Adapting U.S.-Based General Interviewing and Study-Specific Training Protocols for Cross-National Survey Data Collection

Kirsten Alcser, Nicole Kirgis, Heidi Guyer
Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan

Background & Introduction

Adequate and standardized interviewer training is well recognized as a core component of obtaining high standards of quality in data collection. Research indicates that interviewer training helps improve the quality of survey data by: (1) reducing item nonresponse [1], (2) increasing the amount of information obtained (ibid.), and (3) increasing survey participation by teaching interviewers how to identify and respond to respondent concerns [2]. This becomes more important when data collection is undertaken in multiple locations and can be additionally challenging when conducting international, or multi-national, research. When making cross-study comparisons or combining data sets, the manner in which the data were collected must be taken into consideration, which then leads to the question of how the data collectors were trained. This paper will provide examples of well-established training programs at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center (SRC) that have been adapted for international use via a Train-the-Trainer approach [3]. Both examples are derived from international research endeavors carried out to be comparable to the University of Michigan's Health and Retirement Study (HRS) [4] in countries other than the United States. The first example describes a multi-wave Train-the-Trainer session developed for the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) [5, 6, 7, 8]. The training incorporated both the University of Michigan's General Interviewing Techniques training as well as study-specific protocols adapted from the Health and Retirement Study and the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA) [9].The second example is a training session on General Interviewing Techniques adapted for use by the Japanese Health and Retirement Study (HRS-Japan). Trainers from the University of Michigan conducted a Train-the-Trainer session for researchers and representatives from the Japanese survey agency responsible for data collection. There are commonalities as well as differences to both approaches.

The Health and Retirement Study is a longitudinal, population-based study designed to represent the U.S. population aged 50 and older. The study has been conducted since 1992 and includes over 22,000 participants. A broad range of topics is covered in the interview including employment history, health status and health care, finances and savings, and quality of life. A series of physical measures were included in 2004. These measures were then expanded to include biomarker collection in 2006. Over the past decade, multiple studies have been designed and conducted internationally replicating the HRS design in the researchers' respective countries. Participating countries have included fourteen European Union countries and Israel; England; Korea; Mexico; and Japan. Other countries such as China, India, Thailand and New Zealand are in the planning stages of conducting similar studies. The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) was designed to replicate the HRS in Europe while taking into consideration the European policies and context. The first wave of SHARE data collection was carried out in eleven countries in 2004. This included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. The second wave of data collection was expanded to include three additional countries—Czech Republic, Poland and

Ireland—for a total of fourteen European countries, or about 35,000 participants. In 2006, pilot studies of the Japanese Health and Retirement Study (HRS Japan) were designed and conducted in five distinct regions of Japan.

This paper will discuss the adaptations made to the standard SRC training in general interviewing techniques, preparation of the training personnel for cultural awareness, and examples of possible improvements in study outcomes as they relate to the training.

Methods

Overview of Training Program in General Interviewing Techniques

The training program in general interviewing techniques conducted at the Survey Research Center (SRC) is designed to be a comprehensive training on all of the necessary components of conducting standardized, high-quality interviews. All new interviewers hired at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center must satisfactorily complete training in general interviewing techniques training prior to being trained on a specific study.

The training in general interviewing techniques conducted for SRC interviewers consists of approximately 24 hours of content. Before new interviewers come to in-person training, materials are sent to them for home study. Materials include an interviewer manual and an interactive CD-ROM [11] on standardized interviewing techniques, as well as some background on working as a field interviewer for the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. Interviewers are expected to review the CD-ROM and complete exercises and a quiz before coming to in-person training. New interviewers then attend approximately one and a half days of in-person training in general interviewing techniques, which includes review and practice of all concepts presented in the home-study materials plus a thorough training on the systems used to conduct interviewing work —electronic sample management, using the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) questionnaire, and time-keeping software. Only interviewers who successfully complete the entire training session in general interviewing techniques stay for the study-specific training.

At SRC, the key components of training in general interviewing techniques are:

- Interview Introductions: Introducing the study to households and respondents.
- Addressing Respondent Concerns: Identifying and responding to concerns from study respondents.
- Asking Questions: Reading the question exactly as written, proper pace and tone, and asking all questions presented.
- Providing Clarification: Repeating the questions, using definitions of terms provided by researchers, using neutral phrases.
- Probing Responses: When to probe, using neutral probes such as "What do you think?"
- Giving Feedback: Encouraging good participation by the respondent, using neutral feedback such as "I see" and "Thank you."
- Recording Data: Importance of accurately recording responses, making note of qualified answers.

As the Survey Research Center has been asked to provide consultation and training for international data collection efforts such as the World Mental Health study and the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), the SRC training program in general interviewing techniques has been adapted to meet the needs of these efforts.

