

## **Cross-Cultural Issues in Survey Translation: Translation of Meaning and Meaning of Translation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper outlines the translation process involved in the ORC Macro's evaluation of the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia. The IVLP is a long-running program in which foreign professionals and prospective leaders from all over the world have the opportunity to participate in funded short-term visits to the United States to improve their professional practices and career positions, as well as to provide opportunities for them to learn first-hand how democratic institutions and processes, free-market economies, and other values of Western democracy and American society are manifested in professional and daily life. The present paper adds to the growing literature on translation issues by delineating a step-by-step translation process that could be used as a blueprint for adjusting translation methods of a survey instrument to fit a particular cultural context. The paper also highlights the importance of attending to the theoretical issues in the translation process, outlines specific phases of the translation process, presents the modified de-centering translation technique adapted for the project, describes the types of translation equivalences that were addressed, and discusses contextual factors inherent in the translation process. In the process of addressing such a variety of issues, the paper underscores that the meaning and the purpose of the translation process is to provide a qualitative approach for the instrument development that maps contexts of people's lives, documents emic-etic aspects of cross-cultural research, and fosters collaborations with all stakeholders of the research project.

## **Cross-Cultural Issues in Survey Translation: Translation of Meaning and Meaning of Translation**

The research context of our exploration of cross-cultural issues in the translation of survey instruments involved ORC Macro's evaluation of the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)<sup>1</sup> in Russia and three other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia. The IVLP is a long-running program in which established or potential foreign leaders, chosen for their professional merit and leadership potential in a variety of professions, have the opportunity to participate in funded short-term visits to the United States. During these professionally focused group visits, they meet with their American professional counterparts to learn about American practices in the field, travel to several cities to observe American life and culture, and establish informal contacts with Americans. These visits, lasting up to 3 weeks, are intended to improve the professional practices and career positions of participants, as well as to provide opportunities for them to learn first-hand how democratic institutions and processes, free-market economies, and other values of Western democracy and American society are manifested in professional and daily life. Thousands of people from all over the world participate in the IVLP each year. The overall objectives of the IVLP program evaluation were: 1) to determine the immediate and long-term outcomes of the program experiences on the participants, their institutions, and their home countries; 2) to assess the levels of participation in and the value of the IVLP for alumni and their affiliated organizations; and 3) to document alumni's demographic and professional characteristics.

ORC Macro subcontracted the data collection to the Institute for Comparative Social Research (CESSI, based on the Russian acronym, a major research company in CIS) that conducted face-to-face, questionnaire-driven, structured interviews with 90 percent of the sample, as well as, open-ended, in-depth interviews with the remaining 10 percent of the sample. These interviews with the IVLP alumni from the four countries inquired about their views of the program; measured the impact of the program on their perceptions of democracy, American government, its institutions, culture, society, and people; assessed the effects of the program on participants' professional development; and determined how program alumni disseminate acquired professional and cultural information to people and institutions in their native country. The interviewing was done in respondents' native language and required translation of the structured and the open-ended instruments, as well as other supporting documentation to provide valid comparisons across the four countries. The overwhelming majority of the translation issues that we encountered involved the structured questionnaire, while the instrument for the open-ended interviews provided enough flexibility that virtually eliminated the translation issues with respect to the precise wording of the items. Therefore, this paper focuses on the translation issues pertaining to the structured questionnaire, while acknowledging that some of the issues might also be relevant to the open-ended, in-depth interviews.

Issues of translation are long standing and are well addressed in cross-cultural research literature (Brislin, 1986; Brislin, 1976; Loner, 1981). Unfortunately, some issues still persist. Studies seldom delineate a clear theoretical framework underlying the translation process; often fail to document and address contextual factors influencing the translation; and still lack the consensus regarding the relative importance of various types of translation equivalences and translation techniques. The present paper attempts to add to the growing literature on translation issues by delineating a step-by-step translation process that could be used as a blueprint for adjusting translation methods to fit a particular cultural context. In this process, the paper highlights the importance of attending to the theoretical issues in the translation process, outlines the phases of the translation process, presents a translation technique adapted for the project, describes the types of translation equivalences that were addressed, presents findings that

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<sup>1</sup> In 2004 the International Visitor Program was renamed the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

attest to the validity of the translation, and finally, discusses contextual factors inherent in the translation process.

