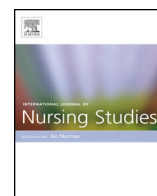




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Practical issues in multi-lingual research



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ABSTRACT

Background: With an increasing number of ethnic minority populations, the use of multiple languages in one research study has increased in recent years. The use of multiple languages helps increase comprehensiveness of educational materials and/or survey questionnaires, and promote ethnic minorities' participation in research. However, little has been clearly known about practical issues in using multiple languages in one research study.

Objectives: The purpose of this paper is to explore practical issues in using multiple languages in a study among diverse sub-ethnic groups of Asian American breast cancer survivors in order to propose future directions for the use of multiple languages in research projects.

Methods: Throughout the research process, research team made written records of practical issues and possible reasons for the issues as they arose. Weekly group discussions among research team members were administered, and the written records of these discussions were reviewed and analyzed using the content analysis. The unit of analysis was individual words. The words in the data (memos and written records) were classified into idea categories that emerged from the coding process.

Results: The idea categories included issues in: (a) collaborators from various sub-ethnic groups; (b) IRB protocol submissions; (c) consistencies in translation process, (d) conceptual equivalence; (e) cultural differences; (f) existing translated versions; and (g) authorship issues. Based on the issues, we made the following suggestions for multi-lingual research: (a) networking and setting multiple communication channels with potential collaborators; (b) checking the institution's IRB policies related to the use of multiple languages; (c) setting the rules and procedures for translation process; (d) checking existing different language versions of instruments; and (e) setting the rules for authorship in advance.

Conclusions: The suggestions made in this study would help the researchers be prepared in advance to deal with the challenges.

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Contribution of the paper

What is already known about the topic?

- With an increasing number of ethnic minority populations in the U.S., the use of multiple languages in one research study has increased in recent years.
- Using multiple languages helps increase comprehensiveness of educational materials and/or survey questionnaires, and promote ethnic minorities' participation in research.
- Using multiple languages could result in some fundamental problems due to the complexity and subjectivity of languages.

What this paper adds?

- “Partnered, permanent relationship” cannot be expressed in a concise single word in Korean because such a relationship is not commonly accepted in Korean culture.
- The term “spiritual (靈的)” based on Christianity is frequently not-applicable to Japanese patients, and it is difficult to translate the terms related to spirituality into Japanese cultural contexts.
- Younger populations in Asian cultures would be fine with explicit description and discussion of topics related to sexuality, but older populations would not be comfortable with direct description and discussion of sexuality.

1. Practical issues in multi-lingual research

With an increasing number of ethnic minority populations, the use of multiple languages in one research study has increased in recent years (Angel, 2013; Squires, 2009; Wong and Poon, 2010). Using multiple languages helps increase comprehensiveness of educational materials and/or survey questionnaires, and promote ethnic minorities' participation in research (Angel, 2013; Squires, 2009; Wong and Poon, 2010). However, this could result in some fundamental problems due to the complexity and subjectivity of languages (Angel, 2013). Perfect equivalence of concepts in different linguistic, cultural, and social class contexts is not possible (Angel, 2013; Squires, 2009). Furthermore, other issues such as those related to the credentials of translators and the roles of translators in research process have also been pointed out (Angel, 2013; Squires, 2009).

To standardize the translation process, great efforts have been made. One example would be the American Community Survey's effort to improve response rates and the validity of the information collected from non-English speaking individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The current best practices of translation are structured procedures for translating questionnaires (Harkness et al., 2010; Kessler and Üstün, 2008). However, these procedures just superficially minimize uncertainty in translation by simply following the standards, and there has been debate on how to evaluate the quality of translations (Harkness et al., 2010; Kessler and Üstün,

2008). Furthermore, formal criteria for assessing the adequacy and quality of translation are still lacking (Angel, 2013).

The equivalence of concepts in translating multiple languages is much more important in quantitative studies because of its stance on objectivity (Angel, 2013). Quantitative studies are based on empiricism whose core goal is clear objectivity in comparisons among different groups using different languages. Subsequently, translated measures should measure a similar concept or construct on a similar metric across different linguistic groups. However, in reality, this basic assumption could be questionable because a specific linguistic group has its own social and cultural factors that influence the reality (Angel, 2013). Virtually, it may not be possible to have valid comparisons through the use of multiple languages. However, in real world research, it is also impossible to avoid comparisons among different linguistic groups. Rather, cross-cultural researchers use multiple language translation while hoping that it would be possible to arrive at comparable or similar metric comparisons. However, little has been clearly known about pros and cons in using multiple languages in quantitative studies.

The purpose of this paper is to explore practical issues in using multiple languages through a research study among diverse sub-ethnic groups of Asian American breast cancer survivors as a case example and to propose future directions for the use of multiple languages in research projects. First, challenges in multilingual research that are currently known in the literature are concisely summarized. Then, the study through which the practical issues were identified is described to provide the background of the issues. Then, practical issues in using multiple languages raised in the study are discussed. Finally, based on the discussion of the issues, directions for the use of multiple languages in future research are proposed.

Translation could be roughly categorized into intra-lingual translation, inter-lingual translation, and inter-semiotic translation (Venuti, 2012). Intra-lingual translation means a translation of verbal signs to other signs of the same language; inter-lingual translation means a translation of verbal signs to some other languages; and inter-semiotic translation means a translation of verbal signs to signs of non-verbal sign systems (Venuti, 2012). In this paper, translation limitedly means inter-lingual translation.

2. What is known in the literature?: Challenges in multilingual research

Challenges in multilingual research that have been reported in the literature can be categorized into: (a) conceptual equivalence; (b) timing of translation; (c) quality of translators; and (d) ethnocentricity.

2.1. Conceptual equivalence

Depending on the purpose of translation, the translation process needs to be different. For a literary translation to make a novel accessible to a different language community, substantial modifications from the original text may be often needed to create a new work of art

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