

Preparing Interviewers to Survey Speakers of Non-English Languages: A Data-Driven Approach

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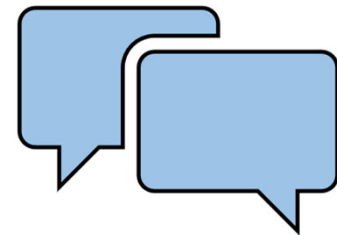
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Bilingual Interviewing: a Specialized Skill

- Bilingual interviewing requires familiarity in the non-English language with
 - Introducing the survey at the doorstep
 - Reassuring reluctant respondents
 - Administering the survey, etc.
- Bilingual interviewers in the U.S. may receive limited (or no) specialized training due to
 - Lack of resources to develop training
 - Logistical challenges of coordinating training
 - Lack of awareness that training is needed, etc.
- Gap in research documenting best practices for this training



Official Translations and Data Quality

- Observation of 600 interviews in 7 languages during 2010 Census supports this connection
 - Interviewers were more likely to improvise question content in non-English languages than in English
 - Behavior “posed a threat to data quality” (Pan & Lubkemann 2013)



Using official translations likely to improve data quality and comparability

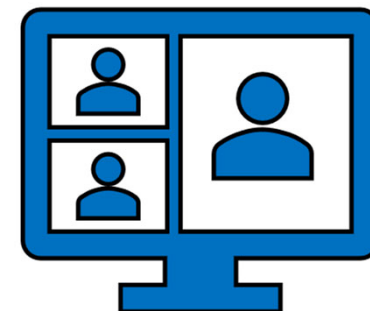
“Uniform wording of questions...is perhaps the most fundamental and universally supported principle of standardized interviewing. There is bounteous evidence that small changes in question wording can affect the answers that respondents give.”

-Groves et al., 2009, p.305

Training Experiment

- Spanish-speaking interviewers split into two groups
 1. Control Group – standard training
 2. Treatment Group – standard + experimental training
- Experimental training
 - Topic: Administering 2020 Census interview in Spanish
 - Format: Online, 30-minutes, asynchronous
- Mixed-methods design
 - Conduct field observations [later canceled due to COVID-19]
 - Conduct 12 debriefing focus groups with interviewers
 - Descriptive statistics* from contact history data
- Goal: Evaluate impact of experimental training on efficiency and data quality during 2020 Census operation to follow-up with non-responders

*Additional analysis (e.g., multinomial regression model, etc.) available in study report



Treatment and Control Groups

- Groups made up of
 - demographically similar census tracts
 - high concentrations of Spanish-speakers
- No reliable household-level data on language
 - Identified *potentially* Spanish-speaking households
- Focus groups uncovered mis-assignment (mostly under-assignment) of experimental training
 - Quantitative analysis excluded cases with contamination between groups

Interviewers	Treatment	Control
Focus Group Participants	5	66
Total	360	1,996
Households	Treatment	Control
Potentially Spanish-speaking	16,000	70,500
Total	20,500	100,000
Contact Attempts	Treatment	Control
Potentially Spanish-speaking	17,174	76,554
Total	22,798	111,377

Standard Training

All non-English materials

Brief practice toggling to Spanish

vs.

Experimental Training

Focused on Spanish materials

Reading official translation as worded

Reassuring messages in Spanish

Several practice exercises in Spanish

Research Questions

RQ1. Did the experimental training reduce the number of contact attempts needed to complete cases?

**Contact
History
Data**



RQ2. Did the experimental training improve data quality?

**Focus
Group
Data**



RQ3. How well prepared were interviewers in both groups to reassure reluctant Spanish-speaking respondents and to administer the interview in Spanish?

RQ1. Did experimental training reduce contact attempts needed to complete cases?

All completed cases

- ✓ Slightly more in Treatment Group completed on 1st attempt

Potentially Spanish-speaking completed cases

- ✓ Slight evidence advantage for Treatment Group persisted to 3rd attempt

Completed on...

