

ESS Round 11 Translation Guidelines

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Changes compared to the ESS Round 10 Translation Guidelines

Besides some edits and reformulations, highlighted in yellow, there is one major change compared to the ESS Round 10 Translation guidelines:

- **Updates to the section on “UPF Translation Assessment” (formerly SQP Coding)**

The translation checks carried out by the ESS-ERIC team at UPF change in ESS11 and are outlined in section 6.2.

General remark on the ESS Round 11 Translation Guidelines

The ESS Round 11 Translation Guidelines consist of two parts:

[Part A](#) – *ESS Round 11 Translation Strategies and Procedures*, which deals mainly with process-oriented and strategic issues relevant for translating the European Social Survey questionnaire. The goal of this part is to describe the processes that the ESS Translation Team recommends all participating countries to carry out in order to produce their national survey instruments. This part is mainly addressed to National Coordinators and/or the persons responsible for organising the ESS translation steps/project.

[Part B](#) – *ESS Round 11 Practical Translation Guidelines* deals above all with practical aspects of translating the ESS Round 11 questionnaire. The goal here is to list and discuss the most important points to consider from a linguistic and translation-scientific point of view. This part is mainly addressed to the persons who are actually doing the translation, proofreading and reviewing the questionnaire.

Please note that the main text of the part B was divided into two sections:

- (a) General Practical Translation Guidelines
- (b) Questionnaire-Specific Practical Translation Guidelines

Within Part B, the first section is mainly addresses to the persons, who are actually doing the translation, proofreading and reviewing but have no professional experience as a trained translator. The second section addresses person, who are actually doing the translation, proofreading and reviewing but who are not yet familiar with questionnaires as a text type and specifics of questionnaire translation.

In [Appendix 1](#) you can find an overview of the TRAPD as applied in the ESS since round 5.

It is essential that all participating countries adhere to the **ESS Specifications** when translating the ESS source questionnaire into one or more language. Please refer to section 7 of the *“Round 11 Survey Specification for ESS ERIC Member, Observer and Guest Countries”* and read these requirements carefully.

Part A
ESS Round 11 Translation Strategies and Procedures

1 The ESS Round 11 Source Questionnaire

The ESS source questionnaire design is sequential, that is, a source questionnaire is developed and finalised before translation begins and is based primarily on an Ask-the-Same-Question (ASQ) model. This model allows for the most extensive forms of analysis, but makes it both essential that the source questionnaire ‘gets the questions right’ and that the translations maintain the intended measurement properties (Harkness, van de Vijver, Johnson, 2003).

The Round 11 questionnaire design process was informed by the following stages:

- cross-national cognitive interviewing: Austria (German), Hungary (Hungarian), and UK (English);
- ‘two stages of cross-national online survey testing in Lithuania (Lithuanian and Russian) and UK (English)’;
- two-nation pilot study: Austria (German) and UK (English);
- advance translation³ (parallel to or just before pilot study): Switzerland + Italy (Italian), and light advance translations into German and Polish.

In addition, input has been gathered from the National Coordinators and Scientific Advisory Board at different stages of the questionnaire design process.

2 Translation and Assessment Framework and Rationale

Survey translation and survey translation problems are among the most frequently discussed topics in comparative survey research. Nonetheless, it is appropriate question *development* rather than question *translation* that is the real key to comparative measurement. Questions properly developed for the comparative context give us the chance to measure what we intend to measure and to ask respondents what we intend to ask. At the same time, poorly translated questions (or response categories, instructions, show cards, or explanations) can mean that respondents are not, in fact, asked what they should be asked.

The ESS translation team has detailed a structured approach for the project which calls on participating countries to expend effort and funds. Seen against the costs and effort involved in developing and implementing a study such as the ESS, translation costs are relatively low. On the other hand, the cost of inappropriate versions or mistakes in questionnaire translations can be very high. The need to ensure sufficient funding in order to hire good translators is also explained in [section 5](#).

The ESS framework sets out to take the best of available procedures, as proven through extensive experience and research and as documented in the literature. The aim is to combine these into an approach which figures among the most effective and best-tested available.

3 Framework for translation and assessment: TRAPD

TRAPD is an acronym for **T**ranslation, **R**eview, **A**djudication, **P**re-testing and **D**ocumentation, the five interrelated procedures which form the framework for ESS translation and assessment (Harkness, 2003). These cover the basic procedures involved in producing a final translated version of a questionnaire (for a more detailed description of the TRAPD model see, for instance, Harkness, 2003):

³ Further detail on the advance translation method can be found in Dorer (2020) and Dorer (2022).



The ESS translation scheme, which is based on a ‘team approach’ or ‘committee approach’ (see also Behr and Shishido 2016) using TRAPD, has been chosen for the ESS as a deliberate strategy to:

- counteract the subjective nature of translation and text-based translation assessment procedures;
- provide participating countries with a combined approach which is qualitatively better than others (such as the much-cited ‘back translation’ approach) but is not more expensive or more complicated;
- include documentation steps which make adjudication decisions easier, provide information needed for secondary analysis and can be used to inform later translation processes;
- allow considered but parsimonious production of translations which share a language with another country.

All or some of these procedures may need to be repeated at different stages. For example, verification, UPF translation assessment or pre-testing may lead to revisions; these may then call for further adjudication and possibly testing of the revised translations (see also [Appendix 1](#)).

The systematic integration of the TRAPD procedures and a ‘committee approach’ (or ‘team approach’) reflect state-of-the-art procedures in survey questionnaire translation and assessment practice (cf. the dedicated section ‘Team translation’ of the [Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines](#)). At the same time, comparative researchers will be familiar with many of the principles and procedures employed. There is, for example, nothing new or surprising neither about the need to assess translations, nor (at least in some survey fields) about the need to document translations. Several decades of literature on survey translation, moreover, attest the need to pre-test translated questionnaires extensively (see for example de Jong et al., 2018; Harkness, Pennell and Schoua-Glusberg, 2004; Hambleton, 2005; Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998; Levin et al., 2009; Willis et al., 2008).

Why a team and not just a translator?

Using one translator may appear to be cheaper and faster than using several translators, a reviewer and an adjudicator and would also seem to eliminate the need to coordinate teamwork. However, relying on one person to provide a questionnaire translation is problematic, in particular if no team-based assessment is undertaken. A translator working alone and simply ‘handing over’ the finished assignment has no opportunity to discuss and develop alternatives. Regional variance, idiosyncratic interpretations, and inevitable translator blind spots are better handled if several translators are involved and an exchange of versions and views is part of the review process. In addition, survey translations often call for words people say rather than words people write. Group discussion (including input from people with experience in survey implementation) is likely to highlight such problems. Team-based approaches include the translators in the *review* process. Thus the cost of using two translators

to *translate* is offset by their participation in this initial internal assessment step. Since they are familiar with translation problems in the texts, the review is more effective.⁴

Team approaches to survey translation and assessment have been found to provide the richest output in terms of (a) options to choose from for translation and (b) a balanced critique of versions (Guillemin et al., 1993; Acquadro et al., 1996; McKay et al., 1996; Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998; Behr, 2009). The team should bring together the mix of skills and disciplinary expertise needed to decide on optimal versions: Collectively, members of this team must supply knowledge of the study, of questionnaire design, and of fielding processes (Van de Vijver, Hambleton, 1996; Warnecke et al., 1997), and the team is also required to have on the one hand translation expertise, and on the other hand the cultural and linguistic knowledge needed to translate appropriately in the required varieties of the target language (e.g., Acquadro et al., 1996; McKay et al., 1996).

The ESS procedures follow a team approach in which translators and people with survey knowledge work together to produce the translated versions. In the ESS team model, three different sets of people (or actually roles) are involved in producing the final version of a translated questionnaire: *translators, reviewers, and adjudicators*.

- *Translators* should be skilled practitioners, ideally with a degree in Translation Studies or Linguistics and/or having worked as professional translators for many years. In addition they must have received some training on translating questionnaires and some briefing on this particular project. The ESS calls for at least two translators per questionnaire. **The ESS recommends that at least one of the translators is a trained and experienced professional translator.** Translators are to translate *out of English into* their mother tongue. In addition, they should be living in the target country at the moment translating the ESS questionnaire.
- *Reviewers* need to have very good translation skills and must be familiar with questionnaire design principles as well as the study design and topic. One reviewing person with linguistic expertise, experience in translating, and survey knowledge is sufficient. If one person cannot be found with these skills, two could cover the different aspects.
- The *adjudicator* is responsible for the final decisions about which translation options to adopt in case the translators and reviewers cannot make this decision on their own. Preferably this should happen in co-operation with the reviewer(s) *and* translators, but at least after discussion with a reviewer.