### **Theoretical Underpinning of Translation Process**

We have used the emic-etic distinction (Brislin, 1976 and 1986) as the theoretical guide to instrument development and translation. Emic involves the differences in the ways overall constructs are expressed in different cultures and is highlighted by the lack of comparable wording. Etic refers to a concept that has the same meaning across cultures and therefore has comparable wording in both languages. The importance of distinguishing between culture-specific and cross-cultural concepts and phenomena guided every step of our instrument development and translation process. Beginning with the development of the initial set of items, ORC Macro staff attempted to specifically identify items that tap into emic aspects of cultural phenomena and to revise these items by providing additional descriptions and examples of the intended meaning. Since these culturally-specific items are unlikely to have equivalent wording in different languages and would be hard to translate, we had to add specific descriptions and examples to facilitate the translation of the intended meaning. In addition, we realized that people in other countries might not have much experience in participating in research projects and would need more detailed instructions on how to respond to the questionnaire. Even in the case of the face-to-face interviewing, the format of the survey, instructions on how to fill out items, and the congruency between the stem of the question and the corresponding items can greatly affect the responding among potentially research-naïve respondents. Thus, we've formatted the items of the questionnaire to facilitate the flow of the face-to-face interviewing, provided detailed instructions on how to fill-out the items, and for some items added cards with response options to facilitate responding and reduce burden.

The emic-etic distinction in the item development also underscored the importance of following the recommended cross-cultural translation guidelines for designing the English version of the items (Brislin, 1986; McGorry, 2000). These guidelines highlight the importance of developing items that would be easily translated by attending to such issues as: using simple sentences, active voice, descriptive phrases to explain potentially unfamiliar or hard to translate words, and specific rather than general terms, as well as avoiding metaphors, colloquialisms, adverbs, and possessive forms. Our focus on the theoretical framework for the study emerged from the belief that without a theoretical framework for the translation process one might misinterpret some results as support for one's hypothesis or preconceived notions when that might not be the case. Without considering culture-specific aspects of meaning, methodological problems with equalizing different language versions, and contextual factors influencing the translation process, conclusions regarding cross-cultural differences would be dubious at best.

### **Translation Technique Chosen for the Project**

The project required surveying the respondents in their native languages, because the majority of IVLP alumni do not speak English. Therefore, a major task in this project was the translation of the English version of the survey instrument into four languages: Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, and Georgian. Traditionally, the technique called for in translation has been the back-translation method, which involves translating the instrument from the original language into another language by one set of bilingual individuals and then getting another set of bilingual persons to translate the translated version back into the original language (Brislin, 1976). This allows the researchers to judge the quality and equivalence of translation and consult with the translators about the possible reasons for any inconsistencies, mistranslations, lost words, and changes in meaning, which then can be used to revise the translated version of the instrument (McGorry, 2000). Although researchers might go through several rounds of the revisions, typically, the original-language version is considered the standard against which the translated

version is compared and therefore materials are translated with as little change as possible from the original version (Beck, Bernal, and Froman, 2003; Brislin, 1976).

There are two major problems with the back-translation method. First, if the back-translation version appears to lack equivalence in meaning to the original version, it is difficult to determine whether the differences are due to poor translation or cultural and linguistic differences inherent to cross-cultural research. Second, when the translated version is similar to the original, it still leaves room for the uncertainty about the equivalence of the nuances of meaning across cultures and languages. Back-translation may lack equivalence in meaning and still demonstrate spurious lexical equivalence, thus giving the researcher a false sense of security (Brislin, 1976; Birbili, 2000). A simple back-translation that forces the translated version to fully correspond to the original may actually lead to semantic differences, as concepts have different meanings and are expressed differently across cultures. Therefore, difference between the back-translated and the original version of the instrument may not necessarily reflect the problem with the intended meaning of the items, but rather reflect the culture specific expression of meaning. To disentangle the emic and etic aspects of meaning ORC Macro staff used a modified de-centering technique in place of back-translation technique. Typically, de-centering modifies the back-translation technique to consider the original language and translated versions as equally important (Beck, Bernal, and Froman, 2003) and therefore does not force the translated version to be the literal translation of the original. Rather, the translated version is designed to reflect linguistic and cultural nuances of the target audience, and the original instrument is revised to incorporate the changes (McGorry, 2000). In this process, discussions with the translators are used to reach the consensus regarding the wording, meaning, and cultural appropriateness of the translated, as well as the original versions. Thus, de-centering allows for the idiosyncrasies of each language and culture to contribute to the final version of the instrument (Brislin, 1976).

We further modified the de-centering method to incorporate a committee approach to the translation process (Beck et al., 2003) and used it in place of formal back translation. Therefore, we did not attempt to translate the translated version of the instrument back into English because we believe that differences could reflect cultural nuances and diverse styles of translators, rather than indicate inaccuracies of translation. In our approach, which we call collaborative de-centering, groups of bi-lingual and bi-cultural individuals—one group for each of the four languages—worked independently to discuss emic-etic aspects of items’ meaning, to identify questionable items on the English-language and the translated versions, and to reach consensus regarding the meaning and wording of both versions. That was specifically done to de-centralize not only the translation of the instrument but the overall translation process as well (See Table 1). Thus, the translation process became a truly collaborative effort without forcing the translators to blindly accept our research conceptions and definitions of constructs. The main role of the ORC Macro staff, in this process, was to facilitate the consensus among the translators and ensure that the emerging meaning corresponded to the original intent of the item.

