

# gesis

Leibniz Institute  
for the Social Sciences



## Translation and Adaptation Guidelines in Large-Scale Studies – what they Should, Can, and Cannot Achieve

*OECD-GESIS Seminar on Translating and Adapting  
Instruments in Large-Scale Assessments*

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## Processes as a precondition for data quality

“To achieve error prevention and continuous quality improvement, a process perspective should be adopted. **Accurate data can be achieved only if there are accurate processes generating the data (i.e., data quality is achieved through process quality).** [own emphasis] Inaccuracies stem from imperfections in the underlying processes, and it is therefore important to control key process variables that have the largest effect on characteristics of the survey output, such as data accuracy.”  
(Biemer & Lyberg, 2003, p. 24)

## Outline

- Guidelines: a typology
- Different types of guidelines:
  - ▶ Contents
  - ▶ Goals
- Focus on project-specific guidelines:
  - ▶ Responsibilities of guideline developers
  - ▶ Responsibilities of national teams
  - ▶ What these guidelines cannot achieve
- Guidelines: *quo vadis?*

## Guidelines – a typology

- The term '*guidelines*' is used for different types of instructions and background information:
  - ▶ **Overarching** guidelines
  - ▶ **Project-specific** guidelines:
    - ***General*** guidelines
    - ***Detailed*** guidelines

## Overarching guidelines ...

- ... provide a framework for the entire cross-national or cross-cultural research process; translation and adaptation is one important step in this process.
- ... are strongly embedded in a research community, even though their range of application is much wider.
- ... include: best practice, suggestions for implementation, lessons learned, known issues, common mistakes, etc.
- Ideally, they inform processes that are set up in specific projects.

## Overarching guidelines: cont'd

- Publicly accessible examples include:
  - ▶ *The ITC Guidelines for Translating and Adapting Tests*
  - ▶ *The CSDI Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines*

## Guidelines of the International Test Commission (2017)

THE GUIDELINES .....	8
Introduction .....	8
Pre-Condition Guidelines .....	8
Test Development Guidelines .....	11
Confirmation Guidelines .....	16
Administration Guidelines .....	24
Score Scales and Interpretation Guidelines .....	26
Documentation Guidelines .....	27

# Guidelines of the International Test Commission (2017)

Translating and Adapting Tests (Second edition) | Final Version | v.2.4

## APPENDIX A. ITC GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATING AND ADAPTING TESTS CHECKLIST

Here is a checklist to remind you of the eighteen ITC Guidelines. We recommend that you check those that you feel you have dealt with satisfactorily in your test translation/adaptation project, and then attend to those that remain unaddressed.

### Pre-Condition Guidelines

- ☐ PC-1 (1) Obtain the necessary permissions from the holder of the intellectual property rights relating to the test before carrying out any adaptation.
- ☐ PC-2 (2) Evaluate that the amount of overlap in the definition and content of the construct measured by the test in the populations of interest is sufficient for the intended use (or uses) of the scores.
- ☐ PC-3 (3) Minimize the influence of any cultural and linguistic differences that are irrelevant to the intended uses of the test in the populations of interest.

