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Assessing Translations: How Different Checking Procedures Compare Under Field Conditions

Gijs van Houten, *International Survey Methodologist*

Danielle Cuddington, *Research Analyst*

Katie Simmons, *Associate Director, Research*

Steve Schwarzer, *Research Methodologist*

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Approaches to questionnaire translation

- High-quality, equivalent translation is challenging

- Back-translation used to be most common approach

- In recent years, move towards committee approaches
  - Translation verification

Research Questions

- Does the verification process lead to a different final translation than the back-translation process?

- Does the final translation provided by the verification process lead to different results, either in terms of data quality or substantive results?

Global Attitudes Project

- Nationally representative telephone and face-to-face interviews with adults aged 18 and over, conducted annually since 2002

- Spring 2014
    - 44 countries from March 17 to June 5, 2014, totaling 48,643 respondents
    - 75 languages and language versions

- Spring 2015
    - 40 countries from March 25 to May 27, 2015, totaling 45,435 respondents
    - 79 languages and language versions

- Both editions conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International

- CATI, CAPI and PAPI

Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Spring 2015 Survey

Countries surveyed

North America **Europe** **Africa** **Asia/Pacific**

Latin America **Middle East** **Russia/Ukraine**
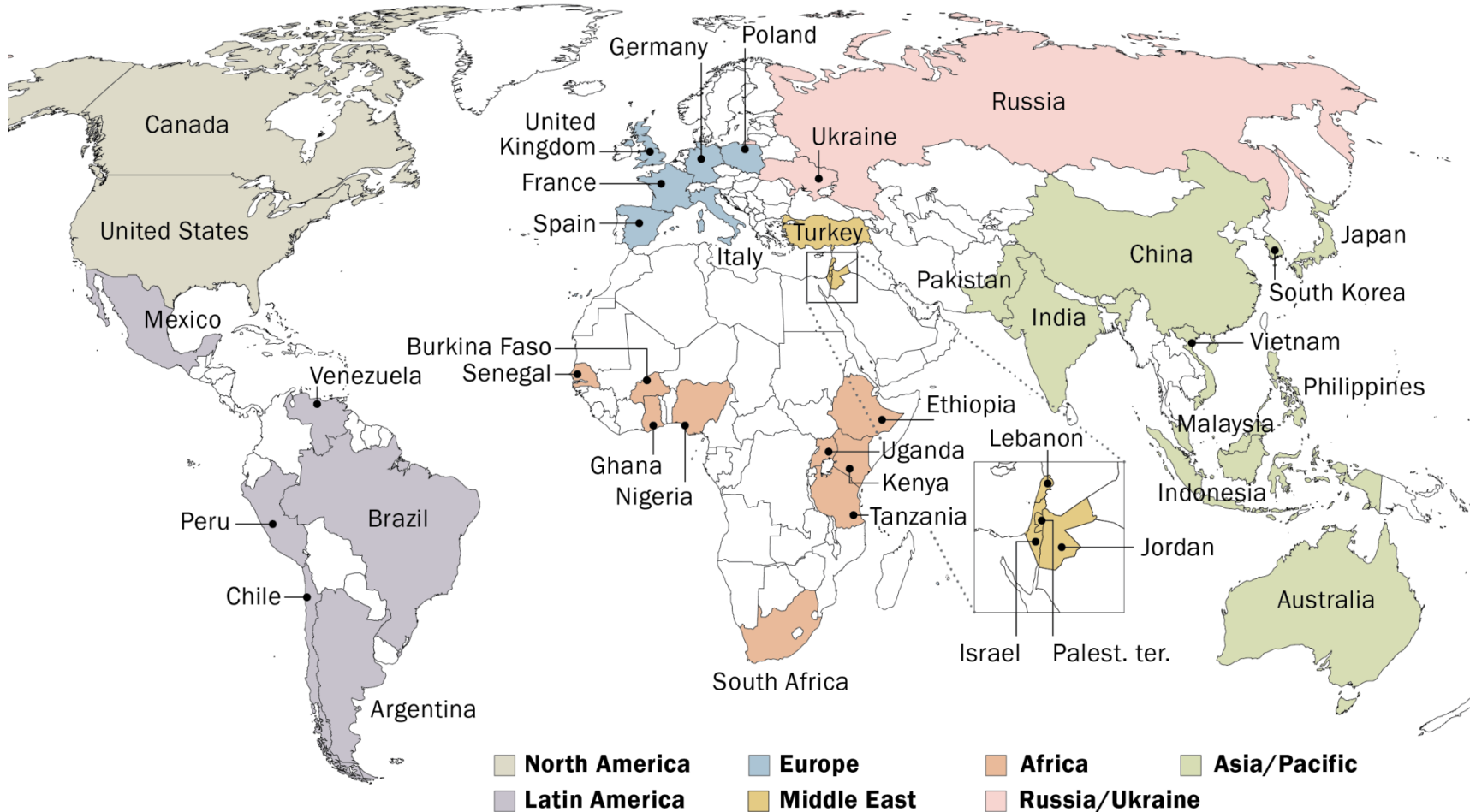
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Prior to 2013: Back-translation

