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Mechanisms of Close versus Free Questionnaire Translation: Findings from an Experiment in Estonian and Slovene

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Contents

1. Overall problems
2. Experiment
3. Methods (quantitative and qualitative)
4. Next steps
5. Further research questions





1. Overall problems

1) Different understandings of 'close vs. adaptive / free translation':

- Survey research: Ask-the-Same-Question (ASQ) / Functional Equivalence includes mainly *close* translations
→adaptive / free translations to be avoided for keeping comparability
- Translation studies: 'Good' / functionally equivalent translation includes *both* close and free / adaptive translation, depending on the particular context
- Translation studies: very difficult if not impossible to draw firm line where adaptation starts





1. Overall problems

2) Situation in multilingual surveys:

- How to give guidelines that apply to 20-35 and more language versions?
→ most translation/adaptation mechanisms are language pair specific

⇒ SERISS translation experiment to shed light into this issue





2. Experiment

- Countries: GB, EE, SI
- Source language: English
- Target languages: Estonian, Slovenian
- Translation approaches: adaptation, close translation
- Questionnaire: 60 items, different latent constructs (from ESS, EVS, SHARE, ISSP)
- CRONOS panel Wave 5 (1 item in Wave 6)





Experiment: Translation Design

- Within each country (i.e., EE, SI) translations were done following the design below:

Batch	Item	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3
1	1-20	Close	Adapt	Adapt
2	21-40	Adapt	Close	Adapt
3	41-60	Close	Adapt	Close





Experiment: Questionnaire Design

Batch	Items	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
		App.	Team	App.	Team	App.	Team
2	25-27	A	3	A	1	C	2
3	42-60	A	2	C	3	C	1
1	1-17, 20	C	1	A	2	A	3
2	21-40	A	3	A	1	C	2
1	18-19	C	1	A	2	A	3
3	41	C	1	A	2	C	3

Note. App. = translation approach; A = adaptation; C = close translation.





3. Method

- Goals
 - a. Compare measurement quality
 - b. Check for measurement equivalence
- To keep in mind
 - Small groups ($n \approx 143-216$)
 - No translations in GB
 - Teams did not always follow translation instructions
 - Different (same) translation approaches do not necessarily lead to distinct (same) translations





Method cont'd

- Independent coders in both languages (1 / language)
- Brita/Lydia don't understand Estonian nor Slovene (methodological problem: completely dependent on third persons in all assessments)



EE and SI coders rated for each item:

- translation potential (source)
- translation score (translation): question + RC

overly close	close	rather close	somewhat close/ adaptive	rather adaptive	adaptive	overly adaptive
-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3

Question	Q3	Q2	Q1			
Scale		S1 S2 S3				

Translation potential

Translation scores



Quantitative analysis (Lydia)

Means in data from CRONOS:

1. Means deviate significantly between 3 versions:
→ Check whether caused by translations
2. Translations deviate (free-adapt) but means are very similar
→ Check translations

⇒ Patterns? Depending on constructs / languages?





Qualitative analysis (Brita)

List all adaptations made in all translated questions
(based on native speaker codings)

4 groups of adaptations:

- **pragmatic-semantic** (meaning)
- **factual-technical** (reality)
- **syntactic-grammatical** (structure)
- **(survey) methodological** (survey habits)





Qualitative analysis (Brita)

Compare qualitative findings:

- Compare 4 adaptation types between items / constructs
- Compare 4 adaptation types between languages
- Is close translation possible at all or not?
- Linkage with quantitative data





5. Further research questions

Can patterns be found on:

- Findings based on adaptation type?
- Findings based on language?
- Findings based on construct / item?





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