

4 SHARE Translation Procedures and Translation Assessment

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4.1 Introduction

It is useful to remember that quality translation procedures amount to only a small part of the total cost of a survey while they can contribute crucially to the quality of the final product, the data. Poor translation, on the other hand, robs researchers of the chance to ask the questions they intend. Translation procedures and translation assessment are thus crucial components of any cross-national survey development process.

In SHARE, each participating country organised its own translation effort. Knowing that the costs and the effort called for in survey translation are often underestimated, the central Co-ordinator initiated the following activities to support the individual translation efforts:

- (1) SHARE countries were provided with guidelines outlining how to go about hiring translators, testing translators, organising the translation, and, in particular, on producing, reviewing and assessing their translations. The team translation model advocated for SHARE followed, in simplified form, that used in the European Social Survey (see ESS documents at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>). In the European Social Survey, the translation guidelines are closely linked to procedural specifications that participating countries must meet. This was not the case in SHARE; participants were offered the guidelines as recommendations. Ultimately each country decided on its own procedures.
- (2) The Co-ordinator commissioned professional appraisals of selected questions from two drafts of SHARE translations. Both appraisals were made before the pre-test in January/February 2004. In this way, SHARE countries could be provided with feedback to help them improve their translations. The appraisals were made by a group of translators not involved in the SHARE project, each working in their language of first expertise. The translators commented in detail on questions selected from each module of the SHARE questionnaire and also submitted a brief general appraisal of each translation draft, pointing out areas where improvements could be made.
- (3) The Co-ordinator commissioned an expert in survey translation to advise SHARE participants on any translation queries they might have.

Brief details of each support activity are outlined below. Documents providing more details on the translation guidelines and the appraisals are listed in Appendix E to this volume.

4.2 Guidelines and recommendations: SHARE Translation and the TRAPD framework

The TRAPD translation protocol is a team translation model. Team approaches to survey translation and assessment have been found to provide a richer source of options to choose from for translating items, and a balanced critique of versions (Guillemin et al., 1993; Acquadro et al., 1996; McKay et al., 1996; Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). Translators produce the first draft of a translation, then meet with other members of the team to discuss and refine the translation. The team can be thought of as a group with different talents and functions, bringing together

the mix of skills and disciplinary expertise needed to produce an optimal version. Key members of the team need to have the cultural and linguistic knowledge required to translate appropriately in the required varieties of the target language. Collectively, members of the team also supply knowledge of the study, of questionnaire design, and of fielding processes.

TRAPD is an acronym for Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting and Documentation, the five interrelated procedures recommended as the framework for SHARE translation and assessment (cf. Harkness, 2003, Harkness, Pennell and Schoua-Glusberg 2004). Following current best practice, these are basic procedures involved in producing a final version of a questionnaire (cf. ESS translation guidelines and the US Bureau of Census Translation Guidelines 2004 at http://www.fcsm.gov/03papers/delaPuente_Final.pdf). All or some of the procedures may need to be repeated at different stages. For example, early pretesting and debriefing sessions with fielding staff and respondents may lead to translation revisions; these revisions then call for further testing of the new version.

Three different sets of people are required in the team to produce the final version of a translated questionnaire: translators, a reviewer, and an adjudicator. There is general agreement on the skills and functions required for each role. The translators require to be skilled practitioners who have received training on translating questionnaires. *Translators* generally translate out of the source language into their strongest language. (In most cases this is a person's 'first' language.) *Reviewers* have at least as good translation skills as the translators but are familiar with questionnaire design principles, as well as the study design and topic. One reviewing person with linguistic expertise, experience in translating, and survey knowledge is generally sufficient. If one individual with these three areas of expertise is not available, two can cover the different perspectives. *Adjudicators* make the final decisions about which translation options to adopt. They understand the research subject, know about the survey design, and, if not proficient in the languages involved, must be aided by a consultant who is.

The TRAPD team approach was developed a deliberate strategy to:

- a) counteract the subjective nature of translation and text-based translation assessment procedures;
- b) provide surveys such as SHARE with an approach which is qualitatively better than some others (such as the much-cited 'back translation' approach) but is not more expensive or more complicated;
- c) accommodate the different thematic areas covered in complex questionnaires such as that of SHARE;
- d) include documentation steps which makes adjudication decisions easier and which can provide information needed for secondary analysis;
- e) allow considered but parsimonious production of translations which share a language with another country.