- **Back-translation**
  - Local vendor provided original translator and back-translator
  - Pew Research Center reviewed back-translation and provided feedback to local vendor

- **English-centric**
  - Meaning can be lost in translation

Translation Process: 2013 and after

- **Translation verification with committee approach**
    - Translator provided by local vendor, verifier provided by separate vendor
    - Pew Research Center reviews comments of verifier and consults with translator and verifier to arrive at optimal solution

- **Verifying trend questions**
    - In 2015, verification was carried out for existing translations of 11 items
    - Trend translations were verified for 1 to 66 languages per item, resulting in 313 verified language-item combinations
    - Verification results were treated conservatively, favoring comparability over time when translation issues were judged not to affect meaning

Coding of verification outcome

- **Two independent coders**
  - 89% correspondence
  - Consultation to arrive at agreement on 37 language-item combinations
  - Discrepancies mainly related to approach to dealing with interviewer instructions and 'do not read out' passages
- **No issue: no flags, minor spelling, punctuation issues**
  - 194 language-item combinations
- **Flagged, no change: preferential changes, minor grammar issues**
  - 111 language-item combinations
- **Flagged, changed: unclear meaning, incorrect translations**
  - 8 language-item combinations

Analysis

- **Four trend items examined**
    - Today, which ONE of the following do you think is the world's leading economic power — the United States, China, Japan, OR countries of the EU?

    - Which comes closest to your view — China will eventually replace the U.S. as the world's leading superpower, China has already replaced the U.S. as the world's leading superpower, or China will never replace the U.S. as the world's leading superpower?

    - Do you think the government of China respects the personal freedoms of its people or don't you think so?

    - Do you think the government of the United States respects the personal freedoms of its people or don't you think so?

- **All four items were fielded for 66 languages or language versions (N=264)**

Changes in item non-response, by verification outcome

	No issue		Flagged, no change		Flagged, change	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
World's leading economic power (U.S.)	9.8%	6.7%	12.0%	8.1%	11.6%	13.1%
World's leading superpower (U.S.)	16.7%	14.2%	25.2%	18.0%	16.5%	14.3%
China respects personal freedoms	22.0%	16.7%	20.3%	15.9%	3.8%	3.4%
U.S. respects personal freedoms	16.6%	11.8%	18.8%	13.3%	0%	0%

Changes in correlations with related items, by verification outcome

		No issue		Flagged, no change		Flagged, change	
		2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
World's leading economic power (U.S.)	U.S. favorability	-.210	-.204	-.268	-.298	-.197	-.154
	Confidence in Obama	-.191	-.159	-.239	-.288	-.194	-.209
World's leading superpower (U.S.)	U.S. favorability	-.169	-.161	-.068	-.095	.049	.085
	Confidence in Obama	-.157	-.123	-.054	-.082	.055	.170
China respects personal freedoms	China favorability	.306	.315	.322	.330	.383[a]	-.247[a]
U.S. respects personal freedoms	U.S. favorability	.310	.323	.355	.338	.050[a]	-.054[a]
	Confidence in Obama	.336	.301	.411	.379	.101[a]	-.148[a]

[a] N < 100

Conclusion and discussion

- The verification process is time intensive but can still be carried out within the tight timeframe of the project

- Verification revealed a small number of serious issues with existing translations

- Outcomes of the verification process did not have the expected impact on item non-response and construct validity

- In some cases, the uncovered issues might have referred to wrong translations but not necessarily "bad questions"

- Correlations impacted by global events

- Nature of the items (e.g. nominal, dichotomous) limited possibility for assessing impact on distributions

Questions or suggestions?

Gijs van Houten
International Survey Methodologist

GvanHouten@PewResearch.org

Danielle Cuddington
Research Analyst

DCuddington@PewResearch.org