

# Issues in Translating Answer Scales

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# Overview

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- Challenges in answer scale translation
  - Cultural Issues
  - Linguistic issues
  - Surveyspeak
- Target populations for whom we translate
- Translations of scales often try to convey the surveyspeak present in English scales
- Translated scales that work well
- Answer scales and formatting of responses (Tourangeau's survey response model)
- Labeling scales with normal speak
- Plans for experiment to elicit scale labels in Spanish and compare ease of responding with translated surveyspeak labels and the new labels elicited

# Challenges in Cross-Language **Use** of Answer Scales

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## □ Types of challenges

- Cultural

- Linguistic

# Cultural Issues in Scale **Use**

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- Politeness
- Social desirability
- Avoidance of extreme responses

# Linguistic Issues in Scale Translation

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- balance between fidelity to the source and avoiding awkwardness in the translation
- maintaining scale polarity across languages
  
- What can we do to minimize these?
  - Advance translation or translatability assessment can help

# Surveyspeak in Scale Translation

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- ❑ What it is?
- ❑ Surveyspeak (Harkness 2000) in scales and how to best treat it in translation
- ❑ English scales and Surveyspeak
- ❑ Strategies When Identifying surveyspeak in questions to be translated

# Target Populations for US Translations

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- ❑ Mostly LEP
- ❑ Overwhelmingly immigrants
- ❑ Limited prior exposure to surveys
- ❑ Lack of familiarity with selecting a response from a series of options

# “Easy” to Translate Scales

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- Are those that use simple and clear scale labels
- No sureyspeak
- Resemble normal speech
- No polarity issues, but distinct terms
- Terms like Rs could answer themselves in open-ended format



# Good Scale Labels

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- Operational definition:

Those scale labels that respondents systematically choose from without providing answer in their own words.

# Translated Scale That Works Well in Administration (SF-1)

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- Would you say that in general your health is...
  - excellent,
  - very good,
  - good,
  - fair,
  - or poor?
  
- ¿Diría usted que en general su salud es...
  - excelente,
  - muy buena,
  - buena,
  - regular
  - o mala?

# Some Evidence from Cognitive Interview Transcripts

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- General self-reported health status question
- 52 Spanish cognitive interviews for the Hispanic/Latino Adult Tobacco Survey.  
(*Sponsor: U.S. National Center for Health Statistics and CDC's Office of Smoking and Health* )
- All but 3 respondents answered with one of the offered labels
- Why?

# Implications for Translation

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- Our respondents tend to treat the survey as a normal conversation
- They do not format the response so they can provide it with one of the categories offered
- Common tendency to answer in their own words
- Consider this thought:
  - While a question stem can be interpreted as intended even if formulated in words the respondent would not necessarily use, selecting a response may be easier if the scale labels are worded more like the way the respondent would answer the same question if it were open ended.

# Original aim for this presentation

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- We will report on an experiment to elicit scale labels in Spanish, a card sorting exercise to group the labels and order them by intensity, and will compare ease of responding with the more traditional translated surveyspeak labels and the new labels elicited from the target population.

# Design for still current plan

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- Select 3 questions representing different possible issues
- Elicit open ended answers in Spanish
- Ask the questions of monolingual Spanish respondents
- Review interviews to identify ease of choosing categories in each formulation of the scales

# GSS

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- On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do -- would you say you are:
  - very satisfied
  - moderately satisfied
  - a little dissatisfied, or
  - very dissatisfied?
  
- En general, ¿qué tan conforme está con el trabajo que hace? ¿Diría que está:
  - muy conforme,
  - moderadamente conforme,
  - un poco inconforme o
  - muy inconforme?

# Agree-Disagree Scales

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- How to translate Strongly Agree?
  - Fuertemente de acuerdo (e.g. National Survey of Student Engagement)

OR

- Muy de acuerdo (e.g. GSS)



# Summarizing

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- ❑ Wording translated response scales following English Surveyspeak may make respondents less likely to choose from the response categories offered
- ❑ More research is needed to see if selecting an offered response choice is easier if the scale labels are worded more like respondents speak.

# Questions? Thoughts?

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THANKS!!