Adjudicators must

- a) understand the research subject;
- b) know about the survey design, and
- c) be proficient in the languages involved.

In the ESS context, the adjudicator may often be the National Coordinator or someone of senior standing who works closely with the National Coordinator. The roles of adjudicator and reviewer may also be fulfilled by the same person (“reviewer-cum-adjudicator”).

Team Application of TRAPD

T in TRAPD

There are two main ways to organise the translation work in a team translation model. Either the

⁴ The team approach is also in line with the so-called ‘four eyes principle’ requiring that every translation is double-checked by a second equally qualified translator in order to minimise idiosyncrasies in the final translation.

translators each produce a complete version ('parallel translation') or the source text is divided up among the translators and thus each source questionnaire item is only translated by one person ('split translation'). We describe each of these below (for more discussion, see Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998, or Martinez, Marín, and Schoua-Glusberg, 2006).

Parallel translations: Several translators make independent translations of the same questionnaire items. At a review meeting, translators and a reviewer go through all translated questionnaire items discussing versions and agreeing on a final review version. The adjudicator may attend the review process or already act as a reviewer ("reviewer-cum-adjudicator"). Otherwise the version produced through discussion ('review') moves on to adjudication.

Parallel translation is the recommended procedure in the ESS. However, the split approach described below is offered as an option to those countries participating in the ESS that 'share' a language or more than one languages with other participants, since these countries will have the benefit of input from other countries' translations into the same language.

Split translations: *Splitting* a questionnaire between translators can save time and effort, particularly if a questionnaire is long (Schoua-Glusberg, 1992; Martinez, Marín, and Schoua-Glusberg, 2006). At least two translators plus a reviewer and adjudicator (or reviewer-cum-adjudicator) are needed. The translation is divided up between translators in the form of alternating groups of 4 to 5 questions (a questionnaire page). The questionnaire should *not*, for example, be divided into a first half and a second half. By giving each translator material from the same sections, possible translator bias is avoided and translator input is maximised evenly across the material. Each translator translates his/her own questions.

In preparation of a reconciliation meeting, the reviewer proofreads all translated text from all translators. At the 'reconciliation' or 'review' meeting, the translators and the reviewer go through the questionnaire question by question, discussing the reviewer's changes and/or comments, and try to agree on a common version. The adjudicator may attend this review process or already be involved as a reviewer ("reviewer-cum-adjudicator"). Alternatively, the reviewed version moves on to adjudication. The split approach for 'shared languages' applies to the first step of producing the translation in one's own country (see section on [shared languages](#) below).

Care needs to be taken to ensure that consistency is maintained across the translated questionnaire (please refer to [consistency](#) section). This is true for any translation, whether produced in parallel fashion, using a split approach, or even when a translation is produced by just one translator.

Review and Adjudication

RA in TRAPD

The committee approach sometimes merges review and adjudication wholly or in part. This may depend on the expertise of the team or on practical considerations such as time schedules or locations. However, some countries participating in the ESS produce questionnaires in several languages ('multilingual countries'). Thus, the person officially responsible for 'signing off' on a translated questionnaire may in some cases not be personally proficient in that particular language. In such cases, this person may wish to consult in depth with a senior reviewer mastering this language version before deciding on which version to adopt. In this situation, two committee rounds could be useful, one to review, and one to decide whether

the reviewed version will be accepted (adjudication). Translation verification or UPF translation assessment may require additional committee rounds (see [section 6](#)). If several committee rounds *are* carried out, each round needs to include documentation from the previous rounds or from the verification / UPF translation assessment in order to benefit fully from insights already gained. (Please refer to the diagram in [Appendix 1](#)).

The Review meeting

We recommend the *following persons to participate in the Review meeting*: all translators carrying out parallel translations, the reviewer, and if possible the adjudicator. Other participants may be: English native speaker, experts in cognitive pretesting, staff members of the national survey agencies that are experienced with running surveys in the target country, topical experts (for instance on topics such as health, immigration, environmental matters).

Our preference and strongest recommendation is to carry out *in-person Review meetings* because personal interaction is invaluable for achieving the best-possible results.

Only if in-person Review sessions are not at all possible, for instance for budgetary and/or geographic reasons, we recommend remote meetings, e.g. videoconferences.

It is important that **ALL new or modified items are discussed in the national Review meetings**, and not only those where both parallel translations differ, or those the Reviewer and/or Adjudicator wants to discuss in the Review session: it may be that both items are identical, but suboptimal, and this may only turn out in the Review meeting, and this involves a lot of discussion and brainstorming.

In sum, the ESS relies on a *multi-disciplinary and multi-step* translation approach: the idea is to enhance the quality of the final translations by (a) involving players with different qualifications and skills, mainly in linguistics/translation, questionnaire design, survey research, and social sciences, and (b) enabling different translation options to be developed, discussed, and assessed in a series of several steps. This way one can avoid fielding careless translations that have not undergone different quality checks and have not been carefully considered by different actors.

Some recommendations for remote Review meetings:

- Make sure you have technical equipment for all participants that is as simple to use and stable as possible. Skype, adobe connect, Zoom, Microsoft Teams are just some examples of online meeting software tools.
- In most of these software tools, it is possible to share one screen and go through the translations together. This applies to both the excel-based (T)VFF and the online tool TranslationCTRL (TC).
- All participants should test the connection beforehand.
- Clearly define the roles during the meeting: Who is the chair? Who takes notes and documents the discussion?
- As mentioned above, we recommend that at least all translators and the Reviewer – and, if possible, also the Adjudicator – and additional people, if applicable, participate in this discussion.
- As it may be tiring to discuss the translations for many hours over the Internet, it may make sense to split the discussion up into several individual sessions and also to have brief breaks in-between where needed. From our experience, four hours seems to be a maximum duration for an efficient online discussion.
- Make sure that also in this remote setting you allow enough time to discuss ALL new and modified items in the ESS 11 questionnaire. Our rule of thumb says that in a thorough discussion, you can

cover 4-5 items per hour on average.

- Our experience is that online meetings are more tiring than in-person meetings and that efficient remote meeting slots should not last longer than 2-3 hours each, since it may be difficult for the participants to keep their concentration up for more hours. So it will be important to plan enough breaks to make sure all questionnaire items can be covered with everybody capable of concentrating on the Review task.
- Make sure that every participant has equal 'rights', also technically, so that all points and comments are heard and taken onboard.

4 Countries 'Sharing' Languages

A number of ESS countries produce questionnaires in the same language, i.e., they 'share' a language.

The ESS strongly recommends that the national teams sharing a particular language reconcile their translation processes in order to harmonize their final translations into the same language (each of which would be called a 'language version') as much as possible. The different approaches for doing so are listed and explained below.

There are different advantages in harmonizing translations into languages shared across ESS countries as much as possible: shared language discussions may contribute to enhancing the quality of the resulting translations: this step may provide a fresh perspective on translation issues a national team may already have 'struggled' with. In addition, it provides the opportunity for country A to benefit from a neater or better translation made by country B but also suitable for country A. Most importantly, *unnecessary⁵ and potentially harmful* differences in wording can be avoided, and the comparability between questionnaires using a very similar wording in one language will be enhanced. Comparing versions may sometimes lead both country A and country B to modify what they have and arrive at a better (perhaps) common version.

It is also possible that national teams decide they need *different* versions, where the same language is used differently across countries. However, countries should try and follow the 'as close as possible to each other, but as different as necessary' principle. In each case countries will be asked to document changes made as a result of consultation as well as any differences across sharing countries which it is necessary to keep. This should be documented in the [\(Translation and\) Verification Follow-Up Form - \(T\)VFF](#) or in the TranslationCTRL (TC)⁶.

Each country sharing a language with another country is asked to first produce and discuss their own draft national version (T-R-A steps) and then consult with other countries fielding in this language too.

Shared Languages in ESS Round 11⁷:

⁵ An example of an unnecessary difference in wording would be if one country translates "What job do you have?" and the other one as "What is the title of your job?"

⁶ A number of national teams will carry out their questionnaire translation process in the newly developed online platform TranslationCTRL (TC) rather than in the (T)VFF. For these teams, separate instructions on the use of the TC will be provided.

