Training Cognitive Testing
Interviewers in Different Settings and Languages

FCSM 2018 Conference
March 8, 2018

Alisú Schoua-Glusberg
alisu@researchsupportservices.com
asglusberg@impaqint.com
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?

alisu@researchsupportservices.com