

gesis

Leibniz Institute
for the Social Sciences

Advance Translations in the European Social Survey (ESS) – a means for improving the transla- tability of source questionnaires for multilingual surveys?

Brita Dorer (GESIS, Mannheim)



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Assessments”

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European Social Survey (ESS)

- Academically-driven social survey
- Monitoring change of attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns in European societies
- Fielded biannually
- 2005 awarded with the Descartes prize (research prize awarded by EU)

Questionnaire translation in the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Source questionnaire in British English
- 20+ participating countries, even more language versions
- Translation method:

TRAPD

(Translation-Review-Adjudication-Pretesting-Documentation) 'team / committee' approach

- Highest goal to achieve:
Comparability between ALL national versions!
(For comparability of resulting data)

Cross-cultural questionnaire design in the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Questionnaire development 20 months
- Including several methodological steps, amongst others:
 - Cognitive Interviewing in several countries
 - Large-scale pilot survey in 2 countries (each about 500 cases)
 - Expert reviews at different levels
 - Coding item characteristics & measuring in Survey Quality Predictor (SQP)
 - **Advance translation**

Advance translation: purpose

- Improve **translatability** of the source questionnaire
- Facilitate later translation
- Minimise later translation problems and mistakes
- Improve / facilitate **intercultural portability** of the source questionnaire

“Achieving optimal translations begins at the design stage.”
(Tom Smith 2004)

- Linguistic / semantic level
➔ *source text unambiguous / easy to understand / easy to translate?*
- Cross-cultural / factual level
➔ *concepts in source text ('what is asked') transferrable into target cultures?*

Advance translation: idea

- Use translation as ‘problem-spotting tool’
 - Identify and point out problems BEFORE finalising source questionnaire
 - During questionnaire design phase
 - First mentioned by Janet Harkness & Alisù Schoua-Glusberg (1998)
- ➔ Translation problems often only detected when you have to translate by yourself / while carrying out a translation. NOT by merely looking at a source text!

Advance Translation: implementation

So far implemented in:

- European Social Survey (ESS) Rounds 5-9, since 2009
- 3rd European Company Survey (ECS), 2012
- 6th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), 2014

Advance Translation: methodology

- Usually 2-3 languages / language groups
(depending, e.g., on availability, budget)
- Full 'team / committee approach' (TRA in TRAPD)
(2 independent translations + review/adjudication session
/ multi-disciplinary team)
➔ Thorough translation work !
- Translation teams:
 - translators: experienced in questionnaire translation
 - reviewers/adjudicators: experienced in questionnaire design

Advance Translation: methodology

- Comments more important than final translation quality
- Commenting
 - Pre-defined problem categories
 - Comments in own words

Advance translation template (Excel)

Comments more important than translations!

1. Translate 2. Problem Category 3. Comment



E	F	G	H
Advance Translation 1	Problem Category	Comments Advance Translator 1	Advance Trans
PADUOTI RESPONDENTUI 36 KORTELE	<div data-bbox="631 982 888 1346"> <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptation Design Grammar / Syntax Wording / Formul Consistency Unclear source / I Response catego Other </div>	Longer wording would make it clearer for the interviewer (using full sentence)	41 KORTELE

Problem categories in ESS since Round 6

- No Comment
- Intercultural problem / Cultural difference
- Institutional / factual difference
- Design
- Unclear source / Meaning
- Response category
- Grammar / Syntax
- Adaptation
- Wording / Formulation/ Phraseology
- Consistency
- Other

Similar methods

Methods used:

- Translatability Assessment in the medical / pharmaceutical field / life sciences
- Translatability Assessment by cApStAn
- Producing two source versions, e.g., EN and FR, example: PISA

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 1

ESS 8: '**energy efficient** household appliances'

Mentioned for French language, but also problematic for other languages (e.g., RU, DE) / language groups:

Adjectives in target languages clumsy / difficult to understand.

→ 'consuming less / few energy'

→ Concept of energy efficiency not kept due to translation problems

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 2

ESS 5: “**Community service** refers to a sentence other than a prison sentence or fine where the offender is asked to perform a task or tasks that benefit the community e.g. cleaning litter from the streets.”

AT: Community service is not performed in public sphere in some countries

→ Concept of community service seen by others cannot be used in all countries

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 3

ESS 8: '**dependence on energy imports**' does not apply in all countries, e.g. Norway, Russia

(rather energy exports than imports)

→ Concept understood differently in these countries – if at all

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 4

ESS 6: “At the **top of the ladder** are the people who are the best off – those who have the most money, most education and best jobs. - At the **bottom** are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the worst jobs or no jobs.”

AT: Especially in new democracies you find many people who have the best education, but don't have at all most money or best jobs etc.

→ Concept of ‘top-bottom’ doesn't have a comparable meaning across ESS countries

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 5

ESS 8: the term '**energy**' in most Slavic languages refers mainly to 'electric energy'

- Concept of 'energy', including, e.g., fuels understood differently in different countries
- Comparability at risk
- Needs to be more explicit, e.g., 'energy and electricity'

Examples of problematic concepts detected: 6

ESS 9:

- Questionnaire module on **‘justice and fairness’**
 - Two distinct theoretical concepts
 - BUT: in many languages (above all Romance, Slavic) only one adjective for both ‘just’ and ‘fair’
- Source texts reworded to use only one adjective in English (‘just’) in order to enable comparability of translated versions

Interaction with other methods

Example of the ESS:

Cognitive Interviewing (CI):

- Complement each other:
 - CI reveals way of understanding & understanding problems by respondents (target population)
 - AT reveals understanding, understanding problems and wording problems in target language and country by translating teams (translators & questionnaire designers)

Interaction with other methods

Example of the ESS:

Expert reviews:

- Complement each other:
 - Expert reviews rather look at the concepts / content of questions
 - AT rather detects actual translation & linguistic problems in the target language (while actually having to translate it)

Interaction with other methods

Example of the ESS:

Quantitative tests (e.g., large-scale pilot, coding in SQP):

- Additional information:
 - Measurement quality of the translated questions
 - Do they measure what they are supposed to measure?

Success of Advance Translation in ESS

- Advance Translation repeated in every round since 2009
 - Very useful step, many issues detected, often triggers additional discussion of source text
- ➔ Translating forces teams to think about source very thoroughly !!**
- Soon to be published: Think-aloud study (DE & FR) on usefulness of Advance Translation (Dissertation Brita Dorer): Usefulness proved // Results to be published late 2018/early 2019

Questions or comments?

brita.dorer@gesis.org