⁷ Note that the list of countries sharing languages will be finalised once Round 11 participation has been confirmed.

Albanian	Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia
Dutch/Flemish:	Belgium, the Netherlands
English:	Iceland, Ireland, Norway, UK
French:	Belgium, France, Switzerland
German:	Austria, Germany, Switzerland
Greek	Cyprus, Greece
Hungarian:	Hungary, Slovakia
Italian:	Italy, Switzerland
Polish:	Iceland, Poland
Russian:	Estonia, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania (and Georgia as a minority language below 5%)
Serbian:	Kosovo, Serbia
Swedish:	Finland, Sweden

The ESS does not follow a deliberate policy to insist that countries sharing a language must use the same wordings. However, it makes very good sense that countries that share languages consult with one another. The UK and Ireland may also wish to consult on country-specific differences and the UK team may need to consider any differences required across the different countries in the UK.

4.1 Shared languages: Specific TRAPD-steps for sharing and comparing questionnaire translations

The classical approach for translating the ESS source questionnaire into a ‘shared language’ is as follows:

- Step 1: Each country follows the TRA steps at national level (see above). We recommend using 2 parallel translations; however, also the “[split translation approach](#)” may be an option. A first Review and Adjudication step are carried out at national level;
- Step 2: The national teams then exchange their translations and arrange for a shared language reconciliation step; the ESS translation team should be informed of the procedure chosen and the different steps should be documented accordingly;
- Step 3: In this reconciliation step, the national teams come together to consult on the translations during an *international in-person reconciliation meeting*. Representatives from all countries involved meet in person in order to discuss all newly translated or modified questions. This international reconciliation meeting has a similar character and structure as the Review meeting at national level: At least one person per country, that is, language version, should participate in this meeting – ideally this would be the NC and/or the person acting as reviewer/adjudicator from each country. This person should be proficient in the language to be harmonised and understand questionnaires. We recommend that at least one translation expert participates in the meeting (e.g. from the host country of the meeting so that there are no further travel expenses). The reconciliation group “harmonise” and remove differences across countries as appropriate and comment on any differences retained. This should be documented in the (T)VFF (in the column called ‘Shared Languages Discussion’) or in the TC. As noted, the ESS does not have a deliberate policy of harmonisation.

The ESS translation team also accepts, if the meetings to harmonise translations into ‘shared languages’ are carried out remotely instead of in-person, although this is not the recommended methodology. Guidance on how to carry out such remote Review meetings is provided above.

Please note: Demographic questions which are country-specific anyway do not need commentary on differences between national versions (e.g. the country-specific education variables).

Step 4: Once the reconciliation steps within the ‘shared languages’ process are completed, the countries document the co-operation process (differences kept and changes made) in the (T)VFF or TC.

Step 5: The translation is then sent to cApStAn for verification (see Translation Verification by cApStAn). Please note that in ESS round 11, not all shared languages will be subject to external verification. cApStAn will be informed of the different arrangements agreed upon between the countries sharing languages and will pay particular attention to this aspect during the verification process. In the case of shared languages, the verification process will include a ‘Central Verification’ for comparing and trying to harmonise the verification interventions for each of the shared language versions. (For details, please consult the ESS Round 11 Verification Instructions, which will be provided as a separate document).

Step 6: The UPF Translation Assessment step may be carried out jointly by the teams sharing one language. Please discuss this with the ESS translation team and the team at UPF.

Step 7: During or after the verification and UPF Translation Assessment process, countries that share languages may need to communicate with each other again in order to discuss their respective verification or UPF Translation Assessment results, before finalising their national questionnaires for the pre-test (see [Appendix 1](#)).

An important premise in this procedure is that countries must have finished their own versions and their first review at national level, leaving enough time to exchange versions with other countries and then review and decide on a version before sending this to the ESS translation team at GESIS and to cApStAn. Good and timely communication between countries sharing languages is crucial. The translation team will be glad to assist wherever possible.

In any case, the method applied for the ‘shared language’ harmonization must be documented – as should be the outcomes of the respective reconciliation approach chosen.

4.2 Alternative approaches for dealing with ‘shared languages’

There may be constellations in which the national teams translating into shared languages have to think about alternative approaches for trying to harmonize their translations. Below we list some of these options.

If none of these approaches is feasible for specific scenarios, please contact the ESS translation team (via [myESS](#)) to discuss and seek alternative steps for your cases.

Alternative for step 3: *Exchange of translated questionnaires via email and discussion via videoconferences, telephone and/or web-based conference.*

In case an in-person reconciliation meeting is not possible to organize due to, for instance, lack of financial resources, as timing, too large geographical distances, or other reasons, it is recommended to organize Reconciliation / Review discussions via videoconferences (or, if needed, telephone and/or web-based conference). In this case, it is important that the countries involved have a thorough discussion on all critical issues and also document the outcomes of their deliberations in the (T)VFF. In the TC, exchanging versions is no longer required because all translated versions are saved in the tool.

Step 7: The UPF Translation Assessment is carried out only for the main national language; so if a shared language is not the main language in an ESS country, they do not need to undergo these UPF translation checks.

4.3 Using a quality-checked and finalised translation from another ESS country

In cases where a translation is needed into a shared language A, and another version of this shared language A has already been finalised (including TRAPD, verification, UPF Translation Assessment) and possibly already fielded at the national level, this finalised and quality-controlled version may be used as 2nd parallel translation in the TRA steps of the new language A version even if this translation has not been actively agreed upon with a second country.

The subsequent steps, starting from verification, are the same as for any other ESS languages.

However, some points need to be considered:

- (a) this option should only be applied in exceptional cases, that is, if the translation schedules are so different from each other that no other reconciliation methods (see above) are possible; in any case, reconciliation methods where all participating countries make a more active contribution to the final translation(s) will be more rewarding for all those participating;
- (b) there must be a thorough review meeting when using the final translation from another country as the second translation in the TRAPD process in your country; if possible, there should be a communication with the country producing this first translation, giving feedback and also asking questions or providing comments in cases of criticism of this translation; like in all review meetings, the participation of both people with linguistic and/or translation expertise and people with survey knowledge is crucial;
- (c) the disadvantage of this option is that the country finalising their translation first is unable to benefit from the opportunity of discussing their translation with experienced native speakers from other countries.

5 Finding and Selecting, Training, and Briefing Translators and Reviewers

NB: Countries fielding the ESS questionnaire in more than one language will need to follow the TRAPD, verification (and shared language harmonisation, if applicable) processes for *all* of their languages. For the UPF Translation Assessment, it is acceptable to only do the coding for the main national language.

They will, therefore, need to find suitable personnel for *all* of their languages. Depending on the degree of multilingualism of the National Coordinator, this person may act as reviewer or adjudicator for more than one language in order to ensure consistency between the different national languages. However, it is crucial that *all* translation teams include people with proficient linguistic knowledge in the target language as well as in English.

Your individual needs determine whether you require one or two translators; however, you will need a reviewer and an adjudicator (or a reviewer-com-adjudicator) for all language versions that you will be producing for your country.

If a National Coordinator is not to be the adjudicator for a given translation, another person of senior standing with the appropriate qualities is required.

In looking for translators, you may also find someone suitable to act as reviewer.

The ESS translation team recommends that at least one of the translators has a background as a **trained and/or professional translator or is a linguist**. Because of their training and professional experience, these people will not only contribute to the team work with their linguistic skills and knowledge on how to carry out translations at a professional level, but they will typically also help avoid errors caused by lack of diligence, for instance, as they will be used to delivering copy-editing or proofreading services (see also section on [Final copy-editing / proofreading / cross-checking](#)).

Depending on the national or regional habits and on the language combinations, professional translators or linguists may be quite expensive. Therefore we recommend **earmarking a sufficiently large budget for the translation process** right from the beginning, to make sure you will be able to hire good translators, reviewers or adjudicators as required.

5.1 Finding and Selecting Translators and Reviewers

The first step is to find potential candidates, the next one is to select from among them. Potential places to look for professional and trained translators are official channels (translation associations and the like); places of translator training, e.g., translation faculties; officially recognized freelance-translator-networks, e.g., PROZ.com, LinkedIn; your own network channels; the ESS translation team network channel; ask other similar studies for recommendations; possibly look also for people within your institution and through other institutions likely to use translators. An ideal candidate is a professional trained translator with a degree in Translation Studies or Languages / Linguistics with many years of experience in translation and a specialisation in survey translation.

