

# Using Qualitative Data to Develop Interviewer Training Materials for Surveying Limited-English-Speaking Households

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Presented at the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Conference

May 10-13, 2022 Chicago, IL

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# Background

- Surveying households with speakers of languages other than English is important given the linguistic diversity in the US
  - 21.5% of people in the US speak a language other than English at home (2020 ACS 5-year estimates)
  - • 4.3% of US households have no one over the age of 5 who speaks enough English to complete a survey in English (2020 ACS 5-year estimates)
- Interviewers need training that is evidence-based, effective, and responsive to their needs to be prepared to survey this population

# Training for Language Barriers and Interviews in Non-English Languages

- Interviewing non-English speaking households presents unique challenges
  1. For all interviewers due to “language barriers”
  2. For bilingual interviewers doing interviews in their non-English language
- Current training is often inadequate
  - Limited research on these topics
  - Surveys may lack the resources to design training materials for multiple languages, and coordinating bilingual training can be logistically complicated
- Better training could lead to improved data quality and decrease costs

# Literature Review & Research

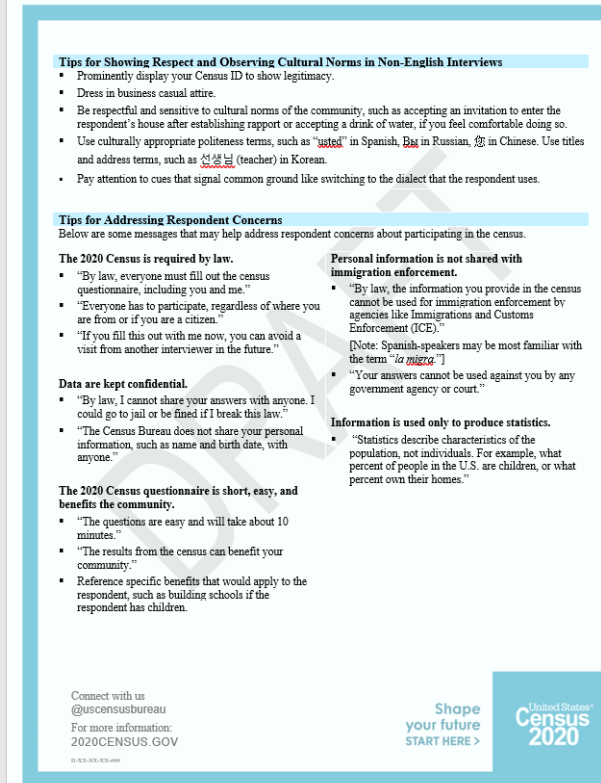
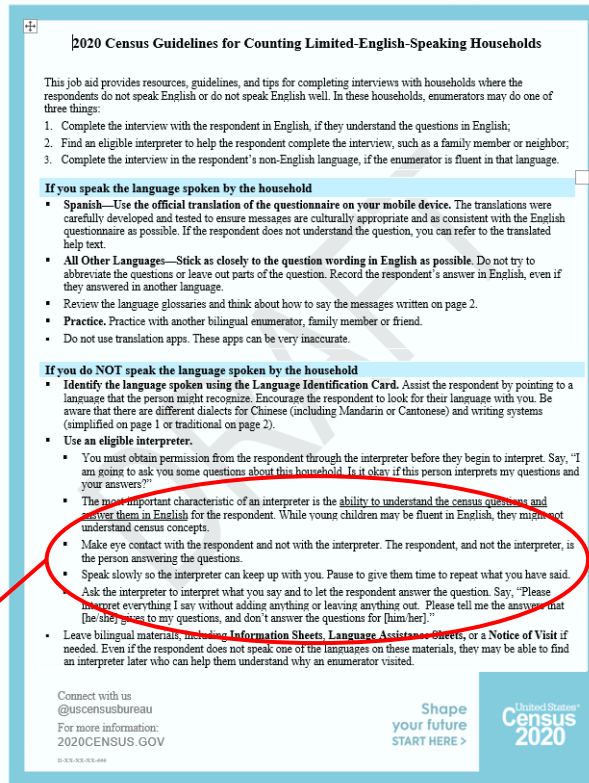
- Gap in the literature on the effects of interviewer training on surveying non-English-speaking households
  - Billiet and Loosveldt (1988): trained interviewers obtained fewer nonresponses and less underreporting than untrained interviewers
  - Groves and McGonagle (2001): interviewer training increased respondent cooperation rates for interviewers who received the training
- Since 2017, Census Bureau has researched this topic
  - Focus groups: 42 with respondents in 7 languages, 19 with field staff on language barriers, 23 with bilingual field staff on interviewing in their non-English language
  - Interviews: 38 with respondents in English & Spanish on confidentiality, 5 with field staff
  - Observations: Field observations of interviews, attending training as an observer