Those responsible in each country for supervising SHARE translations were asked to identify suitable people for the preparation of translation drafts and for the evaluation and refinement of the translations. A template was proposed to enable the translation and assessment team to document decisions taken as part of the translation and review process.

4.3 Professional Review of Selected Questions from SHARE Draft Translations

The Co-ordinator commissioned an expert consultant to organise two appraisals of questions from each SHARE module in each country. In the end, all but the Dutch

questionnaires were appraised. As it was, Dutch translations came under considerable scrutiny from CentERdata colleagues located in Tilburg.

Professional translators and, in particular, teachers of translation were selected to review the drafts. They were asked to identify weaknesses and make recommendations for improvement, as outlined below. The first appraisal was of participants' first drafts, the second appraisal was of a later draft prior to the dress rehearsal pre-test. Since countries worked at different speeds in providing and updating translation drafts, the actual version reviewed in the second round of appraisals varied across countries.

Appraisers received two detailed briefing documents, one for each appraisal undertaken. Appraisal work of this kind is rare. To counteract any possible reluctance appraisers might have to criticise fellow translators, the briefings emphasised the prophylactic nature of the project. Care was taken to make clear to the appraisers that their careful critique would help the translators to improve and would contribute to the ultimate success of the project.

The appraisers were given a key to follow in coding errors or problems they found. If, in working through the selected questions, they found consistent weakness, they were asked to contact the translation co-ordinator immediately, before they finished the appraisal. In this way, a country could be given "red alert" feedback if required. In addition, unnecessary expense could be avoided for review of a translation of markedly poor quality. However, this situation did not arise in the SHARE appraisals.

SHARE's translation consultant co-ordinated the appraisal effort – organising the selection of questions on both a theory-driven and praxis-oriented basis, providing the evaluators with generic briefing materials and co-ordinating the to-and-fro of material to be appraised and appraisal reports between the Co-ordinator's office and the evaluators. A team of three translation experts (Janet Harkness, Hans Hönic, Paul Kussmaul) individually selected questions from each section of the SHARE questionnaire, focusing on those they considered potentially problematic for translation. At a group meeting, the three agreed on which to select for external appraisal from among their three individual selections.

Reviewing translators received the questions for review in a template which 1) aligned the English alongside the translation and 2) allowed the reviewers to enter comments directly next to the question or phrase on which they were commenting. Feedback from the appraisals was in general welcomed by SHARE participants.

The appraisals were unusual in several respects. As said, extra appraisals of translation quality are not common in survey research. In addition, the appraisals conducted for SHARE were made ahead of finalising the questionnaire. Feedback provided by the appraisers could be used by participants to improve their translations but could also be used to inform the design of the source questionnaire.

4.4 Expert consultation

The Co-ordinator commissioned an expert in survey translation to provide both the guidelines tailored to SHARE's needs and budget, as described under section 1, to arrange and co-ordinate the translation appraisals, and to advise SHARE participants on translation queries they might have. The written materials made available to SHARE participants were preceded by a presentation at a SHARE workshop in early 2003. At this meeting, the principles of the TRAPD translation procedures and recommendations for selection and training of translators were outlined and SHARE participants had the opportunity to ask questions first hand. In the wake of first appraisal feedback, a number of countries consulted with the expert

at length on translation issues and on harmonisation procedures between countries sharing a language.

4.5 Lessons learned

Undoubtedly, the pre-test-and-pilot design of the SHARE study, coupled with the translation guidelines and the external appraisals, provided the SHARE project with a rare opportunity to refine and correct the source questionnaire and the translated versions. Having a translation consultant available for the project meant that researchers unfamiliar with survey translation could draw on specialist advice. The appraisal of draft translations by experienced external translators was invaluable in revealing areas where improvement was needed in time for changes to be made. Future waves of SHARE could profit from making the guidelines for translation production and review required procedures, rather than recommended procedures.

Lessons were learned through difficulties, too. Translators sometimes had problems using the Language Management Utility needed to facilitate the multi-language programming of the SHARE questionnaire. Middle term, such tools need to be developed or extended so that they can accommodate translator's needs - translation, version changes, and version tracking - while also facilitating programming needs. Indeed, ISR, University of Michigan and ZUMA, Mannheim, both involved in consulting SHARE, are currently deliberating on developing such tools.

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