Health and Retirement Study (HRS) Training

After being trained in general interviewing techniques, all interviewers and field managers on the Health and Retirement Study are required to complete a four-day study-specific training, in addition to completing approximately eight hours of home study. All HRS field staff are also required to successfully complete a certification interview demonstrating that they have mastered general and study-specific interviewing techniques as well as successful mastery of conducting a series of physical measures and collecting biological samples.

The Health and Retirement home study packet is mailed to interviewers approximately two to three weeks prior to the in-person training. The packet includes the study manual, a physical measure and biomarker data collection booklet, an instructional DVD [12] on collecting physical measures and biomarkers, and a home study questionnaire to complete after reviewing all enclosed materials

The four day study-specific training is typically conducted in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The in-person training allows for the field staff to meet each other and to receive the same information at the same time. For many interviewers, this is the only time they will actually meet their colleagues in person. During data collection, interviewers work independently in their local areas.

The in-person training session includes the following components:

- Study overview and protocols: background information on the longitudinal features of the HRS including the study and sample design.
- Interview overview and protocols: review of the rules for the various interview and instrument types as well as follow-up procedures for different types of sample members.
- Systems overview and protocols: review of the interview application and special rules within the various sections as well as a review of the sample management system and information displayed, entered and updated.
- Conducting physical measures and biomarkers: this includes a review of the protocols and procedures for collecting physical measures and biomarkers on the HRS. Physical measures include tests of grip strength, lung strength, walking speed, tests of balance, height, weight and waist. Biomarkers include blood pressure, salivary DNA, and blood spots collected for A1c, cholesterol and C-Reactive Protein.
- Practice interviews: scripted mock interviews are conducted to practice the different instrument types and gain familiarity with the computerized interview application.
- Addressing respondent concerns: a review of the primary concerns expressed by HRS respondents and approaches to addressing the concerns is presented to the interviewers and practice sessions are incorporated in the training.
- Tracking/tracing respondents: a key feature of longitudinal studies is panel retention. Over the course of the study period, sample members move and must be located in order to keep them in the study. Tracking protocols and resources are reviewed with the field staff.

- Certification instructions and requirements: all interviewers must successfully complete a certification interview for both the physical measure and biomarker collection, as well as conducting the interview itself. The guidelines are reviewed prior to the actual certification. Bi-lingual interviewers are certified in both English and Spanish.
- Data collection goals and timeline: the goals for various sample types are presented as well as expectations regarding the length of the field period and time estimates per completed interview.
- Special sessions on research findings: researchers are invited to present recent findings from the Health and Retirement Study to the field staff. This helps to gain familiarity with the overarching goals of the study and the purpose of the research itself. The sessions on research findings are motivational for interviewers and demonstrate the importance of the research.

A substantial amount of time is spent actually reviewing the interview instrument and completing scripted mock interviews. During the mock interview, each trainer reads from a script that has been written to allow interviewers to gain familiarity with the interview while reinforcing general interviewing techniques and providing instructions on some of the more difficult sections or questions. Even the most experienced interviewers benefit from the hands-on sessions and practice with the interview and systems.

Interviewers are certified on two components: conducting the interview and completing physical measures and biomarker collection. Interview certifications are completed over the phone with a supervisor after returning home from the full study-specific training. Physical measure and biomarker certification takes place during the in-person training. An interviewer can attempt to complete certification up to three times. If at that time they are unable to successfully complete certification, the interviewer will not be allowed to conduct physical measures and collect biomarkers in the field.

Although all training sessions are conducted in English, the HRS interview can be completed in Spanish as well. The interview, as well as all respondent materials, is translated into Spanish. Interviewers must be certified to conduct the interview in Spanish using a standardized language certification process. Bilingual interviewers receive study supplies in both English and Spanish and are required to practice the interview in Spanish. Additionally, bilingual interviewers are required to complete a certification interview in both English and Spanish.

The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)

The training program of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) is based on the train-the-trainer (TTT) model in which core trainers, in consultation with the project coordinating center, develop and execute a centralized training session for trainers and key staff from survey organizations selected from the countries that will conduct the data collection. The goal of the training program is to standardize local interviewer training, study procedures, and data collection as much as feasible in an effort to ensure a consistently high level of quality and comparability of the data that are collected for the entire SHARE project at a given point in time as well as across time.

In order to facilitate comparability with the HRS, SHARE contracted with staff at the Survey Research Center to take the lead in developing the training program and all training materials (in English) as well as to conduct the training with the country-level trainers and other designated members of the local survey organization or project team.

