Language Interpreting and Oral Translation in Surveys

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Outline

• Written or scripted questionnaires
• Why use oral translation or interpreters?
• Oral translation in surveys
• Interpreting in surveys
• Best practice versus survey necessities
• Outlook for research and practice
Written or scripted questionnaires

A written or “scripted” version is available for the interviewer to follow according to instructions.

- Basic aim of standardized questionnaires is to reduce unwanted sources of error through interviewer effects.
- Interviewers provided with “script” to follow faithfully.
Written or scripted questionnaires
Terminology

• **Translation**: 
  (1) transfer of meaning between languages 
  (2) time for research, reflection + revision

• **Interpreting**: translation in “real time”

• **Source Language (SL)**: the language translated out of (cf. ST)

• **Target Language (TL)**: the language translated into (cf. TT)
Definition: TRANSLATION

Survey Instrument → Translator(s) → Translation

Interviewer F-2-F

Respondent

Interviewer

Telephone

Respondent
Definition: ORAL TRANSLATION

**Oral translation** in surveys: translation made orally (or signed), not written down

- Two people involved: interviewer and respondent
- The interviewer can speak both the language of the questionnaire and the language of the respondent
Definition: ORAL TRANSLATION

The interviewer conducts the interview in the language of the respondent (TL) by:

– silently reading the question **and**
– orally translating (sight translating) the questions into TL as s/he conducts the interview
– hearing responses in TL, silently translating + coding the answers in the SL questionnaire
Definition: ORAL TRANSLATION

Survey Instrument -> Translation -> Interviewer (F-2-F) -> Translation -> Respondent

Survey Instrument -> Translation -> Interviewer (F-2-F) -> Translation -> Telephone -> Respondent
Drawbacks : ORAL TRANSLATION

- Multi-tasking increased burden (dual role)
- No record of what asked or answered
- Stimulus depends on translation quality
- Variance between interviewers and within interviewers (consistency)
- Handling of dynamics (interruptions…) => deterioration of interviewer performance (e.g forgetting to probe...)
Definition: INTERPRETING

- Three people involved: interviewer, interpreter, respondent
- The interviewer reads off the scripted question in the SL.
- The interpreter interprets into the TL for the respondent.
- The respondent replies in the TL.
- The interpreter interprets the response into SL.
- The interviewer codes the answers in the SL questionnaire
Definition: INTERPRETING

Survey Instrument
  → Interviewer
  → Interpreter
  → Respondent

Survey Instrument
  → Interviewer
  → Interpreter
  → Telephone
  → Respondent
Models of Interpreting

CONDUIT

word-for-word
machine
invisible

CONTROLLER

adaptation
advocate
present
Modes of Interpreting

**UNHCR**

- simultaneous (+ *chuchotage*)
- consecutive
- summary
- verbatim (word-for-word)
Desire for “verbatim” interpreting

• LEGAL FIELDS
  (especially: police witness + suspect interviews, cross-examination in court, etc.)

• MENTAL HEALTH
  (e.g. mental health status interviews)
Desire for “verbatim” interpreting

=> “forensic interpreting”  (Wilson & Perez)

i.e. Interpreting in communicative events when language is used as a means of “diagnosis”
If interpreters used in surveys...

“forensic interpreting”
may be best strategy?
Drawbacks: INTERPRETING

- Inconsistency - increases variance in data
- Interpreter-quality dependent
- No record of what asked + answered
- Understanding of survey interviews
- Length + cost
- Interpreter interventions (length -> respondent + interviewer burden)
Best practice for survey translations

Use scripted source questionnaire matched with scripted translated questionnaire

BUT
What if there’s little choice?

Practical reasons, such as:
• Unpredictable language needs
• Need to incorporate unexpected
• Need to interview languages “rare” for given context

Unavoidable:
• May meet with languages without standardized written form (e.g. sign languages)
What if there’s little choice?

Is oral translation preferable to interpreting?

?  

How best to prepare?

• preparation for interviewers (-> interpreting)?
• preparation for interpreters (-> interviewing)?

When telephone involved, who is face to face + with whom?
Research needed

Starting points from Translation & Interpreting Studies

- Language competence (x 2)
- Interpreting / Translating competence
- Survey work - practices + procedures
- Subject field knowledge
Research needed (2)

1. Consider (oral) translation / interpreting at design stage (e.g. “instructions”)?

2. Guidelines + Training
   interviewer
   interpreter
   (respondent)

3. Implementation tools (glossary...)
Oral Translation + Interpreting

often driven by expedient

However, quality survey practice calls for careful planning, training, implementation + research!