

More About Translations and Multicultural Research

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I recently had three experiences that deepened my thinking and my questioning about the challenges of translations and multicultural research

The first experience was listening to a webinar presented by Jon Krosnick about survey experiments conducted in multiple countries (lapop lapop, 2021). In the webinar, he explained how selected questions from survey experiments contained in a book by Shuman and Presser (1996) were administered in a number of countries and languages. He reported that some experiments worked as they did in English, some did not, and that he sometimes found that using culture as a moderating variable made the results across countries more similar.

The second experience was reviewing an article for another journal. In the article, an Asian researcher conducted a public opinion survey in an Asian country and used a scale validated a long time ago in the US as an important predictor variable. The author did not report how the scale was translated and whether the scale worked in the Asian country as it did in the US. I suggested that revisions to the paper include a discussion of these issues.

The third experience was a conversation with Lin Sun who is a PhD candidate in Special Education at Indiana University Bloomington. Mr. Sun asked for survey consulting help to organize a survey package that consists of two self-created questionnaires and two standardized scales that he will use to collect data for his dissertation. Mr. Sun is fluent in both English and Mandarin, and the survey study will be conducted with Chinese parents of young children with autism in mainland China.

Mr. Sun initially planned to include a parenting self-efficacy scale that has been validated in the US and adapted into Mandarin. However, as he delved into the

literature on self-efficacy, he came to realize that the concept of *self-efficacy* and the research movement on the topic is deeply rooted in Western culture and mentality, centering individualistic empowerment. While in China, where collectivism is valued, applying self-efficacy into a collective context may not be a good fit and could be a difficult concept for the unique group of parents being surveyed for the dissertation to understand even though these parents might have gone through a process of self-blaming for their children's condition like many Western parents do (Zhou, et al., 2018).

Mr. Sun then switched to using a family support scale validated in English and adapted into Mandarin. However, one item in the original scale asks parents if they receive support from "church members/minister." The adapted version changed this item to "Communist Party and Youth Organization." How similar or different are these support systems? Eventually, Mr. Sun located another social support scale for his dissertation that was developed in China in 1994 and has been used widely among different target populations, including parents of individuals with disabilities. The content and language usage are culturally valid. His experiences demonstrate the challenges and care needed when using questions and scales that may not accurately transfer across languages and cultures.

Collectively, these experiences made me wonder if more *AJPOR* authors who cite Western literature or use scales and questions developed in English should also include explanations about the possible impact of different cultures and languages on their outcomes. Just as I learned from Mr. Sun, other Western scholars would benefit from a better understanding of the similarities and differences across languages and cultures. The transfer of scientific knowledge in public opinion and survey research needs to go both ways in our internationalized world.

References

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Biographical Notes

John Kennedy directed the Indiana University Center for Survey Research for 24 years. He also directed the University of Hartford Institute of Social Research for two years and was employed at the US Census Bureau for four years. He earned a PhD in sociology from the Pennsylvania State University. He has been involved in the development of a number of professional journals and was the founding editor of *Survey Practice*, an e-journal published by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He has also been actively involved in professional research ethics including chairing Indiana University Social Behavioral IRB for 12 years and he served on two committees that revised the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics. He teaches a graduate course in Survey Design.

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Lin Sun is a PhD candidate in Special Education with a doctoral minor in Social Work at Indiana University Bloomington. His research interests center on autism interventions and family capacity-building in low resources contexts. He has co-authored several peer-reviewed journal articles and two book chapters, all of which are related to autism, family perspectives and communication assessment and interventions.

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