The SHARE Train-The-Trainer Program

The SHARE interviewer training program requires a minimum of three days (total of 18 hours) of training. The SHARE Train-The-Trainer (TTT) program "models" this training for trainers from each participating country's survey organization. It also provides a model training agenda and training materials, including a comprehensive Interviewer Project Manual, for country-level training for each of the training sessions to be conducted in the SHARE member country. The TTT covers training in general interviewing techniques and field procedures as well as SHARE study-specific training. It does not include basic administrative requirements of interviewers as agents of the survey organization, such as time keeping and reporting, expectations for day-to-day interactions with field supervisors or survey organization, and requirements for protection of respondent privacy and confidentiality of respondent data. It is the responsibility of each survey organization to make sure that these are covered separately.

The SHARE training program covers all of the key components of the SRC training in general interviewing techniques from interview introductions and question asking to recording of data. In addition, the SHARE training program covers standard field procedures used on all SRC surveys, including contacting sample households; maintaining and accounting for each selected sample element (household level and individual level) in the gross sample; writing "call records" for each contact attempt, including making specific call notes for both Contacts and Non-Contacts; interviewing special populations (e.g., physical and cognitive limitations); gate keepers (i.e., how to gain entry to a household/respondent, going through an intermediary – a family member, a door keeper); resistance handling (e.g., averting resistance, addressing respondent concerns); and number of call attempts (i.e., SHARE requires that a minimum of eight attempts be made to reach a respondent, and these attempts should be spread across weekdays and weekends and across time of day in an effort to increase chances of making contact).

In addition to the training in general interviewing techniques, the SHARE TTT program includes training on SHARE study-specific protocols and procedures. The aim is to make certain that these are as consistent as feasible across the three projects: SHARE, ELSA and HRS. In addition, since SHARE is a longitudinal study, it is important to review and enforce consistency of the administration of those specific protocols that are repeated across future waves of data collection.

For best overall results, the SHARE TTT training format combines lecture with visuals and round-robin practice sessions. Mixing the format keeps the participants engaged and acknowledges that different people learn in different ways [13]. All presentations make use of power point slides to make it easier for participants for whom English is not the primary language . These slides also serve as the Training Facilitator Guide and can be translated and used in country level training.

The current content of the study-specific training of the SHARE TTT program includes:

- SHARE project overview and review of substantive domains covered in the questionnaire
- Sample overview – who is eligible to participate in the study
- Overview of the sample management system—e.g., functionality, handling of coversheet information including respondent selection/identification, launching an interview, interviewer observations, documenting the call (call record), transferring a sample record if instructed to do so by a supervisor, sending sample and interview information to the survey organization
- Proxy interviews – when to accept a proxy; special requirement for selection of a proxy
- Interviewing in Nursing Homes – special considerations; gaining access
- Overview of the computerized questionnaire application program and functionality (e.g., Blaise program application)
- End-of-life ("exit") interview with family members of deceased panel respondents
- Protocols for handling self-administered questionnaires, as appropriate
- Physical measurements and certification of ability to perform the measurements correctly
- Gaining respondent cooperation
- Questionnaire walk-through and hands-on practice.

The study-specific training for SHARE will be updated for each wave of data collection to take account of new areas of research focus to be included in the project and changes or updates to the sampling process. For the current third wave of data collection (2008), for example, a life history interview is being used to collect data on the SHARE panel members and any new age-eligible partners of the panel members. Special training on how to use the calendar approach to collect data from birth to present is incorporated into this wave of SHARE study-specific TTT training program.

Adapting Standardized Training and Field Procedures to Local Conditions

SHARE has taken an approach of requiring adherence to standards of interviewing, while being sensitive to cultural and legal constraints of member countries.

Based on debriefing with trainers and other country level staff who participated in the TTT during the first two waves of SHARE data collection, there were several areas where the training protocol and field procedures needed to be modified in accordance with local requirements for conducting survey research. However, at the same time, there were some protocols and procedures that were reinforced as minimal requirements for the project. The protocols and procedures that were adapted to local (European and/or country specific) conditions included:

1. Reluctance handling or reluctance aversion. Local laws or accepted practice dictated how much effort the interviewer or agency could put into averting or converting a potential respondent's expression of reluctance to participate. This was an area, therefore, that could not be entirely standardized. During the first wave of TTT training for SHARE, the trainers and the project coordinator's team held a separate session on this issue after having requested examples of how this was handled from all participating

survey organizations. Thus, the resulting training focused on identifying the 8-10 usual concerns expressed by respondents when faced with a request to participate in surveys. This model is based on SRC's experience over several decades of survey administration [14]. The SRC model was adjusted to take account of concerns encountered in the experience of local survey organizations. Making sure that the interviewer was completely familiar with the purpose of the SHARE project and had practiced responses to each of the identified concerns would help gain cooperation without being coercive.

