

# 2020 Census Bilingual Enumerator Experiences in the Field

Patricia Goerman, Kathleen Kephart and Mikelyn Meyers,  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Daniela Glusberg, Alisú Schoua-Glusberg,  
Research Support Services  
Patty LeBaron, RTI International

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# Multilingual Doorstep Messaging Research at the U.S. Census Bureau

- Decade long program of research related to doorstep interactions and messaging in multiple languages
- Nonresponse FollowUp (NRFU) doorstep interviewing operation
  - 2010 Census: Field observation of interviews in 7 languages
  - 2015 focus groups with respondents in 7 languages
  - 2017 Doorstep messaging focus groups in 7 languages
- Past research has included: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese
- English included as a baseline for comparison

# 2020 Census Evaluations and Experiments

- The Census Program for Evaluations and Experiments (CPEX) is a research initiative designed to evaluate the current census in preparation for planning the next census.
  - 2020 CPEX program included 3 experiments, 7 evaluations, 51 operational assessments, and 5 quality control profiles.
- Goal to continue our research and development of supports for gathering census data in multiple languages in the face-to-face Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) operation

# Original Study Plan

- Doorstep observation of Census interviewers in 7 languages during the 2020 Census
  - English, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese
- 5-minute doorstep debriefings of respondents after the census interviews were complete
- Cognitive interviews with respondents in 7 languages to develop and test 5-minute doorstep debriefing questions

# COVID-19 Complications

- Census NRFU field dates repeatedly pushed back
- Delays with getting contract awarded and personnel through security clearance
- Difficulty with social distancing between respondent/enumerator and observer.
- Enumerators could not enter respondent homes
- Enumerators and observers could not travel together: complication for big cities
- Observer IRB safety requirements: local infection rates, avoiding public transportation, staying out of indoor areas like elevators, stairways

# Modified Methodology Due to COVID-19

- Bilingual enumerator debriefing focus groups over the telephone
- 28 focus groups with up to 6 enumerators per group from various regions across the country.
- Plan: 4 focus groups per language group (English only, and bilingual enumerators who spoke the other 6 languages)

Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese), Korean, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese

# Interviewer Focus Group Composition

Group Language	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Total per language
Monolingual English	5	4	4	N/A	N/A	<b>13</b>
Bilingual Spanish	4	3	3	2	5	<b>17</b>
Bilingual Chinese	5	3	4	5	N/A	<b>17</b>
Bilingual Vietnamese	4	4	4	6	N/A	<b>18</b>
Bilingual Korean	3	5	4	2	N/A	<b>14</b>
Bilingual Russian	1	6	2	4	N/A	<b>13</b>
Bilingual Arabic	4	5	6	4	N/A	<b>19</b>
<b>Total enumerators who participated</b>						<b>111</b>

# Research Topics

1. Use and availability of census materials (brochures, letters, handouts)
2. Doorstep messages used with respondents
3. Challenges faced by interviewers
4. Undercount of children
5. COVID-19 concerns



# Findings: Use and Availability of Census Materials

- 4 commonly discussed materials: Information Sheet, Language Assistance Sheet, Language Identification Card, Notice of Visit
  - Varied awareness when and how to best use materials
- Training
  - Pandemic related cuts to planned training: all day in person training switched to ½ day telephone training
- Interview smartphone app: available in English and Spanish
  - Translation on the fly required of other languages
  - Spanish interviewers reported often employing translation on the fly
  - Many possible reasons for not sticking to the wording
- Some reported using “unofficial” materials: e.g. Google Translate, materials from partnership organizations or past censuses
- Materials they were not aware of
  - Language glossaries

# Findings: Doorstep Messages used with Respondents

- Interviewers across languages reported having told respondents about how filling out the census would help their communities in terms of:
  - Schools
  - Community centers
  - Hospitals
  - Emergency services
- Choice of messages based on respondent characteristics
- Confidentiality messages, particularly helpful with non-English speakers
- Enumerators reported that telling the respondent that completing the interview would prevent a follow up visit from another enumerator was helpful

# Findings: Challenges Faced by Interviewers

- Immigrant concerns
  - For Spanish, Arabic, Korean and Chinese speakers, concerns about sharing information
    - “I just think anybody who’s an immigrant right now might be afraid with the current administration and not trusting what’s going on and think they might use it against them.” – Arabic-speaking enumerator*
- Sharing a common language builds trust
  - Finding across languages

# Findings: Undercount of Children and Others

- Undercount of children age 0-4 is a well documented and recurrent problem across multiple censuses (Jensen et al. 2018)
- It has gotten worse in this age group, while coverage of other age groups seems to have improved (O'Hare 2015)
- Interviewers felt that omissions of children easily corrected in instrument
  - Observation and respondent debriefing would likely be a better way to study this
- Incomplete information about children seemed more common to them than complete omissions
  - Reluctance about sharing details on children in the household, especially date of birth
- Apartment buildings where more people living than allowed
  - Interviewers sometimes suspected omissions from respondents and apartment managers

# Findings: COVID-19 Concerns

- Interviewers reported many respondents who seemed concerned about answering due to COVID-19
- Respondents sometimes talked through doors, windows
- Some stated the pandemic as a reason for refusal to participate
- Interviewer concerns (most reported not being too concerned)
  - Unmasked respondents getting too close
  - Long periods spent in unventilated hallways in large buildings
  - Narrow hallways where distancing not possible
  - Wishing for different types of masks, hand sanitizer
  - Wish for more guidance on what to do about potential COVID exposures

# Findings: Additional Topics

- Challenge of building access
- Case distribution challenges: receiving a balanced number of cases that took into account their language abilities
- Desire for more control over caseload and order of visits
- Challenges with finding proxy respondents for cases that were hard to contact
- Usability issues with the census app

# Key Recommendations and Takeaways

- More bilingual interviewer training would be useful
  - Reading question wording verbatim
  - Avoiding use of machine translation
  - Hands on practice using translated materials
  - Tailored messages to use with specific language groups
- Translation of the Nonresponse Followup app and other materials into more languages
- Development of shorter doorstep messages that are easier to use
- Increased outreach to non-English speakers through advertising and other community groups
- More outreach and training about importance of and reasons for counting children accurately

# Remote Telephone Debriefing Focus groups: Lessons Learned

- On the whole very successful
- Challenges with not being able to use video due to census issued equipment not allowing for this
  - Hard to make sure people were referring to the same census materials when we could not show them
  - Hard to keep a record of who was talking for summaries
- Interviewer language proficiency: interviewers self identified as bilingual. Sometimes not fully fluent



# Recommendations for Future Research

- Interviewer perspective provided many rich and interesting details. May not be the same as how respondents perceive things and/or what an observer would see
- Recommend future observational field studies that include incorporating respondent voices into the process

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Thank you!

For more information:

E-mail: [Patricia.L.Goerman@census.gov](mailto:Patricia.L.Goerman@census.gov)

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