HOW TO DEVELOP RESEARCH MATERIALS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Mary Angelica Painter, University of Colorado Boulder
Melissa Villarreal, University of Colorado Boulder
Carson MacPherson-Krutsky, University of Colorado Boulder

This check sheet is for researchers who are planning to work with participants who speak a language or multiple languages besides English. This check sheet will help researchers ensure that their research materials are accessible. It also offers recommendations for preparing to translate and interpret materials.

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE INCLUSION NEEDS AND BENEFITS

Globally, research is conducted and published primarily in English (Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020), limiting many non-English speakers from taking part in the research process or accessing final products. By gearing studies toward non-English speakers or those with limited-English proficiency, when appropriate, researchers can better include diverse populations in knowledge production. This will not only more fully represent diverse voices in data collection but also produce rich insights and build trust with communities that speak languages other than English (Holmes et al., 2013). As an added benefit, including linguistically underrepresented community members may help them contribute to policy solutions for their communities. With all this in mind, it is important to remember that sound multilingual research should be tailored not only in language, but also to the cultural context of the focal populations (Im et al., 2016).

PLANNING AHEAD FOR TRANSLATION AND/OR INTERPRETATION

Translating written materials and/or providing verbal interpretation of spoken words can take time to plan and organize, so it is important to assess language needs for your project or program from the start. Before engaging with non-English-speaking populations, you will first need to know which materials and communication you will need translated and/or interpreted. The following questions can help guide planning for such research:

- ☐ How many languages are necessary to reach relevant audiences? Which languages? Which communities?
- ☐ What cultural nuances are specific to the language spoken in the community you are studying?
- ☐ Will outreach materials (e.g., emails, flyers, social media posts, etc.) need to be translated to recruit or otherwise engage participants?
- ☐ Will your selected research methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, surveys, etc.) require interpretation?
- ☐ Will you need interpretation for presentations or workshops?
- ☐ Will reports, manuscripts, presentation slides, or other materials need translation?
- ☐ Who will do the interpretation or translation? Do you or someone on your team have the necessary capabilities, or will you need to budget for a professional to support your efforts?

TRANSLATION TIMELINE

Translation takes time. Once you have a list of the research activities and materials that need translation, you should develop a detailed timeline to ensure these materials will be ready by project deadlines. Whether someone within your team is translating or you are hiring a professional, here are some important aspects to consider:

☐ Translation services often charge per word. Start by developing estimated word counts for the materials such as emails or reports that you will need translated.

☐ Assess whether you or your team members are able to and interested in assisting with translation and, if so, how long translations will take to complete. When developing shorter materials like emails or flyers, it may be appropriate for you or someone on your research team to complete the translations. For example, Villarreal (2022) translated materials, such as recruitment guides and consent forms, that were crucial to the research project and specific to the research target population.

☐ Best practices suggest using professional translators for lengthier professional documents and materials, such as reports and manuscripts. Translators are certified and skilled in maintaining a professional voice, incorporating cultural competency and nuance, and providing transparency and accountability for their services.

☐ Translators may require up to two days to translate materials containing 1,000 words, or about 4 double-spaced pages. Because many academic materials are much longer than this in terms of word length (such as an 8,000-word journal article or an 80,000-word book), it is again imperative to plan ahead. Fortunately, professional translation services will usually provide timelines for translation. Consult with your chosen translation service to gauge how long their services will take and how much it will cost, especially if you will need to translate multiple documents in multiple languages.

☐ Local, professional translation groups may be better suited to translate materials that need to be adapted for specific geographic and cultural regions. For example, if you are conducting research in both Mexico and Puerto Rico, you will want to be aware of nuances in each location's local terminologies. The research team that developed the Landslide Guide for Residents of Puerto Rico collaborated with Puerto Rican students and scholars who, along with the non-Puerto Rican, Spanish-speaking members of the team, translated all materials to Spanish. Once the linguistic nuances were assured, then the materials were translated back to English.

INTERPRETATION TIMELINE

Like translation, a timeline should be carefully developed for interpretation. Professional interpreters will need to know well in advance if they are needed for meetings, research activities, or other events.

☐ Check to see which interpretation services in the area where you are working can provide the languages you need for your project.

   * At the start of your project, set aside times to contact interpretation services. If you are affiliated with an academic institution, you can also see if there are services provided through your university.

   * Explore which interpretation services are available for your project's languages. Some services might not offer every language, so it is important to know which services are available for your specific language needs.

   * Consider if you will need interpretation provided virtually or in person. Virtual interpretation widens the scope of the available services but requires additional technological considerations. Some software, such as Zoom, allows for simultaneous interpretation. If the software you are using has this feature, allow time for interpreters to get comfortable with it and work through possible technical issues. For example, during the 2022 Natural Hazards Workshop, the Community Language Cooperative provided English to Spanish interpretation for a plenary session held via Zoom to ensure accessibility for the panelists and the participants.

☐ Create a schedule of activities (interviews, focus groups, etc.) that need interpretation.

   * Do not schedule events until you confirm the interpreter is available when you want to hold your activity.

   * Provide the interpreter with the time and information to be successful. Interpretation services often ask for context materials such as agendas, project descriptions, presentation materials (PowerPoint slides, for instance), and project-specific terms to ensure they can interpret appropriately during the event. Have those materials available as early as possible so you can provide them in a timely manner.

* Understand how the interpretation will work. Whether your event or meeting is virtual or in-person, it is important to know all the different components and considerations of interpretation. For example, interpreters will often ask speakers to speak slowly and allow time for the interpreter to translate.

* Have the interpreters introduce themselves to attendees and explain to everyone in the virtual or in-person space how the interpretation will work. If possible, share this information in advance via email and on PowerPoint slides shown during the convening. For example, when the Community Language Cooperative provided interpretation services for Melissa Villarreal's dissertation defense, they provided clear instructions at the outset of the gathering.

BUDGETING FOR TRANSLATION/INTERPRETATION

You may need to incorporate translation or interpretation services into your budget.

☐ Check with your chosen translation and/or interpretation services for their prices. Service costs will vary depending on the length of an event or the number of translated materials. Check with your service provider to know what to expect so you can begin to budget. Be sure to ask for a range of prices to cover different options for translation and/or interpretation that you can incorporate into your grant proposals.

* *For example, for the Inclusive Emergency Alerts for Colorado project, our research team contacted the Community Language Cooperative early in the project timeline and were able to estimate a budget for translating the final report in Spanish, which increased the accessibility of the project.*

☐ Provide space in your budget for additional costs in case of unforeseen translation and/or interpretation needs. Even with extensive planning, some translation and interpretation needs may arise throughout the project. Be sure to have some extra time and funding to account for any unforeseen needs.

CONCLUSION

Offering materials in languages other than English is important for producing accessible research and promoting inclusion of diverse communities. This check sheet offers several actionable steps to inform this process. It is also important to remember to ask community partners questions about what language needs exist and how best to meet them. This is especially important for hazard and disasters research as it can help incorporate the unique experiences and impacts of disaster for these communities.

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