2. Doorstep introductions. While the key points of the introduction were to be the same (e.g., what the study is about; why it is important to participate; that participation is voluntary and information will be kept confidential), the interviewer was encouraged to "make it her own," so that it would sound natural, and presumably would be done in a way acceptable to the cultural background of the respondent. Since some countries used telephone samples, training on doorstep introductions needed to be tailored accordingly.

3. Appropriateness of use of images in training materials. For some of the SHARE training videos and supporting materials which were produced in the US, there was concern that mannerism, dress and other characteristics of actors or situations did not resonate with interviewers in European countries. For example, in a training video that demonstrated the administration of physical measurements, the respondent actor did not appear old enough (50 +), was wearing a baseball cap, or was of a race or ethnic group not commonly found in some or all of the countries. Countries were encouraged to explain the acknowledged limitations before using these materials or to create demonstration of the key points on their own. Most of the materials were subsequently reproduced to improve on their applicability to the project and the European context.

4. Use of "preloaded" information. Information collected in previous waves of data collection can be uploaded into the electronic sample management system for confirmation at the start of the next wave of data collection and also "fed into" the Blaise application to guide routing patterns. In some countries the amount of information that may legally be transferred from one wave of data collection to the next is limited. Thus, in some countries, the interviewer is not permitted to refer to previously collected information about the respondent's or the household's background at all; in some countries, the interviewer may refer to the information only if the respondent was asked and granted permission to do so at the previous wave of data collection; and in some countries, the use of previously collected information could be used as "preload." Accordingly, training and implementation of data collection were tailored for this procedure.

5. Re-contacting respondents in future waves. Some countries required explicit permission from the respondent who participated in one wave of data collection to be approached again with a request for an interview in the next wave. Accordingly, training and implementation of data collection were tailored for this procedure.

6. Panel care. While most countries favored keeping in touch with panel study members between waves of data collection, the types of activities were limited by social, cultural and legal norms. In some countries it was appropriate to send birthday cards, while in others the organizations felt that other marker days were more appropriate (e.g., name day). Again, the ability to do follow-up mailings of any type was limited to countries

where it was legal to access respondent contact information after data collection was completed.

Other protocols and procedures were reinforced by SHARE because variation in these were believed to seriously compromise data comparability across member countries and across the HRS and ELSA projects. These included:

1. Length of interviewer training. The SHARE training agenda requires a training of approximately 3 days or 18 hours total. This is significantly longer than the usual training offered by the local survey organizations and was difficult to implement. However, this is now clearly specified in the contract and is a prerequisite for participating in the SHARE project. This requirement is consistent with those proposed by others for cross-cultural surveys [15, 16].

2. Interviewer certification. This is a process by which interviewers are certified competent to perform the tasks associated with their roles as interviewers on the project. Certification includes written or on-line test on general interviewing procedures, a complete role-play interview with a supervisor, certification of the administration of physical measurements with a certified professional trainer, and language certification as appropriate. Interviewer certification was an area that most survey organizations were not comfortable with, partly explained by the fact that in most countries the interviewers are free agents and could not be required to be certified for a given study. This is now a SHARE requirement.

3. Probing for a non-codable answer. Survey organizations varied with respect to whether an interviewer probe for a respondent's response of "don't know" and "refuse" was implemented. SHARE protocol requires that a "don't know" response or a refusal always be probed once, unless otherwise indicated at the question level. Similarly, in cases of questions about financial aspects, SHARE protocol stipulates the use of follow-up 'range' questions to stem questions about 'amount' to which a respondent answered "don't know" or "refuse." This approach is fairly common in U.S. surveys and is employed extensively on the HRS. Additionally, SHARE protocol requires that a question type that permits the respondent to select more than one response (e.g., a "check all that apply" format) is always probed (e.g., "Anything else?") until the respondent indicates that there are no further responses or categories that apply. The same protocol applies to open-ended questions.

SHARE Train The Trainer Program: Summary

Over the course of two waves of data collection, and now entering the third wave, the SHARE Train The Trainer (TTT) program has evolved into a fairly stable program of training which aims to standardize aspects of interview administration and field and study procedure where feasible. The SHARE training program which is taught in the TTT format to representatives of the member countries' survey organizations and then translated into the country language and implemented for local interviewer training started with the basic components of interviewer training at the Survey Research Center, specifically as implemented for the HRS. Some of the standard procedures of the Survey Research Center's training programs have been adapted for

SHARE as a result of working closely with the SHARE survey organizations. Thus, for example, after conducting training on general interviewing techniques and field procedures at wave I of SHARE, debriefing sessions were held with those attending the TTT training to review what areas were routinely covered as part of their own basic interviewer training as well as to review how they handled specific interviewer conventions such as probing for non-codable answers. The resulting SHARE training program reflects both the flexibility needed to account for special social, cultural and legal conditions as well as stipulations of minimum requirements deemed critical to implement for the sake of data comparability across countries.

