Training Cognitive Testing
Interviewers in Different Settings and Languages

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Outline

- Asking comparable questions
- How cognitive testing can help
- Cognitive testing of translations
- What to do in places with no experience of cognitive testing
- Recruiting and training cognitive interviewers
- Training contents
- Major obstacles
- Minimum standards
- Some examples from around the world
- Lessons learned
Instrument Design and Cognitive Testing

- Comparative cross-national surveys often require asking questions of samples that speak different languages
- Research within one country can also include speakers of different languages (and cultures)
- For multilingual/multicultural studies, instrument design typically occurs in English with limited consideration of cultural realities in target populations
- Translation and cognitive testing of the instrument are the steps that follow instrument design in English
Asking Comparable Questions

- Comparability cannot just be assumed
- Needs to be actively pursued through careful research design and assessed by gathering evidence
- Cognitive testing of translations is one way to assess:
  - how questions will work in the target language(s),
  - what types of errors are present in each language version, and
  - whether questions perform comparably across language versions.
How Cognitive Testing Can Help

Cognitive testing will also:

• provide information about the causes of problems in question performance that can guide recommendations and point to potential remedies.
• For this reason, failing to conduct cognitive testing in multilingual settings means that the fielded question may not perform in the new language version(s) as intended.
Best Practice in Comparative Research

- Cognitive testing in English
- Translation via Best Practice Methods (TRAPD Model implemented in Team/Committee Translation) in country
- Cognitive testing in target language
- Compare findings across languages
- Modify original survey instrument to smooth out differences
- Update translations
Cognitive Testing of Translations: what do we test for?

- **Comprehension**: are questions understood as intended?
- **Equivalence**: do questions work as intended?
- Do low education respondents understand the translation?
- Are there cultural issues in interpreting the questions or giving responses?
- Are there alternative translations that might work better?
- Does the style seem right in the interaction of the interview?
Challenging Situations

- No trained local researchers available
- Language barriers
- Translation
- Realities of budget and timeline
Importance of Staff Selection

- In the absence of experienced qualitative interviewers, need to remember...
  - Cognitive interviewing is more than following an interview guide
  - Skills needed are both linguistic and qualitative research skills
Difference in Skill Set

- **SURVEY INTERVIEWERS**
  - Gaining cooperation
  - Reading as worded
  - Minimal probing to help elicit codeable answers

- **QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWERS**
  - No persuasion skills needed
  - Good listening skills
  - Analytic skills to know when need to probe further
Contents of Training

- What is cognitive testing? Minimal theoretical background
- Purpose of cognitive testing of instrument
- Research Ethics (consent, privacy, data security)
- Protocol review
- Practice/feedback, practice/feedback, practice/feedback, more practice/more feedback
When Reality Hits

- Not enough time/budget for best practice in most projects
- Translations often on the fly or done without methodological safeguards
- Cognitive testing in language by minimally trained interviewers
- Findings reviewed very quickly and superficially
- Changes must be done too fast
- Difficult QC in field and without language command
Some Real Life Examples

- Costa Rica: quantitative researcher, trained in advance, native speaker, together with local partner
- Ecuador: Experienced qualitative researcher, native speaker
- India / Malawi / Rwanda: experienced qualitative researcher trained, observed, and debriefed local partner
- Chile: experienced qualitative researcher trained and observed quantitative researchers
- Liberia: Experienced qualitative interviewers trained via remote webinar. Researcher in person led practice and debriefs
- Laos: Remote skype training of quant interviewers
Cultural Sensitivity Checklist for Instruments

- Is anything in the questions or the style of asking that might be poorly received or even offensive.
- Do any questions sound strange for the study population context.
- Would any questions be difficult for the study population to answer. Why.
- Are any questions NOT likely to elicit a full answer. If so, why.
- Are there questions that may not yield usable information or collect the intended information
- Are any questions uncomfortable for interviewers to ask.
- Is the introduction/consent/explanation of purpose of the interview presented in the best order for the local discourse style.
Lessons Learned

- Ideal procedures are often not possible
- You must decide what are your minimum standards of quality in cognitive testing and adhere to them
- Training often must be done remotely
- Language barriers make this difficult
- Use a native/local researcher as co-researcher
- Observe and debrief/Practice/Observe and debrief
Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

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