Development of Bilingual Interviewer Training at the U.S. Census Bureau

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Disclaimer: This presentation is intended to inform people about research and to encourage discussion. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.
Overview of talk

• Two decades of research related to development of doorstep messages to encourage survey participation in multiple languages
• Challenge: how to synthesize findings and get them into the field in a large survey organization
• Current implementation plans and status
• Discussion
Past U.S. Census Bureau Research

- Census Bureau has done research over a decade related to doorstep messaging across languages
  - Field observation in eight languages during 2010 census
  - Expert review of translated messages in 7 languages (2015)
  - Focus groups in 7 languages (2015 and 2017)
    - English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic

- CBAMS work: (Census Barriers Attitudes and Motivations)
  - Identification of different mindsets attached to census respondents from hard to count populations (e.g. language barrier, unawareness, mistrust of the government, low engagement)
Doorstep messages

• Messages: statements for face-to-face interviewer to initiate conversation and gain respondent cooperation at the doorstep
• Why important? Hard to count populations
• Types of messages included:
  – Census specific
    • Showing Census ID badge
    • Discuss purpose and frequency of Census
    • Census as mandatory
  – General
    • Introduce self
    • Type of questions on survey
    • Confidentiality and fact that it is safe to participate
Types of Findings

• Preferred messages/behavior across language groups
  – Appearance/attire, body positioning
  – Confidentiality, protection of data, low burden
• Concerns across languages that might deter participation
  – Immigration status, safety concerns
  – Fear of losing benefits
• Differences across language groups
  – Mandatory message
  – Meaning of terms such as “count”
• Challenges of sorting through large volume of findings
Sharing Information and Resources in Large Survey Organizations

• Silos, communication challenges
• Offering to provide support/help
• How to best reach out across areas
  – Reach out to as many areas as possible
  – Different survey operations
  – Different teams
  – Apply for existing research and funding programs
    • Increasing operational efficiency program
    • 2020 evaluation program
Incorporating findings into Census Bureau Operations: 4 Examples

1. 2018 Census test
2. National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
3. 2020 interviewer training modules (automated, online)
   – Cross cultural communication (general)
   – Spanish language module for interviewers in Puerto Rico
4. 2020 Interviewer training experiment (automated, online)
   – Targeted to Spanish speaking bilingual interviewers
1. 2018 Census Test: Bilingual interviewer Handout

- Creation of 2 page guideline for counting Limited English Proficient (LEP) households
- Topics:
  - Best practices for using Spanish Census materials
  - Guidelines for translation on the fly when no translation available
  - Tips for showing respect and observing cultural norms
  - Best practices for determining what language is spoken
  - Use available translations if you speak the language
  - Use of interpreters in the field
  - Tips for addressing common respondent concerns
2. National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

• Goal: Prepare Spanish/English bilingual interviewers to administer a newly developed Spanish translation of the survey instrument by creating specialized training materials. Prepare all interviewers to work with interpreters.

• After drafting training materials, we refined them by:
  – Focus groups with experienced interviewers to collect their tips on interviewing
  – Training interviewers for a field test
  – Observing interviewers during field test
  – Focus groups after the field test to find out how well the training prepared interviewers to conduct interviews
  – Revised materials based on interviewer feedback
NHIS Bilingual Training Materials

• Overview booklet for bilingual interviewers:
  – Highlighted changes to the survey instrument
  – Gave bilingual interviewers a preview before the training

• Classroom training for bilingual interviewers
  – Described translated materials available to them
  – Explained how the translation was developed to gain buy-in
  – Discussed best practices for completing interviews in Spanish
  – 2 paired practice exercises on overcoming reluctance with Spanish-speakers
NHIS Training Materials for All Interviewers

• Job Aid on working with interpreters
  – Questions for the interviewer to ask the potential interpreter
  – Instructions for the interviewer to give the interpreter

• Classroom training for all interviewers on working with interpreters
  – How to use the Language Identification Card
  – How to find an interpreter
  – Tips for working with an interpreter
3. 2020 Census Interviewer Training Modules

• Several pertinent online training modules already exist
  – Info on attitude, attire, messages, delivery, challenging situations
• Goal: to review and add any new information from the research on different language speakers
• Additional topics to add:
  – Identifying language spoken at the doorstep using Language Identification Card
  – Interpretation guidelines
Virtual town example

Draft idea from training vendor contractor

You are an enumerator that is going door to door in Diversity Town.

Practice having culturally aware conversations with the respondents.

Navigate each cultural scenario and try to complete the interviews.
4. 2020 Census Interviewer Training experiment

- Experimental Training module for Spanish speaking interviewers
- Sample of interviewers receive training, control no training
- Metrics to evaluate:
  - Response rates
  - Number of contact attempts
  - Item non-response and misreporting errors
  - Field observation and interviewer focus group feedback components
Summary and Conclusions

• Challenging to take a diverse body of research and pull out concrete, practical findings and get them into field
• Large survey organizations have many groups and layers
• Importance of researchers providing hands on support to technical and subject matter experts
• Researchers can reach out in many areas and offer help to get findings into the field
Areas for Future Research

– Ensuring that all relevant messages from large bodies of research make it into the field
  • ESRA talk: co-author Yazmin Garcia Trejo

– Tailoring training to interviewers who speak different languages

– How to best coordinate doorstep messages with messages for use across modes/operations
  • Advertising
  • Self administered modes: paper, internet
  • Advance letters, brochures, other materials
  • Doorstep messages
Seeking Feedback and Ideas

• Are other workshop participants involved in interviewer training development related to 3MC issues for their agencies?
• Have others worked to get 3MC research findings into the field in large or small agencies?
• Do you have feedback on any of our plans?
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