If working with a translation agency, it is important to ensure that you can have direct contact with the translators, that you can work with the same translators, if possible, over rounds (if that is what you wish), and that other requirements as described above as an “ideal candidate” for your translation can be met. Using translation agencies will in some cases not be a viable option, since, for example, translators may work long distance and will be unable to attend review meetings. They may also not be allowed by their employers to interact directly with ESS members as ‘clients’ or, indeed, with each other. It may not be likely for translation agencies to accommodate the selection procedures outlined below and they may be more expensive than individual translators. Many fielding agencies may not be able to provide you with translators to fit the ESS model either.

It is useful to have a number of applicants or possible translators. Even if some ESS members feel they have suitable people already, we suggest these people be ‘put to the test’ along with new recruits. In this way, for example, it is easier to decide who might be better suited as a reviewer and who as a translator or which of two translators is stronger for the task at hand.

In all cases – also where, e.g., translations into more than one language are to be produced by one country – translation begins from the English source questionnaire, not from a translated questionnaire (e.g., Catalan from English, not Catalan from Spanish). Thus, in every case, translators are needed who habitually work *from* English *into* their mother tongue.

During the selection procedure, you not only need to consider the above-described criteria for selecting translators and a reviewer, but you also need to inform the candidates at the recruitment stage about the way the work will be organised – please make the team discussion component clear. It is not uncommon that translators might be a little wary at first about the idea of discussing and criticizing their translations. Take the time to explain that teamwork benefits the end product and that people involved in such teams actually enjoy sharing responsibility and can learn from one another.

5.2 Training Translators

If your candidate is a professional trained translator with many years of experience as a translator, albeit not in the field of survey or questionnaire translation, you can still consider him/her to be a good candidate as you can train him/her to become a good questionnaire translator. Training materials can readily be developed from available questionnaire translations; old questionnaires can be used for training and practice. Someone with appropriate language skills, survey know-how and extensive experience in questionnaire translation should be in charge of training procedures. Training can be on a one-to-one basis or in a group.

During a training on questionnaire translation, the main goal should be to provide information on questionnaire-specific practical translation issues: survey-specific features, such as response categories (in terms of, e.g., intervals, labels of categories, length of labels, question beginnings, scale layout, etc.) or annotations in questionnaires, consistency within the questionnaire and within the context of replication modules, sensibility for country- and culture-specific adaptations or the like (for more information please consult section B for [Questionnaire Specific Practical Translation Guidelines](#)).

For training purposes, translators may be asked to identify problems in question formulations in English, to provide translations, to comment on pre-existing translations (translations already fielded or fake ones), to correct translations, to compare versions with other versions, to make questions more suitable for a specified target population; or you may ask them to explain what an item is actually asking about, and so forth. The ESS training should equally require familiarisation with the annotated source questionnaire and with the processes required within the TRAPD scheme.

Given the scarcity of training opportunities for survey translation, it is common for translators not to have been trained to translate questionnaires adequately. Thus, in many cases, proven translating skills will be more important than survey translation experience.

Please make sure to make these Translation Guidelines available to all members of your national translation team(s). In addition, on the ESS Intranet, there are some instructive films on questionnaire translation topics available. Please share these materials with all team members.

If you require more ideas on how to train – or also brief (see below) – your translation team members, please get in touch with the ESS translation team at GESIS.

5.3 Briefing Translators: Task Specifications and Support Materials

Equipping translators properly for the task helps them perform better. Translators need to be briefed about the specific project they are working on, in our case, the ESS Round 11 questionnaire. In addition, they need to understand the function of target and source text to see the best possible translation

options. What they produce as a translation depends not only on their ability and training but on the quality of the material they are asked to translate and on the task specifications they receive.

If not given job specifications, translators mentally decide their own, since they cannot translate in a vacuum. Task specifications must indicate the intended audience, level of literacy and tone of text (e.g., official or more casual tone), the function of the text (e.g., a questionnaire for fielding or an explanatory translation to describe the content of a questionnaire), and the degree of freedom permitted in translation. Translators need to be informed of how close or free the translation is required to be. **Since the ESS follows an Ask-the-Same-Question model, translators are not expected to adapt content. If in exceptional cases adaptation is required, these must be discussed with the ESS translation team and with ESS ERIC HQ** (for '[Adaptations](#)' see also Part B). Translators should be encouraged to produce questions that do not sound like translations and to use vocabulary that can be understood by less well-educated respondents as well as the better educated.

Translators informed about the measurement components of questions and trained to be sensitive to design requirements as well as target audience requirements are in an optimal position to produce good versions. They are also more likely to be able to point out when a requirement cannot be met and to recognise problems. It is thus strongly recommended that translators are given project-specific support materials, example texts, and the information relevant for their part in producing instruments. The format of the annotated ESS questionnaire and the documentation required are likely to be new to many translators and this should be covered in the briefing.

You should identify and explain each of the various components in the questionnaires (e.g., question introductions, bridging texts, survey questions, instructions, routing, answer categories, or interviewer instructions, where applicable). Clarify with them which segments of the text are for interviewers and which for respondents and indicate the mode intended for different materials.

Any translated components (e.g., instructions, answer scales, replicated questions) used in earlier ESS rounds that are to be repeated in an upcoming round should be clearly marked in what is given to the translators. Giving translators the entire document provides context, and is preferable to deleting parts of the questionnaire that do not require translation. If appropriate, translators can also harmonise new translations with existing translations, that is, keep new translations consistent with existing translations covering related material. **In Round 11, this will be particularly relevant for the rotating module on "Social inequalities in health and their determinants", many questions from which were already translated and fielded in Round 7 in those countries that participated in Round 7.**

The ESS translation team will offer a general training webinar on ESS questionnaire translation processes at the beginning of ESS11.

5.4 Check your Choice of Translators

Even once translators have been appointed, decisions sometimes need to be reversed. In case you work with a new translator, we recommend that the first 10 percent of the first assignment should be delivered for monitoring *as soon as completed*. It is unlikely that *serious deficiencies in a translator's skills* can be remedied by pointing out or discussing problems. If the translation quality is not already

reasonable, it is probably better to start again with a new translator. Reviewing output early also allows you to tell translators about aspects you wish them to treat differently.

Remember that an individual translation is only the first step in a team approach. You can expect to have many of the draft translations improved in the review discussion. This is why the team also needs to consist of good team players. Someone who does not function well in the team context weakens the outcome of the review session(s).

6 Translation Quality Checks in ESS Round 11

Since ESS Round 5, two features have been applied in order to check the quality of the questionnaire translations produced by the national teams. These two elements will be applied once the national teams have finalised their TRA steps (and, in the case of shared languages, after completion of the entire reconciliation process), and before pre-testing the survey instruments (cf. [Appendix 1](#)).

First, the final versions produced by the national teams (after having completed the ‘TRA’ steps and, in the case of shared languages, after completion of the entire reconciliation process) will be sent to cApStAn for translation verification (see below).

Second, once the entire translation verification by cApStAn has been completed, including any feedback loops and discussion between the national team, cApStAn, and the Core Scientific Team (CST), the NCs will use this version to carry out UPF translation assessment ([see below](#)). Pre-testing should then be conducted on the version that is produced following any changes made during the [UPF translation assessment](#).

NB: These additional quality checks are meant to improve and help finalize translations. However, translation teams are still expected to deliver the highest possible quality right from the beginning, that is, in the TRA steps.

6.1 Translation Verification by cApStAn

In ESS Round 11, the translations of most of the participating language versions will undergo a linguistic quality control by an external provider – cApStAn⁸, with a sample of new or modified items from Round 11 to be verified.

The role of the verifiers will be to:

- ensure linguistic correctness and cross-country equivalence of the different language versions of the ESS instruments;
- check compliance with the translation annotations provided in the source questionnaire;
- achieve the best possible balance between faithfulness and fluency; and
- document interventions in a useful way for both the countries and the Core Scientific Team (CST).

The verification process will be documented in the “(Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form – (T)VFF” or in the TranslationCTRL (TC). The verifier’s interventions will be defined by (a) Verifier Intervention

⁸ cApStAn is an external provider, specialising in developing linguistic quality assurance and linguistic quality control systems for use in multilingual, multinational, and multicultural surveys. The company has been involved in many other important international surveys since 2000, amongst others PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, PIAAC and SHARE. The first verification of translations of the ESS source questionnaire by cApStAn was carried out in ESS 5.