**Table 1. Outline of the Translation Process**

Translation Phases	Description of the Translation Process
1	The initial English version of the instrument was developed, specifically focusing on the scale development procedures that would facilitate the translation process.
2	The subcontractor in Russia translated the preliminary English version into Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, and Kazakh languages.
3	The English and translated versions of the instrument were given to small groups of bi-lingual/bi-cultural immigrants in the United States. These persons went item-by-item through the English and the translated versions identifying items that were confusing, unclear, culturally inappropriate, lacking equivalent cultural connotations, or requiring respondents to use memories that would be difficult to recall. The group members discussed with ORC Macro staff the issues of the equivalence of wording, meaning, and cultural connotations. After coming to consensus, the translators revised the first translated versions of the instrument.

4	The revised translated versions of the instrument were then given to the subcontractors in Russia who went through the English versions and the adjusted versions and provided their feedback regarding the equivalence of the meaning and wording. Also providing feedback were bilingual employees of the U.S. Embassy in each country, including Foreign Service nationals who are employed by the U.S. Embassy in their country and work on international exchange programs, including IVLP. At this point, the initial English version was adjusted to reflect the changes that emerged during the translation process.
5	Steps 3 and 4 were repeated as required to make sure that all of the involved parties agreed on the equivalence of meaning, wording, and cultural connotations of the items.
6	The final version of the Russian translated instrument was pre-tested with IVLP alumni in Russia. Any outstanding issues were resolved by going through another round of discussions and feedback from subcontractors and translators in the United States.
7	Three items of the final version of the instrument that were identified by some translators, pre-test participants, and research respondents as being somewhat confusing or difficult were inquired about in a follow-up with a randomly selected 10 percent of the sample. These follow-up respondents provided their feedback regarding possible reasons for the ambiguity of the items, as well as rated the items for their difficulty, cultural appropriateness, recall problems, and any other factors that might have contributed to the difficulty of the items.

### **Types of Translation Equivalence**

Since the validity of cross-cultural comparisons rests heavily on the equivalence of the translated versions, simple back-translation is insufficient for documenting the equivalence of the different language versions of the instrument. Typically, translation equivalence means that two individuals with the same amount or level of the construct being measured have equal probabilities of making the same response to the different language versions of the same item (Mallinckrodt and Wang, 2004). The first step in the process of establishing equivalence involves determining the types of equivalence to be examined. Currently, there is lack of consensus of what types of equivalence are crucial for the scale development and translation. Many focus on content, semantic, technical, criterion, and conceptual equivalences (Beck, Bernal, and Froman, 2003; Flaherty et al., 1988; Mallinckrodt and Wang, 2004). Others stress the importance of functional, conceptual, linguistic, and metric equivalences (Loner, 1981; Helms, 1992). While some highlight the importance of conceptual, semantic, syntactic, and experiential equivalences (Kristjansson, Desrocher, and Zumbo, 2003). Given such a diversity of equivalences that often have overlapping definitions, it becomes difficult to specify the precise types of equivalence that must be established for the instrument to be valid for cross-cultural comparisons. In our efforts to translate the English-language survey into four languages we decided to focus on equalizing meaning, wording, and scaling of the items, which are similar to the conceptual, linguistic, and metric types of equivalence.

#### *Conceptual Equivalence*

Conceptual equivalence is concerned with the meaning that persons attach to specific stimuli, such as test items (Loner, 1981). For our project, conceptual equivalence involved overcoming the difficulties in reaching a consensus among the translators regarding the meaning of some of the items. Some concepts were not easily translatable into Russian or the other languages, partly because of cultural perspective and partly because of the historical legacy of the Soviet rule, which still lingers in the everyday context of people's lives. For instance, "community" was an extremely difficult concept to translate, because it has a strong nationality connotation in Russian that it lacks in English. Thus, the items that included the word "community" had to be revised by providing an alternative wording or by including a description of the specific meaning for the word community (See Table 2; item F1.6 and item G4). Another item that had strong emic connotation involved assessing the educational attainment of the respondents. Due to the differences in the post-secondary educational system in the United States and the former Soviet Union/CIS, as well as due to the high educational level of the IVLP participants, the item had to be revised to improve its applicability (item A9).