As expected, in the course of time, the SHARE protocols and procedures have evolved and have subsequently also influenced both the HRS and the ELSA projects. As all of these projects progress, this feedback loop is critical to ensure comparability of the data to be analyzed across study populations targeted by each project. Training of interviewers is one very important area in this effort to ensure comparability, and the TTT model developed for SHARE appears to be a successful model toward that end.

HRS-Japan

While there are several leading cross-sectional data sets on aging in Japan, they tend to lack comprehensive details needed to understand the behavior of the elderly. A group of economic and health researchers in Japan took elements from the SHARE questionnaire and the health component of the HRS questionnaire and created a plan for a Japanese version of the HRS. The plan was presented to and endorsed by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade. Funding for the study is provided by the Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry (RIETI). While HRS-Japan is not formally a part of SHARE, its aim is to be comparable in those areas where the content of the survey overlaps with SHARE and HRS. In addition to data comparability, the study seeks to improve response rates by enhancing field interviewer training, thus making it comparable to the training techniques used on SHARE and HRS.

In preparation for fielding another pilot study on the Japanese HRS, staff from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center (SRC) were invited to conduct a general interviewing techniques training session in Tokyo, Japan. In an effort to improve the response rate from the first pilot study (48 percent response rate), the SRC trainers were asked to focus on general interviewing techniques related to making household introductions, strategies for gaining respondent cooperation (identifying and addressing respondent concerns), and maximizing contact efforts. These specific components from the SHARE training program were adapted for the HRS-Japan training. Study-specific training on HRS-Japan, such as the collection of physical measures and biomarkers, was conducted by the HRS-Japan research team.

Two trainers from SRC conducted the training. Both trainers were experienced in conducting cross-cultural trainings and both had experience managing the Health and Retirement Study in the U.S. Several conference calls between the SRC trainers and the lead investigators were held in order to seek clarification on training needs, establish a training agenda, and review training materials. A study manual on general interviewing techniques was adapted for HRS-Japan and included sections on household introductions, contact efforts, and gaining cooperation. PowerPoint slides were created to guide the in-person training. The manual, PowerPoint slides, and exercises were sent in advance to be translated by the research staff.

In preparation for the trip, the trainers consulted documents on conducting business with the Japanese in order to familiarize themselves with norms in Japan. One such document, "Working Effectively with Japanese Colleagues" [17] by Japan Intercultural Consulting, provided useful information in understanding some of the cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan. It was helpful in gaining a sense of concepts that are used for data collection in the U.S, but may not be customary when conducting research in Japan. For example, there is no word in Japanese for the concept of giving "feedback." People are typically expected to figure out themselves whether their performance is acceptable, without being told explicitly.

The training was conducted in November 2006 in Tokyo and was one and one-half days in length. The SRC trainers and a principal investigator presented at the front of the room, with a translator to the side. The translator had studied in the U.S., was experienced with survey research, and had a very strong command of the English language. Each day, trainers and the translator would discuss difficult-to-translate concepts in order to find the best terminology to use. The training was conducted in English, with translation into Japanese after every few sentences. The PowerPoint slides were presented on a screen in front of the room both in English and in Japanese.

The training served as a "Train-the-Trainer" session in which representatives from the survey organization in each of the five municipalities attended and would then train their interviewers on the concepts. There were approximately twenty trainees, most of whom knew very little English. The material was first presented verbally in English and then presented verbally in Japanese. While seemingly cumbersome and time-consuming, this method of training went smoothly. It definitely impacted the pace of the training, but in some ways, perhaps helped the presentation by working at a pace in which concepts could be absorbed and retained.

HRS-Japan General Interviewing Techniques

The adaptation of U.S.-based training and components of the SHARE training for HRS-Japan was based on the results from the first pilot study, which indicated the top "reasons for rejection" by respondents were: too busy, don't like surveys, boring, sick, and too difficult. Additionally, these reasons were accepted as the final outcome of a sample case after only one contact attempt. University of Michigan trainers tailored "identifying and addressing respondent concerns" on these topics. Part of the training included a discussion that responding to concerns expressed by respondents can be done with consideration and thoughtfulness—important in any culture, but particularly sensitive in Japan.