Completed on...	All Completed Cases		Potentially Spanish-Speaking Completed Cases	
	Treatment (n = 17,000)	Control (n = 84,500)	Treatment (n = 14,000)	Control (n = 62,500)
Attempt 1	85%	83%	86%	83%
Attempt 2	12%	14%	11%	13%
Attempt 3+	3%	3%	3%	4%

Note: Results from calculating log-odds ratios and confidence intervals for the multinomial regression model supported these findings

RQ2. Did experimental training improve data quality?

After training...	Control Interviewers	Treatment Interviewers
Knew how to access translation	x Many said toggling was not covered in training	✓ All said yes
Reported using translation	x Many said they translated on-the-fly	✓ Almost all reported using it

- Brief exercise in standard training on toggling may not have been memorable
- Control Interviewers did not seem aware they should use the official translation
- Findings suggest experimental training may have encouraged use of official translation, potentially improved data quality

RQ3. How prepared were interviewers in each group?

After training...	Control Interviewers	Treatment Interviewers
Knew how to reassure Spanish-speaking respondents	x Reported needing training on respondent concerns (e.g., immigration status)	✓ Reported feeling prepared to reassure respondents
Knew how to conduct the interview in Spanish	x Reported needing practice interviewing in Spanish	✓ Could build rapport in Spanish ✓ Could explain 2020 Census in Spanish ✓ Familiar with Spanish questionnaire

- Findings suggest Treatment Interviewers more prepared than Control Interviewers
 - Role-playing exercises were particularly beneficial for Treatment Interviewers

Discussion

- Modest evidence suggesting experimental training was beneficial (even with under-assignment)
 - Findings can't speak to cost / feasibility
- Training built on prior research
 - Confirms value of collaborating with interviewers



- Ultimately, CBSM researchers recommend
 - Implementing training
 - Expanding training to additional languages
 - Pairing interviewers up for practice scenarios
 - Adding new topics (e.g., answering questions on race/ethnicity items, etc.)
 - Continuing to debrief with interviewers

Interviewers and Official Translations

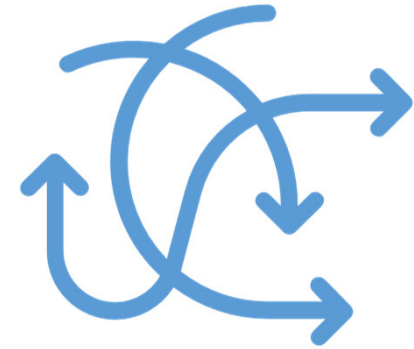


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- Recruiting bilingual interviewers may be difficult
 - Some may speak but not read fluently in non-English language

- Connection between official translations and data quality is not necessarily obvious to interviewers
- Gaining “buy-in” can be complicated
 - Some may prefer their translation to official translation
 - Monitoring in non-English languages may be less robust
 - Interviewers collect data under challenging circumstances



Survey Designers and Official Translations

- Survey designers may grapple with similar blind spots
 - Why is translation on-the-fly problematic?
 - Why training and practice interviewing in non-English languages necessary?
- Consider these questions for interviewing in English
 - Would improvising English question wording problematic?
 - Would training and practice conducting interviews in English be necessary?
- May face resource constraints



Conclusion

- Increasingly seeing investment into more accurately surveying speakers of non-English languages
- Stakes are high – roughly*:
 - 22% of people living in U.S. (ages 5+) speak a language other than English at home
 - 8% of people living in U.S. (ages 5+) are considered “Limited English Speaking”
 - 4% of U.S. households are considered “Limited English Speaking”
- Training for bilingual interviewers is a good starting point
 - Has potential to improve data quality and efficiency

*Source: 2022 American Community Survey, 1-year and 5- year estimate

- Preparing bilingual interviewers is a key component of data equity and representativeness



Questions?

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Citations

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