

# Surveying Cultural & Linguistic Minorities



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# Overview

- What are cultural and linguistic minorities?
- What are hard-to-reach (H2R) minorities?
- Challenges and potential solutions
- Research outlook



# Minority Populations

- Various governmental definitions
  - e.g., United Nations
- But these have weaknesses
- Our definition of a minority:

*A group of residents in a nation state, which is a distinct subgroup of that state's resident population. It is in a non-dominant position, endowed with cultural or linguistic characteristics that differ from other groups. The subgroup has an internal cohesion based on its distinct characteristics.*



# Linguistic Minorities

- Using or preferring a language other than the majority or dominant language
- 6,909 known living languages (Lewis 2009)
  - 193 internationally recognized sovereign states
  - Majority of languages are minority languages



# Linguistic Minorities

- Other considerations
  - Language proficiency and diversity
  - Immigrant linguistic minorities
  - Linguistic isolation



# Cultural Minorities

- Culture is the realm of values and value systems
  - Social theory definition (Mohler 1978; Parsons 1991)
  - e.g., members of a religious denomination
- May or may not be linguistically different
- Defined by differences perceived by majority and the minority itself
  - Different values and beliefs
  - e.g., religion, customs, social behavior



# H2R Minorities

- Groups numerically a minority, but equal or dominant societal role are not included
  - e.g., German, French, and Italian linguistic groups in Switzerland
- Non-dominant position in the cultural and/or linguistic fabric of the larger social unit
  - Lower social status
  - Access to fewer resources (e.g., social capital)
  - Possible stigma and exclusion



# H2R Minorities

## Immigrant Populations

- Spanish-speaking immigrants (US)
- Turkish immigrants (Germany)

## Native/Indigenous Populations

- American Indians (US)
- First Nations (Canada)
- Aborigines (Australia)

## Culturally Distinct Groups

- Basques and Catalans in Spain
- Travellers (UK)

## Tribal or Ethnic Groups

- Groups in highly linguistically diverse countries (India, many African countries)



# H2R Systematic Literature Review

- Systematic search of databases of the academic literature
- Largely limited to western and industrialized context
- Supplemented with own experiences and those of colleagues





# Questionnaire Design (1)

- Follow best practices for general questionnaire development
- Be aware of how different groups may differ systematically in how questions are understood and answered



# Questionnaire Design (2)

- Adaptation (Harkness et al. 2010)
  - Applies only to studies with source questionnaires
  - Change content, format, response options, and visual presentation to fit new population
  - Make “culturally relevant”
    - e.g., local political system, religious beliefs system
- Translation
  - Use TRAPD translation procedure
  - Do not use “on the fly translation”



# Questionnaire Design (3)

- Culture, cognition, and response
  - Individualist vs. collectivist (Uskul & Oyserman 2006; Schwarz et al. 2010; Uskul et al. 2010)
    - Beware of priming effects
  - Comprehension stage
    - Errors from ambiguity (inherent, translation, adaptation)
    - Culturally-based pragmatic meaning – e.g. what is means “to be clear” (Uskul & Oyserman 2006)



# Questionnaire Design (4)

- Culture, cognition, and response
  - Retrieval stage
    - Standard retrieval errors
      - e.g. autobiographical memories
    - Individualist – Collectivist
      - Individualist: characteristics and experiences prominent
      - Collectivist: social relations and roles prominent
      - Culturally prominent details may be more easily recalled or repressed



# Questionnaire Design (5)

- Culture, cognition, and response
  - Judgment and estimation
    - Cultural differences in need to estimate, the influence of response scales, and use of subjective theories
    - Collectivist: emphasis on “fitting in”; rely less on estimation or cues from response scales



# Questionnaire Design (6)

- Culture, cognition, and response
  - Reporting
    - Language barriers may prevent response to open-ended questions
    - Cultural variation in favorable self-presentation
      - Individualist: focus on positive self-image
      - Collectivist: focus on harmonious relationships, modesty, and “fitting in”
    - Cultural variation on what are sensitive topics
  - More empirical research needed



# Other/Complementary Methods

- Qualitative studies
  - Case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, ethnographies
  - Not representative data
- Mixed-methods research
  - Combine quantitative (surveys) and qualitative methods
- Community-based methods
  - Collaborating service providers or community groups of the target population
  - Help gain access, overcome trust, identify target population, and develop appropriate instruments and protocols



# Outlook

- Documentation of methods often poor
  - Substantive results currently focus, methods secondary
  - Good methods for quality data
  - Good documentation to assess data quality and what methods work
  - Hard to replicate studies due to lack of documentation (H2R)
- Document survey lifecycle
- Collect metadata and paradata
  - Study documentation, process data (e.g., key strokes)



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**Thanks!**

# Pretesting

- Essential for identifying problems
  - Evaluate questionnaire design, adaptation, and translation
- Pilot studies, cognitive interviews, focus groups, expert reviews, behavior coding, etc. (Caspar & Peytcheva 2011)
- But groups may respond differently to pretesting (Pan et al. 2010)
- More research needed



# Data Collection

- Particularly challenging with H2R
- Nonresponse and measurement errors
- Choose mode carefully
  - CATI – phone density (landline vs. mobile)
  - Web/mail – literacy prevent some modes (Canales et al. 1995)
  - Unfamiliarity issues
    - Interviewers can motivate participation, handle inquiries, and assuage concerns of respondents (De Leeuw 2008)
- Cultural-media to recruit and publicize research (Han et al. 2007)
- Group input in creating recruitment materials
- Interviewers - ethnically or culturally appropriate interviewers (Greenfields 2012; Han et al. 2007; Garter 2003)



# Ethics

- Proper human rights issues
  - IRB review translations
- Special permissions
  - legal and cultural (e.g., tribal advisory boards) (Lavelle et al. 2009)
- Privacy settings
  - Recognize considerations of privacy varies by culture (Pennell et al. 2010)