Other items that could not be directly translated and required detailed descriptions involved concepts that are specific to a given political, cultural, and societal context. These concepts were work sectors, certain democratic principles, and welfare system. Thus, the translated versions of the instrument were revised to include descriptions specifying the meaning for public vs. private work sectors (item A8), democratic principles in the work place (item D4.7), and social services/welfare system in the United States (item F2.9). To establish the conceptual equivalence, ORC Macro staff asked translators to provide descriptions of these constructs so that the items reflect respondents' interpretations of the meaning of the constructs. For instance, it was interesting to learn that the meaning of the democratic principles at the workplace was perceived as supervisors treating workers fairly, and respecting each team member as an individual. Additional examples of the context-specific meaning involved items assessing the importance of voting and rule of law (items D4.1 and D4.5). These items could be confusing for the respondents living in the CIS, as their definitions and perceptions of these concepts did not directly corresponded with the original intent of the English wording. Thus, the importance of the rule of law was augmented in the translation (changed from "fundamental to a functioning democracy" to "fundamental to the existence of democracy"), while the reason for the importance of voting was diminished (changed from "important because real decisions are made in elections" to "important because representatives of the people are chosen in elections"). Such an augmentation of the importance of the rule of law and the relative diminishing of the importance of voting might be attributed to the current situation in the CIS where the government policies and public opinion often stress the importance of establishing the rule of law, political stability, and economic development -- frequently at the expense of the democratic freedoms (Romanovich, 2003; Levada, 2003). The public opinion in CIS is becoming more disillusioned with democratic reforms, principles, and freedoms, distrusting the integrity of the voting process, while becoming more preoccupied with reducing crime, fighting corruption, restricting private ownership, and establishing economic stability (Laidinen, 2002; Romanovich, 2003; Levada, 2003; Arutiunian, 2003). Thus, the use of collaborative de-centering allowed the meaning and the wording on the voting and rule of law to emerge in a way that is congruent with cultural context of the respondents. This demonstrates the utility of the translation process as a qualitative tool for uncovering cross-cultural variations in the specific meaning of constructs.

**Table 2. Revisions of Items to Establish Conceptual Equivalence**

Item Number	Original Items	Revised Items
A6.5.	Government agency, parliament, or court at the <b>national</b> level.	Government—executive, legislative, or judicial at the <b>federal</b> level.
A8.	Have you changed work sectors ( <b>public or private</b> ) since returning to your home country following your IVLP visit?	Since returning to your home country following the IVLP visit, did you continue to work in an organization with the same type of ownership ( <b>government or non-government</b> ) as before participation in the IVLP, or begun working in organization with a different type of ownership? For example, before you were working in the government sector and now you are working in non-government sector, or vice versa.
A9.	What is the highest level of education you have completed? 1. High school 2. Trade, vocational, or technical training, after high school 3. Some university, no degree 4. University degree 5. Advanced academic degree, such as candidacy or doctoral degree 6. Other, specify	What is the highest level of education you have right now? 1. Some university (no degree or diploma) 2. University degree—Bachelor's 3. University degree—Specialist or Master's or equivalent (five years studying at the university with diploma) 4. Incomplete postgraduate education (without defended dissertation) 5. Completed postgraduate education (candidacy/advanced scientific degree or doctorate) 6. Other, specify
D4.1.	Voting is important because <b>real decisions</b> are made in elections.	Voting is important because <b>representatives of the people</b> are chosen in elections.
D4.5.	The Rule of Law is fundamental to a <b>functioning</b> democracy.	The Rule of Law is a fundamental principle to the <b>existence of</b> democracy.
D4.7.	Democratic principles enhance the workplace -- supervisors should incorporate democratic	Democratic principles enhance the workplace -- supervisors should incorporate democratic principles into their management practices

	principles into their management practices.	(such as <b>treat workers fairly, respect each team member as an individual</b> ).
<b>F1.6.</b>	...voluntary <b>community</b> service.	...voluntary <b>public</b> service.
<b>F2.9.</b>	... <b>social services/welfare</b> in the United States.	...social services system in the United States, <b>social assistance programs for population groups with limited opportunities</b> (welfare).
<b>G4.</b>	As a direct result of your participation in the IVLP, have you done or received any of the following in your <b>community</b> ?	As a direct result of your participation in the IVLP, have you participated in the following activities for the good of the <b>neighborhood/district where you are living</b> (such as work with school, projects to protect the environment, demonstration of leadership qualities during the decisions or negotiations regarding disputable issues with representatives of the local government)?

### *Linguistic Equivalence*

Linguistic equivalence deals with equating words and sentences on survey items, so that the same meaning is communicated (Loner, 1981). In our project, linguistic equivalence became an especially important issue as we tried to equate the meaning and wording of the items for Russian and Ukrainian versions of the instrument. Many Ukrainians, especially those who are college educated, speak and read Russian in daily life. Indeed, only recently has the use of the Ukrainian language begun to expand in response to the government actions. Thus, we expected that the vast majority of respondents in Ukraine would be bi-lingual Russian and Ukrainian speakers. As a result, great care was taken in equating the meaning and wording for the Russian and Ukrainian versions of the instrument, as respondents might choose to respond to either of the two versions. While Russian and Ukrainian are closely related languages, there are numerous differences between them that we had to accommodate. We did this through triangulation process, adjusting the wording and meaning simultaneously for the English, Russian, and Ukrainian versions of the instrument using a group of tri-cultural, tri-lingual translators.