In the "identifying and addressing respondent concerns" component of the training, trainers covered the basic principles of having solid knowledge of the survey, active listening, identifying the concern, selecting a response, and delivering the response. Typical themes of reluctance and typical concerns were outlined and strategies for identifying and addressing them were covered. Data were shared from the U.S. Health and Retirement Study on the typical concerns expressed by respondents, with the top reasons being time/burden concerns—the same top reasons cited by Japanese respondents. Trainees were then guided through exercises in which typical statements of concern were given and the type of concern had to be identified. Then, in groups, there was practice on both identifying concerns and responding to the concerns.

Another important focus of the HRS-Japan training was on the number of contact attempts necessary to improve response rates. The training outlined the importance of making multiple attempts on a sample line and making those attempts in the best calling windows for the study population in order to maximize contact. As with SHARE, baseline sample must have at least eight contact attempts before being coded out as non-interview. Also, the training emphasized the importance of recording every attempt at making contact with each household. Trainers explained that the response rate for the study is a measure of participation of eligible respondents, and participation is a function of contact and cooperation. Several strategies for maximizing contact and cooperation were presented.

One household pre-contact strategy that was emphasized for this study was the use of advance letters and study brochures. An advance letter mailed to the respondent before the first contact with the household verifies the legitimacy of the study, encourages the respondent to contact the agency to schedule an appointment, and provides the interviewer with a reference point to begin interaction with the sample member ("We sent you a letter about the study. Did you receive it?"). SRC trainers encouraged the use of university names affiliated with the project on the advance letter to lend legitimacy and authority to the effort.

Other data collection strategies that were shared with the HRS-Japan team were the use of "Sorry I Missed You" cards, which can be left at the doorstep if no one is home at the time of contact, encouraging the household to call a telephone number for an appointment. Also, the use of small gifts for the respondent and the use of business cards for interviewers were discussed as strategies. Business cards provide a professional way for interviewers to leave behind contact information for the respondent. In addition, the trainers explained the importance of supervisor review of each sample line and discussing contact strategies with the interviewers. Line-by-line review of sample lines can be used to ensure interviewers are making multiple contact attempts and making these attempts in different call windows, making sure appointments are being scheduled at the respondent's convenience, and monitoring calls by age group, making sure that younger respondents are being contacted early in the field period as they can take more time to get the interview due to demanding schedules. The importance of verification of completed interviews was also discussed (checking for falsification of interview data by calling back a certain percentage of completed interviews to verify that the interviewer had, indeed, completed an interview with the respondent).

Trainers explained the important role of principal investigators in data collection, suggesting that site visits to the regions being studied would be helpful and encouraging to the staff. In the U.S., it is typical to have the principal investigators come to interviewer training in order to provide background on the research purpose and explain the importance of the work being done. Hearing the principal investigators talk at training is a part of training that most interviewers thoroughly enjoy as it helps them understand the important role they play in the survey research process.

Because many of the agencies conducting the data collection for HRS-Japan had never used laptop computers in the field, the trainers were asked to demonstrate the logistics of arriving at a doorstep, laptop in hand, introducing the study, and launching the interview. It seemed helpful for the trainees to see how it comes together and learn that other studies in other countries successfully collect data using this mode.

The following topics were covered during the training:

- Welcome and Introductions: Principal investigators welcomed the group to the training, made introductions, and provided an overview of the training schedule.

- Project Overview: Principal investigators presented the goals of the project and talked about the importance of the pilot study. The sample design was explained, including how the sample was selected, what determined sample eligibility, and response rate requirements.

- General Interviewing Techniques: SRC trainers covered components of standardized interviewing such as asking questions, probing responses, and giving feedback.

- Household Introductions: SRC trainers discussed the elements of effective household introductions and led the trainees in an exercise on practicing introductions.

- Gaining Respondent Cooperation: SRC trainers reviewed common respondent concerns with the trainees and ways to address the concerns. Two exercises on identifying the concern and addressing concerns were completed.

- Response Rates and Contact Efforts: SRC trainers presented on the importance of contact efforts on response rates and strategies for maximizing contact efforts at the sample line level.

- Proxy Interviews: SRC trainers explained how to identify and interview proxy respondents.

- Small role-playing session; including a demonstration of using a laptop to conduct the interview: Because the survey agency representatives were not experienced using computers for data collection, the SRC trainers demonstrated the introduction of the study to a household and how the interview is conducted on the laptop.

HRS-Japan: Summary

A year after the Tokyo pilot study training, one of the principal investigators met with the SRC trainers to review results from their second pilot study. The investigators were pleased with the improvement in the response rate (close to 60 percent) which they attributed, in part, to the training on general interviewing techniques and the information provided on data collection concepts and strategies. These concepts and strategies included making more than one contact attempt on a sample line in order to maximize participation, the use of special materials in the field such as advance letters and brochures, and the important role of supervisors and principal investigators in the data collection process.