Categories (verifiers will use cApStAn’s predetermined set of Verifier Intervention Categories, amended for the ESS’s purposes), and (b) be supported by a Verifier’s Rationale (the Verifier’s Rationale will provide brief explanation of the reasons behind the suggestion for change).

The ESS translation team at GESIS and colleagues at ESS ERIC HQ will provide, in cooperation with cApStAn, ESS Round 11 Verification Instructions, that is, a document containing verification instructions, detailing the role of the National Coordinators in the verification process, and providing guidance on how to use the “(Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form – (T)VFF”.

This (T)VFF can be used as a translation template for the entire ESS Round 11 questionnaire. As in the previous ESS rounds, it is not mandatory to submit translations in this Excel file; instead, NCs can simply submit their translations in MS word. However, for countries that wish to work with translation templates, the Excel file will contain the entire ESS Round 11 source questionnaire, that is, also repeated source text. We strongly recommend to use the (T)VFF for the whole translation process, including the TRA, verification and UPF-translation-assessment steps, because this facilitates documentation of the entire translation history.

The National Coordinators will need to set aside about 3-4 weeks for the **verification** work between submitting their translations for verification and the start of the UPF translation assessment (see [below](#)). This should be about 4-6 weeks in the case of shared languages (having finalised all steps, including any shared language steps, and the final review-adjudication process). This includes any communication which will take place between cApStAn, the Core Scientific Team (CST), and the national teams, i.e. in most cases with the National Coordinators.

Please inform the ESS translation team and cApStAn as early as possible of the date you plan to submit your national translation(s) for verification.

!! cApStAn needs to be alerted at least three weeks in advance of this date in order to guarantee the required preparations !!

To inform the ESS translation team at GESIS on your verification schedule, please contact the translation team (via myESS) or fill in the planned submission date in the ESS11 Fieldwork Questionnaire, question number 10.

The final decision on the implementation of cApStAn’s comments lies with the national teams. cApStAn’s comments are not binding but should be considered as an additional means of improving the individual translations and the overall comparability of data throughout the ESS.

The Verification Instructions document will be made available **via the Round 11 NC intranet**.

6.2 UPF Translation Assessment

In ESS Round 11, UPF will perform a number of targeted checks on specifically error-prone aspects of various items. The following aspects have been identified to be especially error-prone in the past rounds and we will, therefore, focus on them in our translation checks in Round 11:

- Consistency of translations with previous rounds
- Consistency of translations within the Round 11 questionnaire

- Proper implementation of questionnaire alerts
- Proper implementation of the MTMM experiment and randomisation(s)
- Proper implementation of showcard design/layout
- Proper implementation of interviewer instructions
- Proper implementation of question batteries
- Proper implementation of check-all-that-apply questions
- Proper implementation of annotations (that do not fall into the above categories)
- Possibly other error-prone aspects identified in source questionnaire

The UPF translation assessment must take place after the completion of the translation verification by cApStAn and before the national pre-test. The foreseen process is as follows:

Step 1: The national team uploads the post-verification version of the showcards to the Documents space on the myESS portal. For those teams not using TranslationCTRL (TC) for their translations, they upload both the questionnaire and the showcards there. For the teams doing their translation in TranslationCTRL (TC), they need to move their (post-verification) translation to the step “UPF Translation Assessment” in TC. Post-verification versions are those where the entire verification process has been completed (and of course all the preceding steps: translation, review, adjudication, and shared languages harmonisation), that is, all decisions regarding verification interventions have been incorporated.

Step 2: The team at UPF conducts all foreseen checks based on the question texts in TranslationCTRL / the uploaded questionnaires as well as the uploaded showcards.

Step 3: The national team receives feedback from UPF about potentially detected errors in the target questionnaire and showcards. This feedback will likely also contain questions and requests for clarification. The communication shall take place in the TranslationCTRL tool (UPF Translation Assessment step) for the teams using TC – and in myESS for the teams not using TC.

Step 4: The national team reacts to the UPF feedback by engaging in discussion with the UPF team where relevant.

Step 5: The national team implements suggested corrections in TranslationCTRL / the documents on myESS (depending on outcomes of discussions with the UPF team, where relevant).

Step 6: When there are no pending issues anymore, the team at UPF informs the national team that the UPF Translation Assessment step is signed off.

7 Changes of Existing Translations in the Core and in Repeated Rotating Modules

The following paragraphs deal with changes made by the national teams to existing translations where *no changes* have been made to English source items.

Countries that have participated in previous rounds of the ESS should note that changes to existing translations of core or repeated rotating module items should only be implemented *after approval* from the translation team at GESIS and ESS ERIC HQ. Details of any changes must also be recorded in the “Changes to existing translations” column in the (T)VFF or in the TC tool.

For the sake of the time series and the unknown impact of changes, countries are explicitly advised against tinkering with their translation. Only real mistakes in previous translations should be corrected after CST approval and subsequently documented in the (T)VFF or TC. Countries must argue a case for any change they want to implement. If possible, countries that wish to change existing translations should provide some evidence of the benefit of this change. This evidence could take the form of a result from a pre-test or some other test result.⁹ The evidence provided will facilitate the decision-making process for ESS ERIC HQ and GESIS on the acceptability of a change. We want to cite Weisberg here (2005, p. 112):

Sometimes a researcher realizes that a question has not been worded perfectly but it is still useful, such as when it is decided that it is better to maintain old question wording so that time trends can be analysed, even if some alternations could lead to a better question.

Special case time-related changes

Words and their use may change over time. This change may, for instance, be triggered by altered social conditions or the introduction of politically correct language. Example from the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) – “Gastarbeiter” (Porst, Jers, 2007): A word that in the past was used for “immigrants” can now not be used any more in Germany since the immigrant flow has changed in its composition, qualifications, and countries of origins. Awareness of needed change over time should lead to regularly reviewing core translations and adapting them where necessary.

Spelling mistakes and typos can be adjusted at any time without approval from the translation team at GESIS; but please inform the ESS translation team at GESIS of any such correction. Also these changes need to be documented in the (T)VFF or TC.

A guidance note on ‘Making changes to existing translations of core questionnaire or repeated rotating module items: Guidance for NCs’ is intended to help NCs see which changes would probably be accepted and not, please refer to the separate guidance document on “Changes to existing translations”.

8 Documentation of Translation Process and Outcome

Translation and review decisions need to be documented in the ESS for four main reasons.

- *First*, those reviewing and adjudicating need notes on options discarded or problems noted in order to decide better on the ‘final’ choices.
- *Second*, the ESS is an ongoing biennial survey. Documentation of problems helps inform later versions of the study. In addition, if changes are made over time, records need to be available of the chain of changes (or their absence) across translations.
- *Third*, secondary analysts can benefit from records of unavoidable differences or adaptations and from notes on mistakes found after a questionnaire was fielded.
- *Fourth*, countries sharing languages need to indicate, for example, where they do differ in formulation. New members joining in the future that share languages with countries already involved will also benefit from this documentation.

⁹ This is not a strict requirement, but a recommendation for streamlining the decision process – especially in difficult cases.

8.1 Documentation Requirements

Documentation throughout the entire process

It is recommended that translators note down – while doing the translation – problems, alternatives, uncertainties or any other thoughts they wish to share with reviewers and/or adjudicators. The (Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form - (T)VFF allows translators to make this documentation *while* doing the translation.

In ESS 11, although it is not mandatory to use the (T)VFF for the translation process, we recommend that national teams use this Excel form as far as possible for their documentation purposes as the structure already contains columns for all potentially relevant issues, such as shared languages, changes to existing translations or any comments arising while translating.

Documentation of final decisions should be made in the following cases:

Documentation in the “Comments on Final National Version” column in the (Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form - (T)VFF

Required: Cultural adaptations (*require approval from the ESS translation team at GESIS*)¹⁰

Example: We do not have badges/stickers as political symbols in your country, but we would rather use flags or scarves; therefore, we have to change these symbols.

Required: Deviations in scale translations (symmetry vs. asymmetrical, change in semantics; bipolar scale becoming a unipolar scale, additional show card; different scales where the English source uses one scale)

Example I: We cannot keep the symmetry from the source text. We cannot say “extremely good” and “extremely bad”; for linguistic reasons we have to say “completely good” and “extremely bad” (that is, ‘completely’ instead of ‘extremely’).