Most of the changes required to establish linguistic equivalence involved changing specific words to make sentences more grammatically and linguistically appropriate for the native speakers. The importance of making items grammatically and linguistically correct was specifically stressed by the translators, who pointed out that the high educational level of the respondents might make them frustrated and reluctant to respond to the items that “do not sound right” for a native speaker. Interestingly, in the process of adjusting the wording the meaning of the items was slightly changed. For example, *views* was changed to *perceptions* (see Table 3, item B4), *experience* was translated as *participation* (item B7), *appreciation* was altered to *respect* (item F5.2), and *communicate* came back as *maintain relationships* (item I4). These and other changes in wording slightly altered the meaning of the items, often by making them more discrete and expressive, which helped to highlight the underlying intent of the items. For instance, *maintaining contacts* points to behavioral involvement and underscores the active role of the alumni, as compared with a more passive version of *remained in contact* (item E1). Similar augmentation in meaning emerged for the words *introduced*, which was changed to *implemented* (item G2.8), *attended* vs. *participated* (item I1.1), and *initiate* vs. *implement* (item G2). The stronger connotations in the wording actually assisted in reducing ambiguity about the meaning and highlighted the importance of adjusting the original English version of the instrument, rather than forcing the nuances of the original version into awkwardly worded and possibly confusing translations.

**Table 3. Revisions of Items to Establish Linguistic Equivalence**

<b>Item Number</b>	<b>Original English Wording</b>	<b>Adjusted English Wording</b>
<b>B4.</b>	How did your <b>views</b> of the U.S. government and the American people change as a result of your IVLP participation?	How did your <b>perceptions</b> of the U.S. government and the American people change as a result of your IVLP participation?
<b>B7.</b>	The IV Program helps to... <b>B7.4.</b> ...develop friendly, <b>sympathetic</b> , and peaceful relations between the United States and	The IV Program helps to... <b>B7.4.</b> Develop friendly, <b>positive</b> , and peaceful relations between the United States and other countries.

	other countries of the world.	
<b>D3.</b>	To what extent do you think your <b>IVLP experience</b> enhanced your abilities in the following areas? ...communicate more <b>accurate</b> information about the United States and Americans to people in your country.	To what extent do you think your <b>participation in the IVLP</b> gave you an ability to make your contribution to the following areas? ...communicate more <b>credible</b> information about the United States and Americans to people in your home country.
<b>D3.4.</b>		
<b>E1.</b>	Have you <b>remained</b> in contact with people you met during your IV exchange program?	Are you <b>maintaining</b> contacts with people that you met during your IVLP visit?
<b>F2.</b>	To what extent do you feel your <b>IVLP experience</b> helped to increase your understanding of the following aspects of the United States?	To what extent did your <b>experience participating</b> in the IVLP help you better understand the following aspects of the U.S.?
<b>F5.2.</b>	... <b>appreciation</b> of the United States and Americans.	... <b>respect</b> of the United States and Americans.
<b>G2.</b>	Have you used the knowledge or experience gained in the IVLP to <b>initiate</b> any of these <b>formal or informal</b> changes in your organization or work? ... <b>Introduced</b> new policies or procedures.	Have you used the knowledge or experience gained during the participation in the IVLP for the <b>implementation</b> of the following <b>official or unofficial</b> changes in your organization or work? ... <b>Implemented</b> new work methods or procedures.
<b>G2.8.</b>		
<b>I1.1.</b>	<b>Attended</b> events held at U.S. Alumni Resource Centers or IATP (Internet Access and Training Program) Centers for IVLP/DOS exchange alumni.	<b>Participated in</b> events held at U.S. Alumni Resource Centers or IATP (Internet Access and Training Program) Centers for IVLP/DOS exchange alumni.
<b>I1.12.</b>	<b>Mentored</b> new participants or alumni of the IVLP or other DOS exchange programs.	<b>Instructed</b> new participants or alumni of the IVLP or other DOS exchange programs.
<b>I4.</b>	Please indicate which of the following groups of people do you currently <b>communicate</b> with?	Please indicate which of the following groups of people you currently <b>maintain relationships</b> with?