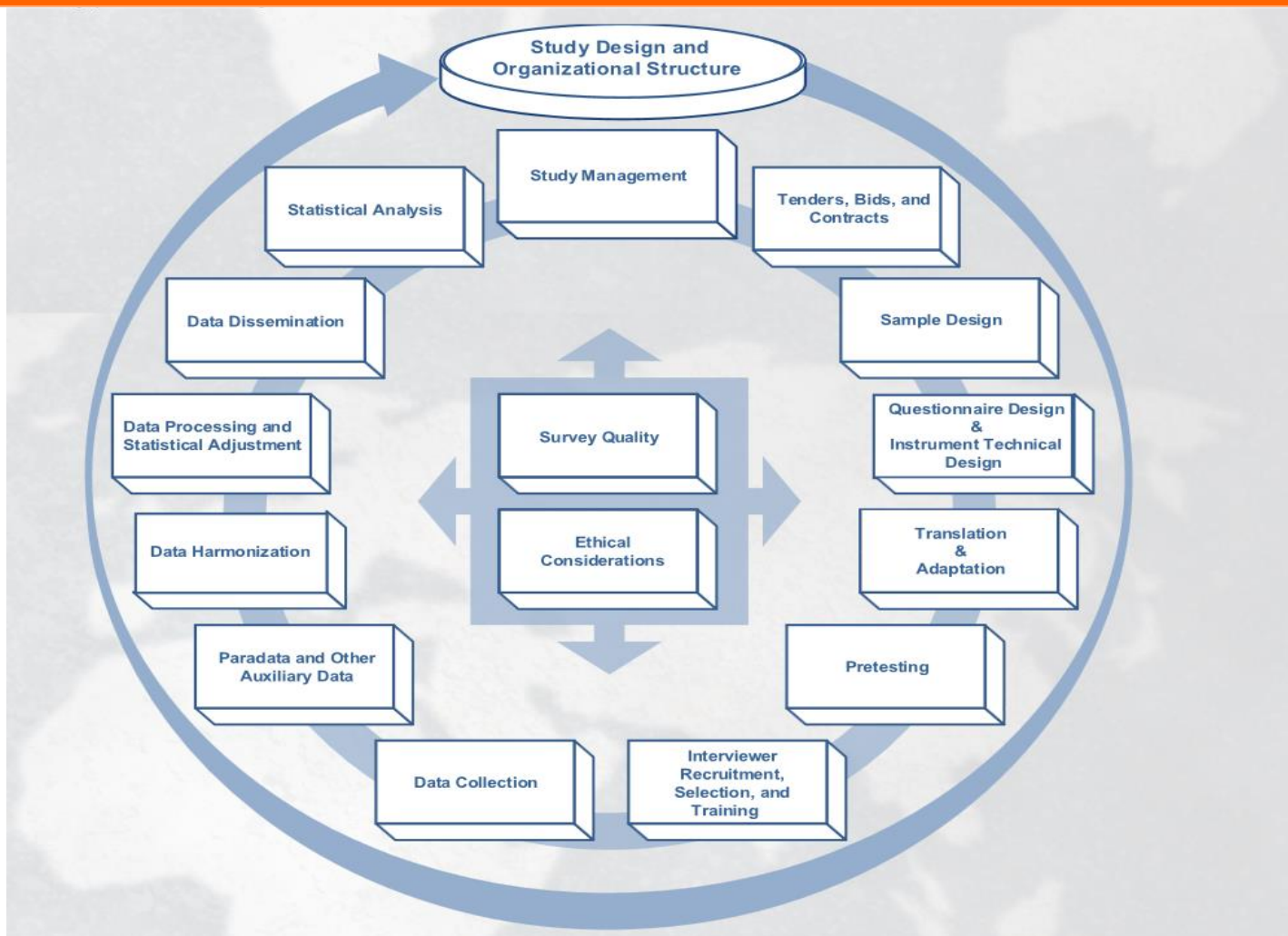
### Test Development Guidelines

- ☐ TD-1 (4) Ensure that the adaptation process considers linguistic, psychological, and cultural differences in the intended populations through the choice of experts with relevant expertise.
- ☐ TD-2 (5) Use appropriate translation designs and procedures to maximize the suitability of the test adaptation in the intended populations.
- ☐ TD-3 (6) Provide evidence that the test instructions and item content have similar meaning for all intended populations.
- ☐ TD-4 (7) Provide evidence that the item formats, rating scales, scoring categories, test conventions, modes of administration, and other procedures are suitable for all intended populations.
- ☐ TD-5 (8) Collect pilot data on the adapted test to enable item analysis, reliability assessment and other small-scale validity studies, so that any necessary revisions to the adapted test can be made.



# Cross-cultural survey guidelines (2016)

## [Comparative Survey Design and Implementation (CSDI) Guidelines Initiative]



# Cross-cultural survey guidelines (2016)

## Instrument Technical Design

### Translation

#### Overview

#### Management and Budgeting

#### Team

#### Scheduling

#### Shared Language Harmonization

#### Assessment

#### Tools

## Adaptation

### Pretesting

### Interviewer Recruitment, Selection, and Training

### Data Collection

#### General Considerations

#### Face-to-Face Surveys

#### Telephone Surveys

#### Self-Administered Surveys

### Paradata and Other Auxiliary Data

### Data Harmonization

### Data Processing & Statistical Adjustment

## Introduction

### Team translation

#### Guidelines

1. Plan translation as an integral part of the study design.
2. Have two or more translators produce initial, parallel translations.
3. If possible, have new teams work with two or more full translations.
4. To save time and funds, have experienced teams produce
5. Review and refine draft translations in a team meeting.
6. Complete any necessary harmonization between countries with shared languages before pretesting.
7. Assess and verify translations, using some combination of procedures discussed in Translation: Assessment, potentially independent of formal pretesting.
8. Have the adjudicator sign-off on the final version for pretesting.
9. Pretest the version resulting from adjudication.
10. Review, revise, and re-adjudicate the translation on the basis of pretesting results.
11. Organize survey translation work within a quality assurance and control framework and document the entire process.
12. Translation procedures from the past – no longer recommended.