Example II: “extremely good – extremely bad” - additional show card needed for item battery. Three items require masculine ending of good and bad, one item requires feminine ending of good and bad. Combining both masculine and feminine ending on one show card would be awkward for respondents.

Example III: For linguistic reasons, it is very difficult for us to distinguish between ‘extremely/ completely’ and ‘very’ in the answer scales.

Advised: If certain terms or phrases were particularly difficult to translate, please briefly note this down in the (T)VFF.

Advised: Translations that, at first sight, seem to be a deviation, but which have been chosen on

¹⁰ For [Adaptations](#), see Part B.

purpose.

Example I: Replacement of “race” by “skin colour” – for historical reasons we cannot use “race” in our questionnaire.

Example II: “How likely is it that during the next 12 months you will have to spend less time in paid work than you would like, because you have to take care of family members or relatives?” (D48, ESS Round 4): We have translated “family members or relatives” with one word. We do not have different words for this.

Example III: “We need to be more explicit than the source questionnaire because we need to decide on the masculine or feminine gender in the target language or use both genders where the English language can be gender-neutral.”

Advised: If “if any” or “if at all” cannot be translated without producing an awkward target text, this omission should be documented.

Advised: *Although this should have been ironed out in the questionnaire development stage:* Reasoned concerns about the validity and reliability of the question, if translated following the ASQ approach, in your national context.

9 Pre-testing

Please refer to the “[ESS Pre-testing Guidelines](#)” for further details on pre-tests that must be conducted in each country prior to the start of fieldwork.

10 Using the Translation Annotations – from a process-oriented point of view¹¹

Annotations on source questionnaires provide information which allows ESS translators, reviewers, and adjudicators to focus on what is meant in survey measurement terms in order to do a better job. In some cultures, to stay with the example for interviewers above, ‘household’ might be automatically associated with ‘home’ and hence ‘family’. If the annotation notes point out that the focus is on a dwelling unit (however variously defined via ‘shared cooking pot’ or ‘shared finances’, etc.) the intended and necessary focus becomes clear to the translator. At the same time, a number of ESS questions use idiomatic expressions. We have added notes to help clarify the intended sense where we felt this was necessary.

Participating countries are explicitly invited to point out in advance where they would like clarification notes. In Round 11, some of the annotations have been formulated as a consequence of translation difficulties that arose when translating items for pre-testing in a number of ESS countries as well as of *advance translations* carried out before finalising the ESS Round 11 source questionnaire.

¹¹ For a practical point of view on [Annotations](#), see section 29 in Part B.

Participating countries are encouraged to contact the ESS translation team at GESIS with any questions or problems during translation.

Please note: Annotations should NOT be translated! They are there to support the translation process, but should NOT appear in national questionnaires as footnotes!

11 Workflow and Deliverables for Translation

In order to organise the entire translation and verification process in ESS Round 11 and for documentation purposes, National Coordinators are asked to carry out the following steps and to send the material requested below.

!! Please note that in ESS Round 11, any communication between the national teams, the ESS translation team and cApStAn should be carried out in the online communication platform myESS and not via email. Email should only be used as a backup in case of serious technical problems with the online platform !!

NCs are required to:

- inform the translation team at GESIS about all languages that the survey will be fielded in (this information is to be provided in the Fieldwork Questionnaire);
- provide information on the national translation team(s) (this information is to be provided before the translations start);
- provide information on the translation and verification time schedule (this information is to be provided in the Fieldwork Questionnaire and via myESS; cApStAn needs to be informed at least three weeks in advance before launching the verification process);
- provide information whether the translation(s) will be submitted to cApStAn for verification in the form of an overwritten questionnaire in Word or in the Excel translation template called “(Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form - (T)VFF”. This information should be sent to the translation team at GESIS and to cApStAn via myESS; the two options of submitting national translations for verification will be described in more detail in the ESS Round 11 Verification Instructions;
- send their pre-final translation(s) of the questionnaire, after having completed the TRA steps at national level (including any shared language efforts, if applicable) (so-called “final pre-verification version”) to the ESS translation team via myESS (using the Documents feature); the ESS translation team will forward this version to cApStAn for translation verification;
- send the translated items earmarked to UPF for the UPF translation assessment via myESS (using the Documents feature) once the translation verification is completed: the ESS translation team will liaise between the national teams and the team at UPF after delivery of the verified translations from cApStAn;
- provide documentation of national versions and translation discussions in the (T)VFF and send to the ESS translation team at GESIS via myESS. Please remember that all steps need to be documented, that is, the whole TRAPD process + verification + UPF translation assessment;

- provide documentation of national versions and discussions with countries sharing a language (ideally covered in the (T)VFF and sent to the ESS translation team at GESIS via myESS);
- provide documentation of changes made to existing translations (after having agreed on these changes with the translation team at GESIS and the team at ESS ERIC HQ), that is, of items from the core modules or repeated items from rotating modules in the (T)VFF and send to the ESS translation team at GESIS via myESS.
- send the entire documentation of their translation process(es) to the ESS translation team at GESIS via myESS.
- upload the final versions of the translated questionnaires and showcards to myESS (using the Documents feature); this information should be provided after completion of the whole translation process (TRAPD + verification + UPF-translation-assessment).

Part B

ESS Round 11 Practical Translation Guidelines¹²

¹² The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dorothée Behr at GESIS, Mannheim, who set up a first draft of this Part B in ESS 5.

Part B is divided into two sections:

(a) **a more general part** – including aspects that are of general relevance for any translation. Trained / professional / experienced translators are familiar with this kind of general requirements to achieve a high-quality translation also for other text types;

(b) the second section focuses on **questionnaire-specific translation issues** and thus is important also for professional / trained translators who are not yet familiar with questionnaires as a text type and specifics of questionnaire translation.

General Practical Translation Guidelines

12 Introduction

This Part B presents some practical guidelines for questionnaire translation in the *European Social Survey* (ESS) as part of the TRAPD procedures.

Please be aware that in practice – depending on language and culture – not every recommendation can always be implemented. Furthermore, sometimes following one recommendation may mean acting against another. And so please see these Practical Translation Guidelines as recommendations rather than rules that *must* be followed at all times.

Please also bear in mind that some of the points mentioned are issues that professional and experienced translators would consider in their work anyway. However, since national teams have differing levels of experience and for reasons of completeness, we still want to list them all here. At the same time, developments in questionnaire translation research may lead to revisions of these practical guidelines over time, especially in light of research on the central issue of closeness to the source text vs. freedom in translation (cf. Harkness et al., 2010; Kleiner, Pan, Bouic, 2009).

What is the overall goal in comparative survey research? Following Harkness (2008, p. 59) we can state: “... In comparative research, data must be valid and reliable for the given context but must also be comparable across contexts. ...”

The following guidelines outline what these requirements mean for translation – following current expectations on what questionnaire translation within the *Ask the Same Question* approach should involve.

Unless stated otherwise, all the examples in this document are drawn from the ESS itself.

Ultimately the aim of the translation is to replicate the stimulus provided in the source language and culture in the target language and culture. This means therefore that **even weaknesses in a source question need to be translated equivalently into the target questionnaire** especially in a survey like the ESS where the main aim is cross-national comparability. The translators are therefore charged with translation rather than questionnaire design itself.

In general, what we strive for in the ESS translation activities is not word-for-word or literal translation but translations that are *functionally equivalent* to the source text, i.e. translating its *meaning*.

In general: Any query or comment to the translation team should be sent to the ESS translation team via myESS !

13 Translating meaning

As noted in Part A, the ESS uses an *Ask the Same Question (ASQ) Approach*. In an *Ask the Same Question Approach*, where the same questions are asked in each country and where this “sameness” is reached through translation of a source questionnaire, retention of meaning and scope is crucial as is retention of form. However, misunderstanding the concept of “retention of meaning and scope” or of “close translation”, as it is sometimes called, may lead to inadequate translation. Some people may feel that the closer the translation is to the source text in terms of its surface or formal structure, the better the meaning is conveyed. However, languages differ in their structure, in their grammar, in the lexis and thus often a literal translation is not possible (see also Harkness et al. (2010) on different classifications of translation). This applies especially to languages and cultures that are quite distant from the English language, the source language of the ESS.

Translation involves understanding the meaning of the source text and conveying this meaning in the target language *with the means of the target language*. Some examples shall clarify this task.