### Metric Equivalence

Metric equivalence refers to measures in different languages being scored equivalently, thus assessing a construct at the same level across cultural contexts (Loner, 1981). In our case, issues with the metric equivalence of translation involved overcoming the difficulties in translating the meaning of response options for scales, such as *not at all*, *somewhat*, *moderately*, and *very much*. For instance, in Russian and Ukrainian, the translations for *somewhat* and *moderately* are not as distinct as they appear to be in English, thus highlighting the notion that the meaning of scale scores can be different across cultures (Helms, 1992). To ensure metric equivalence we revised the response options for the scales by providing a continuum that would be linguistically appropriate and conceptually comparable across the translated versions (See Table 4). For some of the scales this involved changing the wording to provide linguistically and conceptually accurate response options. For example, *very dissatisfied* was changed to *absolutely dissatisfied*, while *very satisfied* was translated as *completely satisfied*. Even though it seems that the wording for the response options is not comparable within the scale, the conceptual and linguistic equivalence was actually improved. *Absolutely* and *completely* provided much stronger alternatives to *very* and established linguistically appropriate combinations for the words *dissatisfied* and *satisfied*. The stronger wording for the anchors of the scales actually aided in addressing the issue of response style reported in cross-cultural research. It has been found that ethnically and culturally diverse populations often exhibit differences in response style that consistently skews their use of the extreme ends of response scales (Clarke, 2000). One way to address response style cross culturally is to use scales of at least 5 points, which tend to reduce the effects of the extreme response style (Clarke, 2000). However, we addressed this issue conceptually, rather than methodologically, by wording the extreme anchors for the scale more strongly (*absolutely* or *completely* vs. *very*), which may have made such options more specific, less likely to be used excessively, and more equivalent to the English scale. In translating the response format options, ensuring the linguistic and conceptual appropriateness of the options for each item was more important than establishing the linguistic equivalence to the English version. For example, while the word *very* was changed to address issues of extreme response style when used with *dissatisfied* and *satisfied*, while *very* was retained for the response scale involving the word *valuable*. *Very valuable* was a linguistically appropriate choice of words and as a result, no changes were implemented (See Table 4).



Other changes to the response options of the scales emerged from the discussions with the translators, who suggested that people in the CIS might not be very versed in responding to the structured questionnaires and may require additional aids for keeping track of the stem of the question, the corresponding items, and the response options. Thus, we revised the response options for some of the scales by incorporating the stem of the question into the scale, which assisted respondents in answering the items. For instance, the original question stated: *“To what extent do you feel your IVLP experience helped to increase your understanding of the following aspects of the United States?”*. For each of the items, respondents rated their perceptions on the scale from *“Not At All”* to *“To a Great Extent”*. However, the translators advocated for the revision of the response options to incorporate the answer to the question as an aid to remind respondents that the items should be rated with respect to the change in their understanding. As a result, the revised version of the question read as: *“To what extent your experience participating in the IVLP helped you better understand the following aspects of the U.S.?”* on the scale from *“Did not help at all”* to *“Helped very much”*. Other changes of the response options that were incorporated the stem of the question into the scale are presented in Table 3. Overall, the changes to the wording and format of the response options for the scales, required for establishing the metric equivalence, highlighted once again the importance of keeping the original English version of the instrument flexible to allow the linguistically and conceptually appropriate changes to emerge.

**Table 4. Revisions to the Response Options for the Scales to Establish Metric Equivalence**

Type of Changes	Type of Scale	Response Options of the Scales				
Wording	English scale:	Not at all Valuable	Slightly Valuable	Moderately Valuable	Very Valuable	
	Adjusted English scale	Absolutely not-valuable	Slightly Valuable	Valuable	Very Valuable	
	English scale:	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
	Adjusted English scale	Absolutely Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Completely Satisfied
	English scale:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure/ No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Adjusted English scale	Absolutely Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Absolutely Agree
Incorporating answers into scales	English scale:	Not at all	To a Small Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Great Extent	
	Adjusted English scale	Did not help at all	Helped Slightly	Helped to some extent	Helped very much	
	English scale:	Not at all	To a Small Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Great Extent	
	Adjusted English scale	Absolutely did not Enhance	Enhanced Slightly	Enhanced to some extent	Very much Enhance	
	English scale:	Not at all	To a Small Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Great Extent	
	Adjusted English scale	Did not share at all	Shared slightly	Shared to some extent	Shared very much	

### Additional Efforts in Documenting Equivalence

The whole process of equalizing the instrument across languages creates the paradox of equivalence. Scores of respondents in different countries may represent not only the difference in constructs measured

by the instrument, but also the differences in perceived meaning attributed to the items of the instrument (Van der Veer, Ommundsen, Hak, and Larsen, 2003). The more effort that is spent equalizing the perceived meaning of the different language versions of the instrument, the less likely cultural differences are to emerge. In contrast, without equalizing the measures, apparent cultural differences that emerge might be due to the inadequacies in establishing equivalence, rather than real cultural differences (Loner, 1981). In an effort to check for the role of translation equivalence in influencing the cultural differences across the language versions of the instrument, we conducted follow-up telephone interviews, in Russian, with a randomly selected 10 percent of the respondents.