**Appendices: A | B | C | D | E**

### Further Reading

## Introduction

Translation is the process of expressing the sense of words or phrases from one language into another. It is also known as one type of asking the same questions and translating (ASQT) as discussed in [Questionnaire Design](#) (where we also discuss asking different questions (ADQ) and its correspondence to [Adaptation](#)). Another

## What can and should these overarching guidelines achieve?

- Raise awareness of good practice, challenges, and limitations in cross-national and cross-cultural research, giving everyone the possibility to collect high-quality data
  - ▶ Provide a framework for quality assurance and quality control
  - ▶ Provide a general framework for the assessment of research
  - ▶ Provide a framework for funders to assess the quality of research and/or the methodology proposed
- Ensure the trustworthiness of a discipline (validity vs. methodological artefacts)

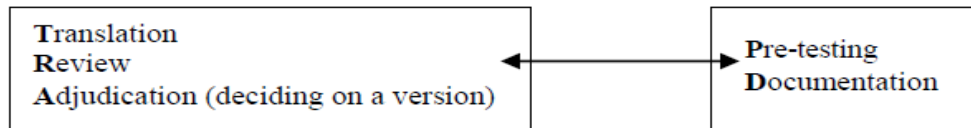
**Let us now move on  
to project-specific general guidelines –  
which should ideally be informed by the overarching  
guidelines**

## Project-specific general guidelines ...

- ... introduce a project and its objectives (e.g., PIAAC or a small-scale project on a personality scale).
- ... give information on the master questionnaire (origin, development).
- ... introduce the method chosen to measure the underlying concepts in a comparable way, i.e. translation vs. adaptation.
  - ▶ Thus, they specify the leeway for adaptation.
- ... prescribe a translation approach (e.g., double translation and reconciliation, pretest) and outline the different persons/roles needed for its implementation.

## Project-specific general guidelines ...

- ... describe good practice in instrument translation (e.g., things to look out for, translation traps).
- ... provide instructions for using specific software tools.
- ... are potentially tailored to different groups: translation managers, translators, and reviewers/reconcilers.



A **committee-based approach** (also known as ‘team approach’ or ‘committee approach’) using TRAPD has been chosen for the ESS as a deliberate strategy to:

- a) counteract the subjective nature of translation and text-based translation assessment procedures.
- b) provide participating countries with a combined approach which is qualitatively better than others (such as the much-cited ‘back translation’ approach) but is not more expensive or more complicated.
- c) include documentation steps which make adjudication decisions easier, provide information needed for secondary analysis and can be used to inform versions for later fieldings.
- d) allow considered but parsimonious production of translations which share a language with another country.

## 20 Clarity and fluency

In general, do your best to produce questions that can readily be understood by the respondents and fluently read out by the interviewers, otherwise the measurement quality of the question may be compromised. Reading aloud the entire survey instrument before being finalised may help detect phrases or expressions that do not sound fluent and is therefore recommended as an additional quality step when finalising your translations (see section 30).

Writing questions that can be understood by the target population requires not only taking into account usual target language characteristics but also involves taking into account the target group in terms of their *age, education* etc. The target group of the translated questionnaire will always be the same as for the source questionnaire.<sup>21</sup> All members of the target population should be able to understand the questionnaire in the intended sense without exerting particular effort.

## What can and should these project-specific general guidelines achieve?

- Introduce the key players involved in translation to the task of instrument translation.
- Outline best practice methods and procedures as a means to ensure high-quality data and thereby comparability.
- In sum: They foster a **common and consistent** understanding and approach in all countries – which is even more important in contexts where the different key players have different backgrounds, experience, and knowledge sets.



## Frameworks ...

- ... provide information on the concepts, their relationships, and how concepts are operationalized  
→ This information feeds into general and detailed guidelines.

### FACTORS THAT AFFECT TASK DIFFICULTY

#### Transparency of the information

An important factor affecting task difficulty is the transparency of the information in the text. A question that explicitly refers to the superficial information (literal information) in the target text is easier to process. For some tasks, the needed information is explicitly signaled; for example, a telephone number always has a particular form and may also be preceded by "Tel" in the text. The text may have a title or the problem and solution may be directly labeled as such.