Example 1 (ESS Round 6, core item C2):

Using this card, how often do you meet socially* with friends, relatives or work colleagues?

* “Meet socially” implies meet by choice rather than for reasons of either work or pure duty.

In this example “Meeting socially” was difficult to render in many languages. Most often a literal translation that conveys the same meaning as in British English was not possible. In order to convey the intended meaning (also described in the annotation), some countries rendered the question as “How often do you meet friends, relatives or colleagues outside of your work time?” or as “How often do you meet friends, relatives or colleagues on a private basis?” “Meet” was supplemented by, e.g., “outside work” or “on a private basis” in order to convey the intended meaning. The annotation possibly has aided translation by offering synonyms.

Kußmaul (2007) suggests that a direct or literal translation of “meet socially” into the German language could even invoke formal events such as a reception, a ball, a speech, etc. and would thus not be in line with the concept under investigation.

Example 2 (ESS Round 4, item D44):

Employees often pretend they are sick in order to stay at home.

In [example 2](#) from the rotating module on Welfare fielded in Round 4, one country needed to use two words in order to translate “employees” (employees and workers) since a one-word literal translation for “employees” in their language would convey only employees engaged with administrative tasks. The British English word ‘employees’ covers all those who work for any employer regardless of the type of work they do. Brief documentation may be useful to make it clear to data users and researchers why this addition was needed. This could, for instance, be documented by including a comment in the

(T)VFF. However, whenever decisions such as these are made, careful consideration should equally be given to the issue of respondent burden, question length, and double-barrelled items. This holistic view should in each case ensure that well-considered decisions are made.

These examples show what good translation is: **Ask yourself ‘What does it mean in the British English source questionnaire?’ and then put this understanding into words in your own, that is, the target language.** Produce translations that do not reduce or expand the scope of information to the extent that the meaning or the concept of the original source question is no longer kept. However, ensuring a fully equivalent translation may sometimes turn out to be impossible, in particular if two languages do not have terms that match semantically or even equivalent concepts. In these cases, the best possible approximation should be striven for and the lack of ‘full’ equivalence noted.

If you come across interpretation problems that your team cannot solve, please contact the translation team at GESIS. Your query may reveal ambiguities that should be clarified for all countries and, therefore, your queries can be of help to others as well. In the same context, it is paramount that countries follow the **translation queries document** and its regular updates. This will be made available on the ESS Round 11 Intranet.

Finally, we would like to stress that the translation should always target the same “object” as the source questionnaire. So for example, if a question asks about the respondent themselves the translation should also focus on the respondent themselves (rather than someone else). If this “object” differs between the source text and translation, this may lead to artefacts in the data that make comparison impossible.

Example 3 (ESS Round 6, core item C6):

How safe do you – or would you – feel walking alone in this area* after dark? Do – or would – you feel...

*respondent’s local area or neighbourhood.

This question addresses the respondent personally (“you”). The item is thus about the respondent’s own feelings and not about others’ feelings. A country translated this item in a very general way, that is, ‘How safe is this neighbourhood after dark, walking alone?’ The data may thus not be comparable if general vs. individual perceptions differ.

In this context, some more details on **“you”** and its different meanings are apt. ‘You’ can mean: (1) the respondent personally (singular); (2) the respondent and any other people (plural); (3) ‘you’ in the sense of general statements, without referring to specific individuals. ‘You’ needs to be correctly interpreted in a given context and questions and then correctly conveyed in the target language, which may often be a more explicit rendering than in the source text. In case of doubt, countries are advised to check with the ESS translation team.

14 Connotations

Be aware that words carry connotations, i.e. associations implied by a word in addition to its referential meaning. These connotations may then lead to unintended reactions on the part of the respondents, that is, to bias. This may apply, for instance, to translations of “race”. Another example is presented below:

Example 4: In the European Values Study (EVS), the Spanish scores for an item which measured loyalty deviated from the overall pattern of results for Spain. Upon examination it appeared that, unlike in other languages, the Spanish word for loyalty that was used in the translation had the connotation of “sexual faithfulness” (Van de Vijver, Poortinga, 2005).

Please be careful that the translations used do not convey any ambiguous / unintended connotations that would distort the results.

15 Ambiguity

Related to the above topic we now address ambiguity. Be careful to not introduce *unintended ambiguity* during the translation process. If, for example, the source text asks how often the respondent ‘attends sporting events as a spectator’ and the translation provides a formulation that can equally well be understood as directly participating in sport activities themselves, then this translation option should be discarded. Clarity on the concept required from the item will be useful in making final decisions.

Ambiguity can also result from *syntactical* ambiguity. Syntactical ambiguity can arise when respondents do not know which part of the question goes with which part. These links should always be made explicit to the respondent:

Example 5:

Should “I really dislike answering machines” be understood as “I dislike answering” or as “I dislike the machines”? (Harkness, Pennell, Schoua-Glusberg, 2004, p. 456)

(Cf. also the translation of ‘you’ presented in [Example 3](#) Section 13 above.) In case of doubt, please refer to the ESS translation team.

16 Gender

Gender is an aspect that differs between many of the ESS languages and therefore often causes problems when translating the ESS survey instrument.

Gender issues can have different forms:

(a) Your language may require masculine and feminine versions of certain adjectives, nouns, etc. (Harkness, 2003; Harkness et al., 2004) where the English language is gender-neutral.

Example 6 (ESS Round 6, core item B20):

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?

In this example, some languages may require both masculine and feminine versions for “satisfied”, e.g. in French *satisfait* and *satisfaite*. It would be good to clarify in advance how this gender issue should be dealt with in your country so that translators can accommodate the specified requirements when doing the first draft translations. If you like to discuss this, please refer to the ESS translation team.

Some countries need to decide, in many instances, whether to mention both, masculine and feminine forms, in order to be politically correct or to only use one of these forms. In this regard, we would recommend the national teams to follow the line that is best accepted in the respective country – and, as far as possible, to stick to this line consistently across the entire questionnaire. However, our aim is not to exclude one of the genders but we also want to avoid making a question too complicated or too difficult to ask by each time repeating both genders. In case of doubt, please refer to the ESS translation team.

(b) Gender can also become an issue in other cases, as the following substantive example demonstrates:

Example 7 (ESS Round 4, item D32):

Using this card, please tell me whether you think doctors and nurses in [country] give special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally?

In example 7, “doctors” covers all doctors regardless of their sex and “nurses” covers all nurses who care for the sick or the infirm, regardless of their sex. In some languages and translations, the masculine form of “doctors” and “nurses” can be used to refer to both men and women because it can be used in a generic way. In other languages, one may need to find paraphrases in order to avoid making this item a gender-specific item: for example, “nursing staff members” could be used as a translation for “nurses”. However, care should always be taken to cover the intended meaning as succinctly as possible so that questions do not become too long.

(c) Similar issues also need to be taken into account when asking questions about the respondent’s partner. In British English the word ‘partner’ could refer to a partner – married or unmarried – of the opposite or the same sex. However, in some languages both feminine and masculine partners may need to be explicitly referred to in order to allow for all possibilities, e.g. in German or in Polish (cf. [Example 8](#)).

Example 8 (SHARE):

Generic English Questionnaire: “Now I would like to ask you about any partners you may have had who you have not lived with. Have you ever been in a long term relationship that was important to you, where your partner lived at a different address from you for most of the time?”

cApStAn verifier’s comment: “National version excludes (from the point of view of grammar) possibility of man having a male partner or a woman having a female partner.”

17 Omissions

In your translations, do not omit (or change) any words or phrases that provide temporal, spatial or any other type of framework within which the respondent is requested to position their answer (e.g. *last week; in general; on average; all things considered; mainly; about as in ‘about how many’, etc.*). Omitting words or phrases of this kind would mean that the mental calculations from respondents in your country are not comparable to those elsewhere which in turn might compromise data quality.

Example 9 (ESS Round 6, item A1):

On an average weekday, how much time, in total, do you spend watching television?

As to [example 9](#), if “average” was omitted, an important part of measurement would be lost; respondents might think of their most recent experience rather than taking into account their usual TV watching habits.

Example 10 (ESS Round 6, item F31):

What does/did the firm/organisation you work/worked for mainly make or do?

In [example 10](#), if a country omitted “mainly” that would mean that the respondent’s answer in target culture x would not be as focused to the primary tasks or functions of the firm as in countries where this was included. The respondent may say: “Well, there are many things to say. Which one should I list?” Or they might end up mentioning only one of the rarer functions and miss the main ones entirely.

