Between Letter and Spirit:

Testing Survey Translations with Spanish Speaking Respondents

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Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS)

- A continuous, multipurpose survey of a nationally representative sample of the Medicare population

  - Conducted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) through a contract with NORC at the University of Chicago

- Collects extensive information on

  - Health care use and expenditures

  - Sources of health care

  - Access to health care

  - Satisfaction with care

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MCBS Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Questions

- The MCBS currently includes the DHHS Data Standard for Primary Language, with optional granularity

  - How well do you speak English? Would you say:
    (1) Very well (2) Well (3) Not well (4) Not at all

  - Do you speak a language other than English at home?
    (1) Yes (2) No

  - What is this language?
    (1) Spanish (2) Other language, specify

Objective: Develop and Test New Questions

- NORC and CMS developed and tested an expanded set of LEP measures for the MCBS

- New questions developed on

  - Language preference for medical care and health-related materials

  - Barriers to health care access due to language:
    - Symptoms
    - Communication with providers

- The survey items were developed in English and were then translated into Spanish

- Questions were tested in both English (with Language Assistant) and Spanish

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Research Question

Does the language in which the interview is conducted introduce error?

- Conceptual framework:
    1. Close translation (word-for-word) vs cultural language adaptation
    2. Complex question wording

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Methods

- 28 LEP Medicare beneficiaries aged 65+ were recruited from the Chicago metropolitan area
  - Contacted senior living facilities, cultural and community centers, and places of worship for various cultural communities
- English interviews conducted with "Language Assistant" (LA)
  - Language assistants were family member or friends aged 18 or older who would normally accompany respondent to medical or other appointments.
  - Language assistants only used in MCBS when interview is completed in a language other than English or Spanish
- Respondents received $40 incentive

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Methods

Language of Interview	Respondent Language	Number of Respondents	Total in Analysis Group
English	Chinese	6	
English	Spanish	2	10
English	Russian	2	
Spanish	Spanish	18	18

Methods

- Initial LEP module in test instrument created with questions about

  - Discussing symptoms in English

  - Discussing symptoms in language other than English (LOTE)

  - Understanding medical provider recommendations in English

  - Understanding medical provider recommendations in (LOTE)

- Revision of instrument, based on first round of cognitive testing, adapted questions from initial instrument into questions about

  - Communicating in English

  - Communicating in language other than English (LOTE)
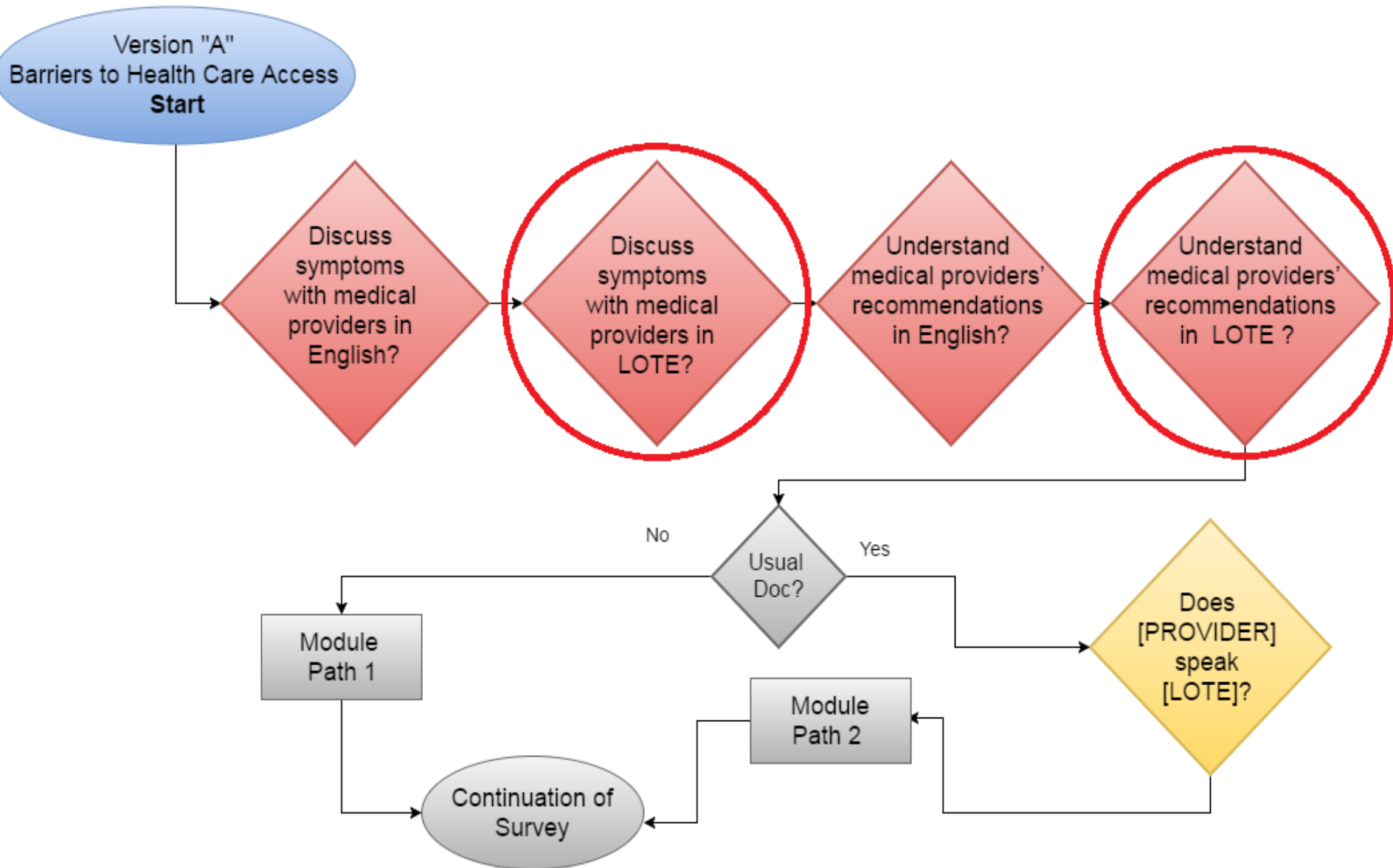
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Communication with Providers: Version "A"