The successful outcomes on HRS-Japan illustrate that despite being in a different culture, general interviewing techniques, such as identifying and addressing respondent concerns, and other data collection concepts and strategies are applicable and adaptable and can be successful in any culture.

Conclusion

As described above, there are many aspects to consider when developing interviewer training sessions to be applied to different populations or contexts from that in which the trainers or the training originated. In conducting cross-national training, non-study related content and other cultural aspects must be taken into account in addition to the research content that must be adequately covered. In all cases, SRC training staff has attempted to provide a baseline model to be used in participating countries. However, the training sessions have also been designed to be flexible, and trainers are encouraged to adjust the sessions to meet the needs of each population. For example, when training on door step introductions, countries and cultures vary greatly in social norms regarding what is considered appropriate and polite. In the United States, one may be encouraged to engage in conversation and to attempt to develop a rapport with the household from the first contact attempt. This may be considered impolite in other cultures, and brief interactions may be more acceptable. Likewise, in the United States interviewers are trained never to accept food in a respondent's home but to politely refuse. In other cultures the norm is to accept food at the first offering, or to politely refuse the first offering but then accept the second time in which it is offered. It is important to address these types of behaviors or techniques as they may ultimately lead to a difference in response rate. While it is impossible to actually "train" on all of the various nuances to take into account, both trainers and trainees must recognize that cultural differences do exist and must be accounted for. The definition of "normal" will vary from one place to the next.

Apart from the training content, there are other aspects of training of which the trainers must be aware. This may include such things as the tone of voice used when presenting training material, the pace and delivery of the training content, the use of non-standard language (slang for example) and the meaning of body language (raising one's hands or arms for emphasis or to make a point). The interpretation of such behaviors can influence the degree to which the trainees accept the training (as well as the trainers) and the information provided. If the behavior is considerably different from that which is socially acceptable in their country, the behavior can be distracting to such a degree that the content of the training may be misinterpreted or, worse yet, not even heard or accepted. This reinforces the idea that the trainers must be culturally aware of the context in which they are training, including the social norms of the society as well as the specific needs and expectations of the trainees.

Additional examples of non-training content related types of cultural norms that must be taken into account are such things as holidays and meal times. While this may seem minor, it can be of importance and lead to major misunderstandings if not recognized and communicated during the planning phase. For example, the length and timing of vacations varies by country. Likewise, religious and national holidays vary from country to country. It is best to review an international calendar when scheduling a training to be sure that the dates do not conflict with any holidays that may be observed by the participants. If training is scheduled during a holiday period, participants may not be able to attend the full training and the actual cost of the training may be increased as well if it is considered a peak time for hotels and flights. Customs vary in regards to meals as well ranging from a two hour break in the middle of the work day to a short 30 minute break or even a “working lunch” during which work is carried out while eating. This is true in regards to break times as well—the length of the break and what is to be served during the break will vary by country or region. Once again, it is important to consider the cultural norms both of the country where the training is taking place as well as of the participants.

In this paper, we have reviewed two Train-the-Trainer programs and discussed the cultural implications of such trainings. Ideally, in multi-center studies, the same team from the coordinating center will train all interviewers to ensure standardization of study-specific protocols [15]. However, oftentimes this is not feasible as the trainers may not speak the languages of all of the participants and a translator may not always be available or affordable. If this is the case other steps must be taken to ensure the standardization of study-specific protocols. One approach is the train-the-trainer model. The train-the-trainer model offers a baseline training that can be varied and implemented by each group. It also provides study documentation on both the training as well as the sampling and study procedures. For example, the study manual is an important part of training and will serve as reference material while the survey is underway [16] as well as afterwards during the final report or publication phase. While the overall goal of training, as well as field protocols and procedures are to standardize these as much as feasible, social, cultural and legal conditions of the member countries necessitate that some modifications be made. When these occur, they are negotiated with the coordinating center and documented. Additionally, researchers and survey agencies must plan for more time when adapting a train-the-trainer program for their interviewers given that all materials must be translated before the interviewer training takes place.

Cross-cultural research is a challenging and rewarding endeavor in which all parties further their knowledge not only of the study itself, but of other cultures and styles. While there is an ever-increasing interest in cross-national research, much work remains on identifying the components and feasibility of standardizing interviewer training. Additional work is then necessary to formalize the desired level of standardization to be implemented across study countries and emphasized in cross-national training sessions. Additionally, the characteristics of the trainers must be taken into consideration as well to ensure successful training and high quality data collection.

References

1. Billiet, J., & Loosveldt, G. (1988). Improvement of the quality of responses to factual survey questions by interviewer training. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *52(5)*, 190-211.