We've asked follow-up respondents specific queries about three questions identified during the pre-test and data collection as being potentially confusing. These questions assessed respondents' attitudes about various aspects of American democracy, changes in respondents' views of the U.S. government and American people, as a result of IVLP participation, and extent to which the IVLP experience enhanced respondents' abilities to contribute to their own country's political, economic, and social development (See Table 5). We asked respondents to rate the presented questions—using a 4-point scale (from *Not At All* to *Very Much*)—on the extent to which the question's difficulty or confusion might be due to the following issues: 1) problems in understanding the meaning and/or wording of the question; 2) difficulties recalling the details of the IVLP experience; 3) cultural inappropriateness of the question; 4) problems in separating the impact of the IVLP from the impact of anything else that might have happened since the IVLP visit; and 5) any other factors contributing to the difficulty of the questions. Respondents were specifically encouraged to elaborate on their responses and explain reasons why three questions might have presented problems for them.

**Table 5. Questions Rated by the Follow-Up Respondents with Respect to Difficulties**

<b>Three Questions for the Follow-up Assessment</b>
<p><b>D3.</b> To what extent do you think your IVLP experience enhanced your abilities in the following areas? Your IVLP visit enhanced your ability to...</p> <p><b>D3.1.</b> ...contribute to your home country's political processes.</p> <p><b>D3.2.</b> ...contribute to your home country's economic development.</p> <p><b>D3.3.</b> ...contribute to your home country's social and/or civil development.</p> <p><b>D3.4.</b> ...communicate more accurate information about the United States and Americans to people in your home country.</p>
<p><b>D4.</b> To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</p> <p><b>D4.1.</b> Voting is important because representatives of the people are chosen in elections.</p> <p><b>D4.2.</b> Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy.</p> <p><b>D4.3.</b> An independent media is important to the free flow of information.</p> <p><b>D4.4.</b> All citizens in a country should have equal rights and protections under the law, regardless of circumstances.</p> <p><b>D4.5.</b> The Rule of Law is fundamental to a functioning democracy.</p> <p><b>D4.6.</b> Individuals and organizations have the right to free speech and to voice opposition.</p> <p><b>D4.7.</b> Democratic principles enhance the workplace -- supervisors should incorporate democratic principles into their management practices, such as treat workers fairly, respect individuals.</p>
<p><b>B4.</b> How did your views of the U.S. government and the American people change as a result of your IVLP participation?</p> <p>IVLP participation changed in your views of the:</p> <p><b>B4.1.</b> U.S. Government</p> <p><b>B4.2.</b> American people</p>

The largest percentages of respondents indicated problems with the presented questions that were not related to translation. Although, about 12 percent of respondents indicated having problems with the meaning and wording of the questions about democracy and views of the American government/people, their responses revealed that these problems were not indicative of poor translation quality (See Table 6). People reported being uncomfortable answering these questions mostly because their IVLP visit was focused more on the professional and technical aspects, rather than democracy and government of the United States. Some respondents mentioned their desires to stay away from politics and politically related conversations and as a result, had a difficult time responding to the detailed questions about their perceptions of the various aspects of the democracy, American government, and Americans. The non-translation difficulties were further highlighted by the quarter of the follow-up respondents who indicated that they had problems with the questions about the government and people of the United States due to the numerous events happening in the world since their return from the IVLP, which affected their views. Other issues with the questions mentioned by smaller proportions of the respondents involved the short length of their visit, which prevented them from forming concrete impressions of the government and the democracy, as well as respondents' modesty in estimating their abilities to contribute to their home countries. Interestingly, many respondents used the open-ended queries of the follow-up assessment to express their satisfaction with the IVLP, describe their amazement at the politeness and friendliness of Americans, as well as to lament on not having in their home countries certain aspects of American democracy, rule of law, and social security. Overall, these results suggest that even the difficult questions of the survey still exhibited good translation quality. Fewer than 4 percent indicated any cultural inappropriateness of the items.

**Table 6. Responses to the Queries About the Difficulties in Responding to Questions**

<b>Difficulties in Responding to Questions</b>	<b>Percent Endorsing</b>
<b>Various aspects of American democracy (item D4)</b>	
Problems in understanding the meaning and/or wording of the question	10.6%
Difficulties recalling the details of your IVLP experience	3.6%
Cultural inappropriateness of the questions	3.6%
Problems in separating the impact of the IVLP from the impact of anything else that might have happened since	1.8%
Any other factors	5.3%
<b>Changes in respondents' views of the U.S. government and American people (item B4)</b>	
Problems in understanding the meaning and/or wording of the question	12.4%
Difficulties recalling the details of your IVLP experience	5.3%
Cultural inappropriateness of the questions	3.6%
Problems in separating the impact of the IVLP from the impact of anything else that might have happened since	26.4%
Any other factors	21.0%
<b>Extent to which IVLP experience enhanced abilities to contribute to home country (item D3)</b>	
Problems in understanding the meaning and/or wording of the question	3.6%
Difficulties recalling the details of your IVLP experience	5.3%
Cultural inappropriateness of the questions	1.8%
Problems in separating the impact of the IVLP from the impact of anything else that might have happened since	5.3%
Any other factors	5.3%