Close Translation

How well can you discuss your symptoms with your medical provider in [LOTE]?

How well can you understand your medical providers' recommendations in [LOTE]?

Finding: Unintended consequence of the question wording when translated was that Respondents interpreted questions to be asking how well they could communicate in their native language, which was regarded as strange and mildly offensive.

- (English Interview) Language assistant laughed during probing:

  - *"Very well...this is our mother language...native language."*

- (Spanish Interview) Laughing awkwardly:

  - *"But of course very well!"*

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Close Translation

How well can you discuss your symptoms with your medical provider in [LOTE]?

How well can you discuss your symptoms with your medical provider in English?

Finding: Lack of fit of some of the questions to a given respondent's medical situation, based on language-concordance of respondent and provider

- (Spanish Interview) After question was asked:
  - *"My doctor does not speak Spanish."*

- (Spanish Interview) After question was asked:
  - *"Well with this doctor… he is American but speaks Spanish very well"*

- (Spanish Interview) Respondent commented that she
  - Mostly goes to Spanish language doctors

Close Translation

How well can you discuss your symptoms with your medical provider in English?

How well can you understand your medical providers' recommendations in English?

Finding: Unclear for respondents what it means to *understand v. discuss* a language

- (English Interview) During probing regarding English ability questions
  - Respondent asked whether the question included the aid of an interpreter or not.

- (English Interview) After being asked about understanding provider in English, language assistant says
  - *"He can't understand it listening but can read it....he hope to have some writing."*