2. O'Brien, E. M., Mayer, T. S., Groves, R. M., & O'Neill, G. E. (2002). Interviewer training to increase survey participation. *Proceedings of the American Statistical Association: Survey Research Methods Section*, 2502-07.

3. General Interviewer Training, Trainer's Guide (2005). University of Michigan, Survey Research Center.

4. National Institute on Aging (2007). Growing older in America: The Health and Retirement Study. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health.

5. Börsch-Supan, A., Brugiavini, A., Jürges, H., Mackenbach, J., Siegrist, J., & Weber, G. (Eds.) (2005). Health, ageing and retirement in Europe – First results from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. Mannheim, Germany: University of Mannheim, Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging.

6. Börsch-Supan, A., Hank, K., & Jürges, H. (2005). A new comprehensive and international view on ageing: Introducing the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe. *European Journal of Ageing (2)4*, 245-253.

7. Alcser, K. H., & Benson, G. (2005). The SHARE Train-the-Trainer program. Chap. 6 in A. Boersch-Supan & H. Juerges (Eds.), *The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe – Methodology*. Mannheim, Germany: Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging.

8. Alcser, K. H., Benson, G. D., & Guyer, H. M. (forthcoming). Training for SHARE Wave II. Chap. 8 in A. Börsch-Supan, A. Brugiavini, H. Jürges, J. Mackenbach, J. Siegrist, & G. Weber (Eds.), *First Results from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe – Wave II*. Mannheim, Germany: Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging.

9. Taylor, R., Conway, L., Calderwood, L., Lessof, C., Cheshire, H., Cox, K., et al. (2007). Health, wealth and lifestyles of the older population in England: The 2002 English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. Technical Report. London: National Centre for Social Research.

10. Marmot, M., Banks, J., Blundell, R., Lessof, C., & Nazroo, J. (Eds.) (2002). *Health, wealth and lifestyles of the older population in England*. National Centre for Social Research, London: The 2002 English Longitudinal Study of Ageing.

11. SRC General Interviewing Techniques CD (2005). University of Michigan, Survey Research Center.

12. Health and Retirement Study Training DVD (2008). University of Michigan, Survey Research Center.

13. Lessler, J. T., Eyerman, J., & Wang, K. (2008). Interviewer training. In E. D. de Leeuw, J. J. Hox, & D. A. Dillman (Eds.), *International Handbook of Survey Methodology*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

14. Groves, R. M., & McGonagle, K. A. (2001). A theory-guided interviewer training protocol regarding survey participation. *Journal of Official Statistics*, *17(2)*, 249-265.

15. Üstün , T. B., Chatterji, S., Mechbal, A., & Murray, C. J. L. (2005). Quality assurance in surveys: Standards, guidelines, and procedures. In *Household sample surveys in developing and transition countries* (pp. 199-230). New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

16. Glewwe, P. (2005). Overview of the implementation of household surveys in developing countries. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), *Household sample surveys in developing and transition countries* (pp. 54-66). New York: United Nations.

17. Masuda, M., Working effectively with Japanese colleagues (2004). Presentation. Chicago: Japan Intercultural Consulting.

Funding Support and Acknowledgements

Support for the Health and Retirement Study research was provided by the National Institute on Aging (Grant No. U01 AG009740-18).

The SHARE data collection has been primarily funded by the European Commission through the 5th framework programme (project QLK6-CT-2001- 00360 in the thematic programme Quality of Life). Additional funding came from the US National Institute on Ageing (U01 AG09740-13S2, P01 AG005842, P01 AG08291, P30 AG12815, Y1-AG-4553-01 and OGHA 04-064). Data collection for wave 1 was nationally funded in Austria (through the Austrian Science Foundation, FWF), Belgium (through the Belgian Science Policy Office), France (through CNAM, CNAV, COR, Drees, Dares, Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations et le Commissariat Général du Plan) and Switzerland (through BBW/OFES/UFES. The SHARE data collection in Israel was funded by the US National Institute on Aging (R21 AG025169), by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (G.I.F.), and by the National Insurance Institute of Israel. Further support by the European Commission through the 6th framework program (projects SHARE-I3, RII-CT- 2006-062193, and COMPARE, CIT5-CT-2005-028857) is gratefully acknowledged. For methodological details see Boersch-Supan and Juerges (2005)."

ELSA has been developed through a collaboration between University College London, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), with specialist advice provided by academics at the Universities of Cambridge, Nottingham, East Anglia and elsewhere. Funding for the first four waves of the study has been provided by the US National Institute on Aging, and a consortium of British Government Departments.

Funding for the pilot study provided by the Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry (RIETI), Tokyo, Japan.