# Training exemplars

- Based on research, we began creating, testing, and deploying training materials on surveying non-English-speaking households
  1. A handout developed for the 2018 Census Test on surveying non-English-speaking households
  2. Training modules for the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) for all interviewers on working with interpreters and for Spanish-bilingual interviewers
  3. An experimental training module for Spanish-bilingual interviewers in the 2020 Census

# 1) 2018 Census Test: Interviewer Handout

- Handout had tips on topics like:
  - Using official translations
  - Translating on-the-fly
  - Identifying the respondent's language
  - Working with interpreters



- Make eye contact with the respondent and not with the interpreter. The respondent, and not the interpreter, is the person answering the questions.
- Speak slowly so the interpreter can keep up with you. Pause to give them time to repeat what you have said.
- Ask the interpreter to interpret what you say and to let the respondent answer the question. Say, "Please interpret everything I say without adding anything or leaving anything out. Please tell me the answers that [he/she] gives to my questions, and don't answer the questions for [him/her]."

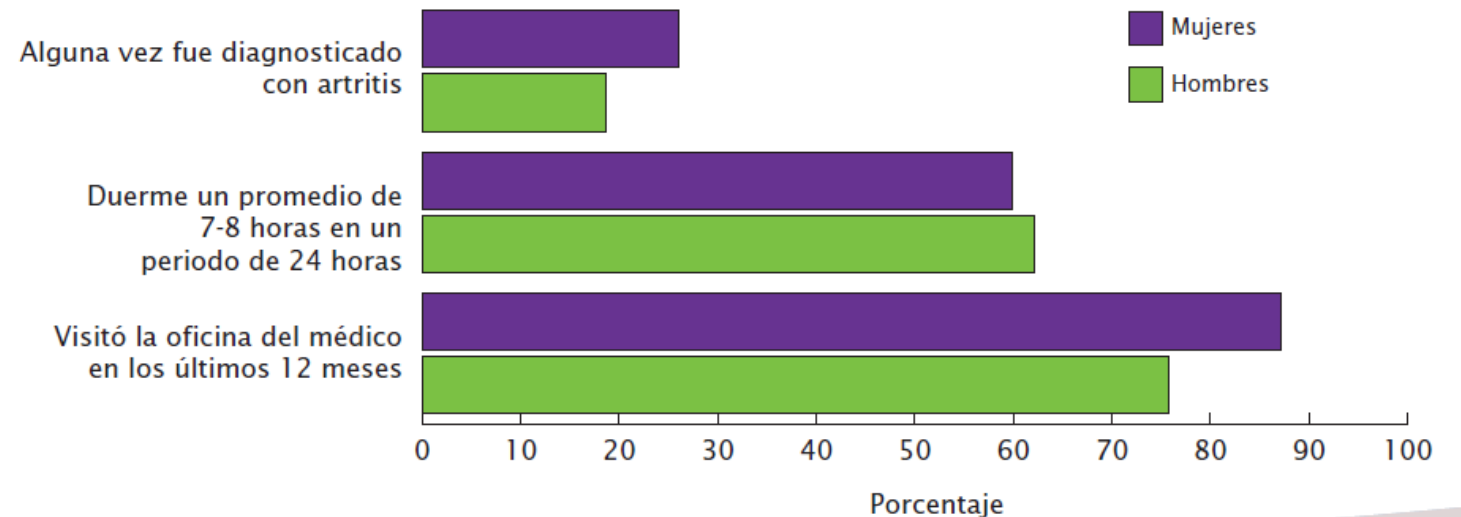
## 2) Developing Training for the NHIS

- Development of the materials was iterative:
  - Conducting focus groups with experienced interviewers to incorporate their tips
  - Training interviewers and then observing them in the field
  - Conducting debriefing focus groups
  - Revising materials based on interviewer feedback
- Paired practice was a key component of the training