## **Contextual Influences on the Translation Process**

In addition to the efforts in establishing equivalence of the translation, the accurate interpretation of the results requires documentation of any contextual and procedural factors that might have influenced the translation process. In this process, special attention should be given to describing the characteristics of the translators, as well as the procedures. The quality of the translation depends heavily on the qualifications, knowledge, and cultural experiences of the translators (Beck et al., 2003). Thus, the translators must be knowledgeable of not only the language, but also the culture, research goals, concepts of interest, and purpose of the items (Kristjansson, Desrocher, and Zumbo, 2003). This underscores the importance of developing truly collaborative relationships with the translators. For instance, it has been reported that translators in East European countries might be reluctant to disagree with Western researchers (Temple, 1997). That was not our experience. However, without developing collaborative relationships and discussing various conceptual and methodological aspects of the project, we might have been perceived as forcing our perceptions and definitions of constructs on the translators, which could then bias the results. Furthermore, it is essential to document any personal or contextual influences that translators might have brought to the translation process. Given vast intra-cultural differences, translators are likely to have different attitudes, values, assumptions, and concerns regarding the concepts of the study. As a result, different translators might interpret and translate the meaning of the items differently. Describing the translators involved in the project and documenting the translation-related issues, problems, discussions, and decisions that were used to produce the translated instruments is essential for indicating the cultural, social, and political perspective from which the findings might be interpreted (Birbili, 2000; Temple, 1997; Temple and Edwards, 2002).

In our research project, we were fortunate to have highly qualified bilingual translators, all of whom were natives of the countries in which the study was conducted, possessed excellent knowledge of English, were aware of the cultural context, and were familiar with the research topics and goals. These people included professional translators, social scientists with extensive experience in survey and evaluation research, and an expert in intercultural education who has taught cross-cultural courses at the State Department's National Foreign Affairs Training Center. We also had the input on the translations from the State Department and the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs office in each country, particularly from the Foreign Service nationals, who are bilingual natives of the country working for the embassy and participating in many aspects of the IVLP. Our translators included immigrants to the United States from each of the countries involved. These truly bi-cultural and bi-lingual individuals from Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan could check for the equivalence of cultural nuances of meaning in English as well as the translation, and identify items that have non-equivalent cultural connotations. Without bi-cultural individuals, some cultural undertones in English and the translated versions might have been left unnoticed. For instance, to adequately translate questions about democracy the translators had to be aware of not only the culturally appropriate expressions of meaning in the translation, but also had to be knowledgeable of the original intent and the meaning of the items in English, which required first-hand, in-depth knowledge of various aspects of democracy in the United States.

The translators worked in groups, discussing every point of concern with the translation, and ultimately coming to the agreement on the translation. In this process, we specifically focused on developing rapport and collegial relationships with the translators, as they are the true experts in the language and culture we are studying. This became an important issue as some translators initially became defensive when some of their suggestions were not fully incorporated into the instrument. Thus, we spent a great deal of time responding to their questions and concerns, specifically explaining the reasons why some of their changes were not used. This helped us to avoid giving the impression of being authoritative, which is a particularly sensitive issue for those from these countries, especially when working with Americans. Developing the collaborative relationships with the translators was essential for arriving at the consensus on the translation, as well as for the progress of the research project.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Overall, the present paper delineates numerous translation issues ranging from emic-etic aspects of the meaning to specific examples of linguistic equivalence, describes the modified de-centering translation technique, and highlights the importance of developing truly collaborative relationships with the translators. In the process of addressing such a myriad of issues, the whole translation process evolved from translating the meanings of the instrument into providing the meaning for the translation. We have realized that the meaning and the purpose of the translation process is to provide a qualitative approach for the instrument development that maps contexts of people's lives, fosters collaborations, and documents emic-etic aspects of cross-cultural research. This further highlighted the importance of developing first-hand knowledge of the experiences, life domains, and settings of importance to individuals (Swindle & Moos, 1992). Human behavior and cognitions are greatly affected by the nature of the cultural, social, historic, and material context of the settings within which they occur and as a result, instrument development must match contextual conditions of people's lives (Trickett, 1996; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1994; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1993). The translation process becomes an important part of the research by assisting in developing culturally and contextually congruent conceptualizations, instruments, and interpretations of findings. It is our hope that the translation process outlined in this paper can serve as a blueprint for adjusting translation methods to fit the particular cultural context.

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