Translation: a ghost in the machine?

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“The ghost in the machine”

• Descartes’ dualism: mind and body as separate entities

• Gilbert Ryle described this as positing the mind as a ghost in the machine

• Ryle argued this separation was mistaken
Aim of presentation

- Demonstrate interdependence of translation and questionnaire design
  - Questionnaire design (QD) without translation
  - But no translation without design
  - Translation not separable from (source) QD
    - Even when design not intended for translation

- Consequences for
  - Conceptualization of QD and translation
  - QD and translation goals and procedures
How is translation depicted, described and used in survey research?
Depictions of Questionnaire Design and Translation
**TRAPD:** translation, review, adjudication, pretesting, documentation
Traditional Development Scheme (modified)
Descriptions of Translation
Descriptions of translation in surveys

Across languages

- “identical wording”
- “functional equivalence”
- “ask the same question”
- “semantic and conceptual equivalence”
Uses made of Translation in surveys
Uses of translation in surveys

• Produce other language versions

• Permit pretesting

• Create pool of items for QD purposes

• Create multiple “source” versions

• Inform design
  – Advance translation
  – Translator strategies …

• … (documentation)
No translation without design

• Questionnaires have wordings, measurement properties, and technical formats

• Questionnaire translations also have these

• (Source) questionnaire wording overt

BUT

• Measurement properties, technical formats, other design features under-specified
Translation changes questionnaires

• Meant to maintain/ensure “comparability”

• Alter wording

• Can alter
  – measurement properties
  – other design features
  – technical format
  – …
Translation changes questionnaires (2)

- Wording
  - new language words, syntax, sounds, length, register...
- “Matching” words rarely adequate/appropriate
  - He likes adventures
- (Some SL/TL features also not easy to match)
  - Emotions, idioms, quantifications, grammatical features (...), cultural/language system features
  - (Usually not the “real issue)
  - Adaptation
Translation changes questionnaires (3)

• Measurement properties
  – Answer scales
  – Connotations/ implications
  – Conceptual coverage
  – Pragmatics

• Is your appetite good?
• Strongly agree/strongly disagree
Translation changes questionnaires (4)

- Other design aspects
- Handling of
  - “if any”
  - (e.g. How often if at all do you visit …)
  - Hypotheticals
  - (Suppose you could choose between….)
  - Vignettes (Juan, Fritz, Camilla)

- Technical formats (see CCSG guidelines module on technical design)
Consequences for questionnaire development

- Integrate translation considerations and needs into source design
  - Specify hoped for properties
  - Re-conceptualize design and translation
  - Train questionnaire designers and translators
  - Develop procedures to negotiate and test options (timely quality assurance and monitoring)

- NB: Any questionnaire/questions used as source need similar specification and testing
Thank You