#### Degree of complexity in making inferences

- *Paraphrase.* Readers have to process linguistic information by mobilising their lexical and syntactic-semantic knowledge. An example of this is a task requiring readers to find information about the cost of an automobile in a table that uses the word "car" or "auto".
- *High-level text inference.* In a problem/solution text, neither the problem nor the solution need to be explicitly signaled; rather the reader may have to infer what the problem (and/or solution) is from the text itself. The reader cannot necessarily assume that the problem statement will precede the solution.
- *Extra-textual inference.* Some tasks require the reader to bring in information external to the text or from another text in

**Let us now move on  
to project-specific detailed guidelines –  
which should supplement the general guidelines**

## Project-specific detailed guidelines ...

- ... are also called item-specific translation and adaptation guidelines, notes, and annotations and they point to specific requirements at the item level.

PIAAC FIELD TRIAL 2009		VERIFICATION FOLLOW-UP FORM COMPUTER-BASED										
Country: PT Target language: pt		UNIT: Election Results	PIAAC ID: C302BC02	ALL ID: COREQ2S1								
PLEASE INSERT NEW LINES, IF NEEDED, TO DOCUMENT ADDITIONAL ISSUES												
LOCATION	ENGLISH SOURCE	PROPOSED TARGET VERSION	CONSORTIUM RECOMMENDATION	NPM COMMENT								
stimulus	Nationwide Manufacturing Company Union Council ELECTION RESULTS		Note: 'Union' is to be understood as trade union, i.e. an organization representing workers									
stimulus	Posting Date: June 22, 2000		Eliminate ', 2000' versus ALL version									
stimulus	The election of a new member of the Union Council for election group 3, at the Carver plant took place on June 21, 2000.		The name 'Carver' may be changed. Note: 'plant' means here 'factory' Eliminate ', 2000' versus ALL version.									
stimulus	The results of the election were as follows:											
stimulus	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Candidates</td> <td>Number of votes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A. Greer</td> <td>120 votes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>H.A. Holliday</td> <td>80 votes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>G. F. Reynolds</td> <td>29 votes</td> </tr> </table>	Candidates	Number of votes	A. Greer	120 votes	H.A. Holliday	80 votes	G. F. Reynolds	29 votes		Names of people may be changed. Keep the three numbers aligned over each other.	
Candidates	Number of votes											
A. Greer	120 votes											
H.A. Holliday	80 votes											
G. F. Reynolds	29 votes											
stimulus	Consequently Mr. A. Greer was formally elected as a member of the Union Council for Nationwide Manufacturing Company.		If name 'A. Greer' is changed, change it here too									
stimulus	In accordance with article 16, paragraph 1 of the Union Council bylaws, any interested party may lodge a complaint with the council within one week after publication of these results.											

## What can and should these detailed guidelines achieve?

- Lay out principles of test construction/questionnaire design to be considered during translation and adaptation.
- Point to subtleties with a potential impact on measurement that may otherwise go unnoticed.
- Point to adaptation needs.
- Overall: They pave the way for consistent translation and adaptation decisions across countries and thereby comparability.
  - ▶ They are a means of “harmonizing” across countries (see also Acquadro et al., 2008; Wild et al., 2005)

## Responsibilities of guideline developers

- Draft guidelines that draw on good practice and latest developments in the field.
- Produce guidelines that are feasible in their implementation (e.g., implementation of prescribed processes in the software provided; reasonable timelines).
- Use clear and unambiguous language (which is understood by different groups).
- Take care to provide guidelines where needed, while being at the same time as economical as possible – and possibly tailored to particular target groups.
- If different sets of specifications are used, developers should ensure these are consistent in their terminology and based on each other/complementary.

## Responsibilities of national teams

- Take translation and adaptation seriously – guidelines themselves are not a panacea and do not free from decision-making.
- Select (a) suitably skilled person(s) who will be in charge of the processes for instrument translation and adaptation (i.e. overall management, final decisions).
- Select, brief, and train translation practitioners and relevant experts for the task of translation and adaptation.
- Adequately budget for the process and establish (national) timelines.

## Project-specific general guidelines - what they *cannot* achieve? I

- Guidelines should stand for themselves, but (follow-up) support should also be provided in the form of
  - ▶ web/face-to-face training, and
  - ▶ a queries systemto ensure general and consistent understanding, commitment, and ownership of the process.
- If the underlying assumptions and constraints are inadequate (e.g., timeline, instrument not suitable for cross-cultural application), guidelines cannot make up for this.