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Communication with Providers: Version "B"
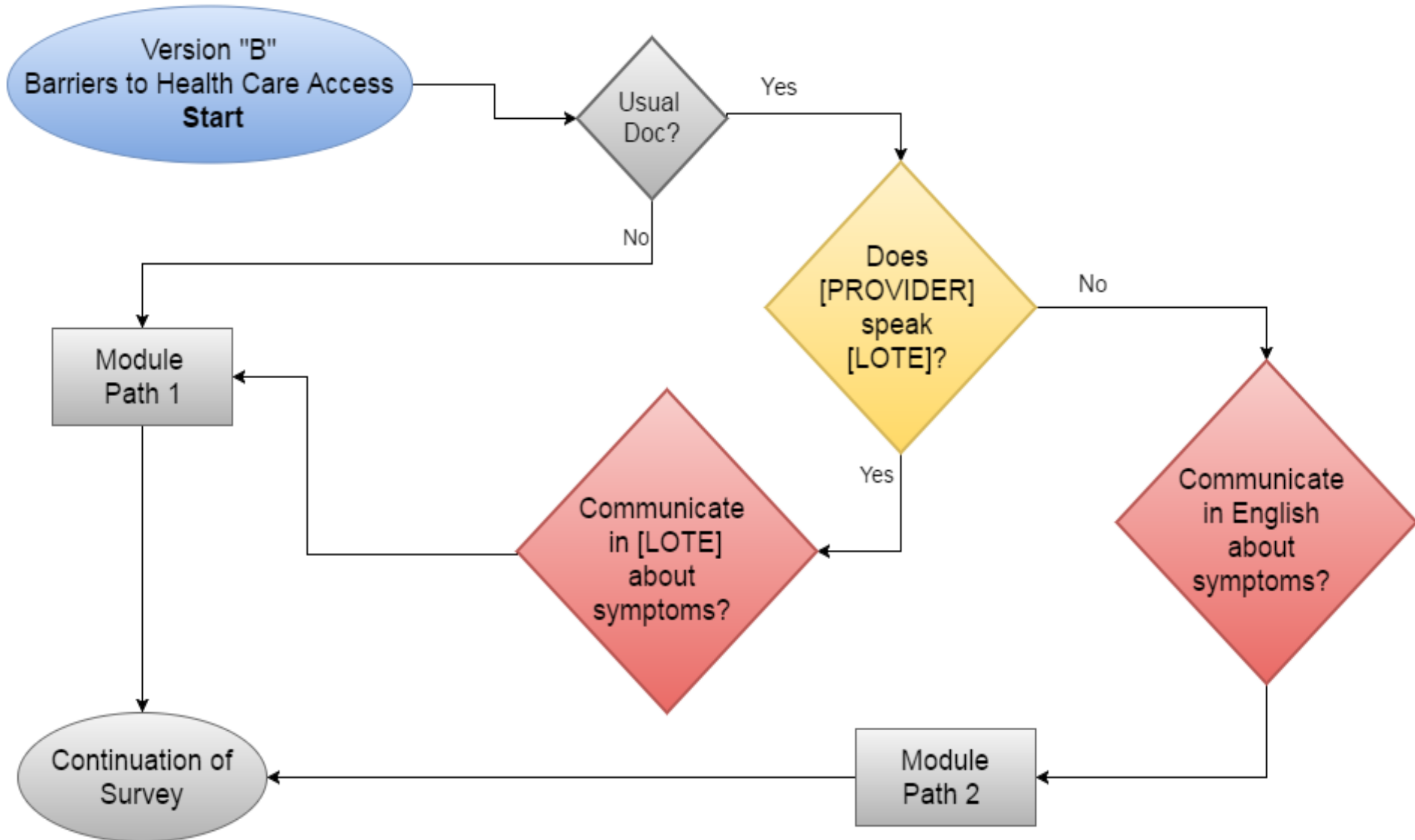
Cultural / Language Adaptation

Finding: Altered question order and branching was successful. Changing question wording clarified intention of the question.

		Spanish	English			Spanish	English
How well can you and your usual provider communicate in English about your symptoms?	Very well	0	0	How well can you and your usual provider communicate in [LOTE] about your symptoms?	Very well	3	1
	Well	0	1		Well	1	0
	Not well	0	0		Not well	0	0
	Not at all	0	0		Not at all	0	0
	Not applicable	5	1		Not applicable	1	1

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Complex Question Wording

In general, in what language do you prefer to receive your medical care? (English, LOTE, Both Equally)

Finding: Effective comprehension of the distinction between preferred language and actual language

- (Preference: LOTE, Spanish Interview) During probing Respondent said he looks for Spanish speaking doctors, because:
    - *"I communicate directly with [them]."*

- (Preference: English, English Interview) Russian-speaking respondent noted that medical terms used by his doctor would not be understood by the respondent in Russian as he left Russia long ago, before he had those conditions. LA gave example:
    - Term "angina" has to do with the heart, whereas in Russian it means "sore throat"

- (Preference: LOTE, Spanish Interview) If respondent had a question, he would ask his grandchildren, but:
    - *"Depending on the situation and the condition in which I find myself, it doesn't matter to me English or Spanish. [What matters] is that it's quick and effective. The majority of [my] doctors speak Spanish…Sometimes they will speak English… but I understand well"*

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Complex Question Wording

In general, in what language do you prefer to receive your medical care? (English, LOTE, Both Equally)

Finding: Unintended interpretation of response option "Both equally" in only one case

- (Preference: Both, Interview: English) During probing, the language assistant for a Chinese Respondent expressed:

  - The beneficiary answered "both equally" because she would prefer to receive medical care in both Chinese and English, in order to practice her English and compare what was said in English to Chinese.

- (Preference: Both, Interview: Spanish) During probing, bilingual respondent commented:

  - *"They always ask me if I prefer Spanish or English. I tell them both."*

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Complex Question Wording

In general, in what language do you prefer to receive your medical care? (English, LOTE, Both Equally)

Language of Interview	Language Preference for Medical Care	Does provider speak LOTE?	N	Pct
Spanish	LOTE	Yes	10	56%
	LOTE	No	7	39%
	Both	No	1	6%
English	LOTE	Yes	5	50%
	LOTE	No	3	30%
	Both	No	1	10%
	English	No	1	10%

Conclusions

Language in which interview is conducted may introduce error due to:

- Nuances in translation
  - Close translation (word-for-word) vs. cultural adaptation of a question
    - Sometimes this may require going back and revising the original English as well, if we want to maintain fidelity between the original and translated versions
      - Through cognitive testing we found new version of module to be less prone to respondent error
- Must be aware of types of questions that might present difficulties for translation and cognitively test

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Thank You!