roommate	Unmarried Partner	Roomer or Boarder	Stepson Adopted son
<b>Chinese</b>	2	None	2	None
<b>Korean</b>	2	None	None	1, 2
<b>Vietnamese</b>	1, 2	None but discomfort	2	1, 2
<b>Russian</b>	None	1, 2	None	2



## Vignette: Relationship Terms, Cont'd

- Led participants to consider a term in a less personal situation
- Involved more than a subset of hard-to-recruit participants
- Observed problems when the vignettes...
  - Included too much text or details to attend to
  - Did not conform to cultural and linguistic expectations
  - Are ordered in a way that might affect reaction



## Conclusions

- Vignettes can be effective in evaluating multilingual questionnaires
  - Could be practicably used to examine comprehension issues and sociocultural context
  - Most participants were able to complete the task
  - Do not include too much text or details to attend to
  - Conform to cultural and linguistic expectations
  - Pay attention to the order and context of the vignettes
- Must engage language experts in the design phase
  - to identify possible comprehension issues
  - to construct the vignettes



## Limitations and Future Research

- Limitations
  - Detailed interview summary reports were used, but not transcripts
  - Census form questions tend to be shorter and less complicated
  - Not an experiment
- Future Research
  - Use vignettes across languages
  - Examine issues related to survey-relevant decisions
  - Design an experiment



Questions?

Contact: [msha@rti.org](mailto:msha@rti.org)

To obtain a copy of this presentation:

[www.rti.org/aapor](http://www.rti.org/aapor)