## Project-specific detailed guidelines - what they *cannot* achieve? II

- Quality requires adequate processes, which require adequate staff, but guidelines
  - ▶ cannot make up for unqualified staff,
  - ▶ are not a means to teach translation as such,
  - ▶ cannot cater for all issues, challenges, and may not be transferable to all languages.
- In sum: Guidelines cannot replace translation competence, incl. decision-making. Ultimately, guidelines should empower and not “de-power”.



## Guidelines – *quo vadis?* I

- Guidelines need to take on board new developments, in particular regarding
  - ▶ the emic-etic distinction,
  - ▶ close translation vs. adaptation,
  - ▶ new software developments.

## Guidelines – quo vadis? II

- We need to collect further empirical evidence on translation procedures, e.g.
  - ▶ on double/single/split translation, single/team reviews and reconciliations, required mix of competencies,
  - ▶ taking into account different cultural and linguistic contexts, and
  - ▶ taking into account languages of migrants and/or their competencies in the official language of a country.
- We may consider adding a risk assessment if certain steps are not implemented (Wild et al., 2005).

What are minimum requirements?

What are related risks?

What are our key process variables?

“To achieve error prevention and continuous quality improvement, a process perspective should be adopted. Accurate data can be achieved only if there are accurate processes generating the data (i.e., data quality is achieved through process quality). Inaccuracies stem from imperfections in the underlying processes, **and it is therefore important to control key process variables that have the largest effect on characteristics of the survey output, such as data accuracy.**” [own emphasis]  
(Biemer & Lyberg, 2003, p. 24)

## Guidelines – quo vadis? III

- We need to collect information on how guidelines are perceived, understood (or misunderstood), and implemented (or why not).
  - ▶ We need to think about payment structures in this context.
  - ▶ We need to think about a good balance between personal interaction and written specifications.
- Britta Upsing's presentation will shed light on the translators' perspective in PISA and PIAAC.

## Guidelines – quo vadis? IV

- We should continue the interdisciplinary exchange between cross-cultural psychology & cross-cultural survey methodology.
- We should also pay close attention to what is happening in the quality-of-life (PRO) field (Wild et al., 2005; 2012; Epstein et al., 2015).
- We should strive to make the overarching guidelines more well-known – which calls for improving the mechanisms for dissemination (Rios & Sireci, 2014) and also for making a stronger case for (the) guidelines based on empirical evidence.

**Thank you!**

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## Links to guidelines

- **ITC Guidelines for Translating and Adapting Tests:**  
[https://www.intestcom.org/files/guideline\\_test\\_adaptation\\_2ed.pdf](https://www.intestcom.org/files/guideline_test_adaptation_2ed.pdf)
- **Cross-cultural survey guidelines:** <http://ccsg.isr.umich.edu/>
- **European Social Survey – Translation Guidelines:**  
[http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round8/methods/ESS8\\_translation\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/round8/methods/ESS8_translation_guidelines.pdf)
- **PIAAC Cycle 1 – Frameworks:**  
[http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/PIAAC%20Framework%202012--%20Revised%2028oct2013\\_ebook.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/PIAAC%20Framework%202012--%20Revised%2028oct2013_ebook.pdf)
- **PISA 2018 – Translation and Adaptation Guidelines:**  
<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/PISA-2018-TRANSLATION-AND-ADAPTATION-GUIDELINES.pdf>
- **PIAAC Cycle 1 – Technical Report – Translation & Adaptation:**  
[https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Technical%20Report\\_17OCT13.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Technical%20Report_17OCT13.pdf)

## Additional literature

- Acquadro, C., Conway, K., Hareendran, A., Aaronson, N., & European Regulatory Issues and Quality of Life Assessment (ERIQA) Group. (2008). Literature review of methods to translate health-related quality of life questionnaires for use in multinational clinical trials. *Value in Health*, 11(3), 509-521.
- Epstein, J., Santo, R. M., & Guillemin, F. (2015). A review of guidelines for cross-cultural adaptation of questionnaires could not bring out a consensus. *Journal of clinical epidemiology*, 68(4), 435-441.
- Rios, J. A., & Sireci, S. G. (2014). Guidelines versus practices in cross-lingual assessment: A disconcerting disconnect. *International Journal of Testing*, 14(4), 289-312.
- Wild, D., Grove, A., Martin, M., Eremenco, S., McElroy, S., Verjee-Lorenz, A., & Erikson, P. (2005). Principles of good practice for the translation and cultural adaptation process for patient-reported outcomes (PRO) measures: report of the ISPOR Task Force for Translation and Cultural Adaptation. *Value in health*, 8(2), 94-104.



## Topics for the discussion

- What is missing in guidelines?
- What happens if we cannot find suitable staff?