# Example of Iterative Research Process

- Cognitive testing uncovered problems with the message “responses are combined to produce statistics”
- Interviewers in focus groups suggested using a “brochure strategy”
- This strategy was incorporated into training
- We observed interviewers using it successfully in the field

**Características de los Adultos Estadounidenses Mayores de 18 Años**



Fuente: Encuesta Nacional de Entrevistas sobre la salud 2014.

*“Census Bureau uses the answers that respondents give to the survey to make charts like this one that show how often men and women are diagnosed with arthritis. Notice that there aren’t any names or addresses. Instead, everyone’s answers have been combined to produce statistics.”*



# 3) 2020 Census Interviewer Training Experiment

- Based on our foundational research, we designed an experimental 30-minute e-learning module for Spanish-speaking interviewers
  - Several paths through practice scenarios (with respondent audio)
  - Time to practice their greeting and introduction
- Sample of interviewers in the US received experimental training (n=360 completed it), control received no additional training (n=1949)
- Quantitative analysis still in progress (response rates, contact attempts, item non-response)

# Focus Group Feedback on 2020 Census Interviewer Training

- Interviewers who received the training seemed more likely to know how to access and to use the official translation
- Interviewers in the control group wanted more training on overcoming respondent concerns on topics like immigration
- Paired practice in Spanish would have been helpful, but couldn't be included due to logistical challenges
- We learned that interviewers in both groups wanted more guidance on helping Spanish-speakers answer the race and ethnicity questions
  - Pointed to a need for training on potential difficulties that speakers of languages other than English may have with specific questions

# Recommended Training for All Interviewers

## **Efficiency**

- Role-playing and practice exercises (ideally in a classroom setting)
- Identifying what language is spoken and using non-English materials to set up the next contact attempt for success

## **Data quality**

- Finding and working with an appropriate interpreter
- When to conduct an interview and when to reassign the case
  - Translation apps/toggling to a language interviewer can't speak
  - Address concerns about how cases “count” for interviewer production rates
  - Reframe appropriately routing cases as a win for the team rather than a loss for the individual

# Recommended Training for Bilingual Interviewers

## Data Quality

- Accessing and reading official translations verbatim
  - How were they developed?
- Practice translating on-the-fly and using glossaries when no official translation is available
- “Nuts and bolts” of administering the survey in the non-English language
  - Reading acronyms (e.g., WIC)/pronouncing technical vocabulary
  - Any language-specific challenges to consider (e.g., mapping education levels onto the US system, name and date formats, etc.)

# Recommended Training for Bilingual Interviewers

## **Increasing Interviewer Efficiency**

- Specific messages for overcoming reluctance in the respondent's language on confidentiality and other topics of interest (e.g., “producing statistics,” immigration status, etc.)
- Similar to English, they need the chance to practice doorstep introduction, FAQs/messages to overcome reluctance, and administering survey questions

# Discussion

- When developing training modules, collaboration with interviewers is essential
- Debrief with interviewers iteratively to understand how training can be improved
- Possibility of adapting training modules across surveys and across languages

# Conclusion

- At Census Bureau, we are increasingly seeing sponsors dedicate time and resources to more accurately surveying non-English speakers
  - facilitates the challenging and important work our interviewers do
  - ensures diverse respondent voices are heard and counted
- Ultimately, developing better training for surveying non-English-speaking households has the potential to increase efficiency and improve data quality

# Questions?

*Special thanks to our sponsors, including the National Center for Health Statistics, the teams who coordinated the 2020 Census evaluations and experiments, and the survey operations teams within Census Bureau.*

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