It is also important not to omit interviewer / respondent instructions or any definitions provided to the respondent. For example, an interviewer instruction such as “CODE ALL THAT APPLY” indicates that several answers are possible. Without such an instruction, interviewers in some countries may believe that only one answer is possible and prevent the respondent from volunteering several answers. This would then compromise comparability between countries with different rules being applied.

Being unsure of the meaning of certain words or phrases should not result in omitting them, i.e. in not translating them. At the same time, please be aware that **not every single word needs to be translated literally as in a word-for-word version**. In case of doubt, please always double-check with the translation team at GESIS!

18 Additions

In general, please do not insert any additional text to the questions, response categories or instructions that is not already part of the source text.

Example 11 (ESS Round 6, item C14):

Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?

In [example 11](#), “weddings” and “funerals” are those instances that are meant to be translated. Although done by one or more countries in the past, “christenings” should normally not be added. If any changes of this sort (replacement, exchange, addition, etc.) are envisaged, this should be put to the translation team at GESIS and ESS ERIC HQ for further consideration and approval.

Example 12 (ESS Round 6, item F41):

Using this card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources?

In [example 12](#), one country added a list of examples to be included in this amount. Their translation reads as follows: “...This refers to the sum that results from wages, salaries, income from self-employment, retirement or pension, in each case after deducting taxes and social security and health-insurance contributions. Please also count income from rent and leasing, investments and income such as child benefit, housing benefit, social assistance and other income.”

Adding **examples** in your translations where there are no examples in the English source questionnaire

needs to be avoided because it changes the stimulus of the question, tends to have a quite big impact on the respondents, and may thereby harm the comparability of the corresponding data.

Please do not add or omit answer categories. This also applies to different types of item non-response categories: E.g., when the English source text only uses the “Don’t know” category, do not add “refuse” or “no answer” categories to your questionnaire. In fact, in the past, different approaches from countries on the number of item-non-response categories added have made research into item non-response quite difficult. Also please do not add answer categories. For example, you may feel that adding ‘farmer’ to an occupational answer list is necessary. But if this is only added in one country but not elsewhere this would be problematic.

If you feel that some unavoidable additions should be made to a translation, please raise this with the ESS translation team.

In some cases, additions may be made for reasons of cultural adaptations. For more information on this topic, see section on [‘Adaptations.’](#)

19 Conjunctions

Conjunctions join together elements of thought, such as words, phrases or sentences. Please make sure that coordinating junctions such as “and” or “or” or “because of” are adequately rendered in the target language.

Example 13 (ESS Round 6, item F36):

Have you ever been unemployed and seeking work for a period of more than three months?

The conjunction “and” suggests that “seeking work” is to be undertaken *while* being unemployed. Translating the question along the lines of “being unemployed OR seeking work” (which may easily happen through oversight) does not tap the same concept as in the source text. So please keep the original sense in your translations.

20 Sequence

As a general rule, we would ask you to keep the order of “enumeration elements”.

Example 14 (ESS Round 6, item B12):

...worked in a political party or action group?

The translation should thus read “worked in a political party or action group” and not “action group or political party”. Intentional deviations should be documented.

21 Clarity and fluency

In general, do your best to produce questions that can easily be understood by the respondents and fluently read out by the interviewers, otherwise the measurement quality of the question may be compromised. Reading aloud the entire survey instrument before it is finalised may help detect phrases

or expressions that do not sound fluent. It is therefore recommended as an additional quality step when finalising your translations (see section on final [copy-editing](#)).

Writing questions that can be understood by the target population requires not only taking into account usual target language characteristics but it also involves taking into account the target group in terms of their *age, education*, etc. The target group of the translated questionnaire will always be the same as for the source questionnaire.¹³ All members of the target population should be able to understand the questionnaire in the intended sense without exerting particular effort.

22 Terminology

In the same context as above, use words that the average population can understand ([population coverage](#)). Be careful with technical terms. Only use them when you are confident that they can be understood by the average citizen.

Example 15 (ESS Round 2, item D6):

When you have a health problem, how often do you use herbal remedies?

In one of the ESS translations, the technical term “phytotherapy” was used for “herbal remedies”. This translation was evaluated by an independent assessor as correct but probably not intelligible to most people.

23 Brevity and conciseness

Try to be as concise and brief as possible in your translation. Do not put additional burden upon the respondent by making the translation *unnecessarily* long.

Also, if you are forced by language constraints to spell out things more clearly in the target language than in the source language (e.g. two nouns rather than one noun; a paraphrase rather than an adverb), always keep the respondent burden to the minimum possible. On the question of how to deal with gender issues, i.e. if both masculine and feminine forms are to be given, please refer to section [Gender](#)). Also make sure that through these “changes” the stimulus is not altered in an undesired way.

24 Causes of mistranslations

In the following, a few causes of mistranslations shall be presented. Awareness of certain things is a first step towards preventing them.

24.1 Interference: False friends (lexis)

Translators can be misled by so-called ‘false friends’. These do, of course, differ from one language to another: simply looking at the surface structure of language, translators may, for instance, decide that

¹³ Population coverage: “The ESS will be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language.” (European Social Survey, 2021).

“intimate” will be translated as “intim” in German or as “intiem” in Dutch. While this may sometimes be true, in other cases, this may not work. The reason for this is that languages cut up reality differently: Words that sound similar across languages may (a) cover the same scope of meaning, there may (b) be overlap in meaning or these words may (c) have different meanings. Therefore, translators should be aware that a similar sounding word may not be what is appropriate in a given context (although in some cases it certainly can be appropriate).

The issue of false friends is illustrated with [example 16](#):

Example 16 (ESS Round 2, item E27):

How often, if ever, have you.....misused or altered a card or document to pretend you were eligible for something you were not?

Some countries produced a similar sounding translation for “card”, namely “Karte” or “caart”. Independent assessors of these translations were unsure about the meaning of “card” in the source text¹⁴ and were even more uncertain about the translated versions (“Karte”, “caart”), which did not make sense in the context. This also suggests that, if uncertain about the meaning of certain words or phrases, translators should always contact the translation team at GESIS to clarify the intended meaning.

TIP: *Monolingual English dictionaries* (as provided under <https://www.onelook.com/>) listing the different meanings of a word may help finding out about what words can mean in various contexts. Sometimes one only thinks of the most typical meaning of a given word and then ignores all others, or one even is not aware of the fact that a word can also have different meanings than those that are usually known. Monolingual dictionaries can help in deciding which meaning of a word is activated and, in addition, they may help in finding the appropriate translation by offering paraphrases and near synonyms which could be used as a basis for translation.¹⁵

24.2 Interference: Grammar and syntax

Being concerned about a comparable translation, translators may sometimes stick too closely to source text structures, thereby neglecting the usual target language requirements and the usual way of forming sentences in the target language. Look out for fluency and clarity in your language *while at the same time* taking into account comparability requirements, i.e. faithfulness. A noun is not always rendered by a noun in the target language, a singular noun not always by a singular noun and an adverb not always by an adverb. Syntactical structures may equally change.

Example 17 on *number*:

“Information” is a typical English singular word that often gets translated by a plural noun in other languages.

24.3 One-to-one equivalencies and their fallacies

¹⁴ In this context, ‘card’ refers, for example, to ‘Identity Card’.

¹⁵ Trained and/or experienced translators will know that, in most cases, monolingual dictionaries are more useful than bi- or multilingual dictionaries: They provide the translator with precise explanations of the *meaning* of a word or expression without narrowing down his or her freedom and creativity to find the right way to express this in the target language by offering ready-made translations.

Translation documentation from previous rounds has shown that translators occasionally use the words that typically or automatically come to their mind as one-to-one equivalencies. It is an erroneous belief; however, to think that word 'x' in the English language always leads to word 'y' in the target language (Hönig, 1997). "Government", "work", "job" or "reasonable" can all have different translations, depending in each case on which of the meaning dimensions of the English words gets activated in the given context.

Inexperienced translators are especially prone to using one-to-one equivalencies without further questioning the deeper meaning of the source text (Krings, 1986). For this reason, it is of utmost importance to assemble in your team people with excellent translation and language skills.

24.4 Careless reading

There have been cases in the past where careless reading has led to mistranslations. Rather than translating "wealthy" one country translated "healthy" and then others copied this through the shared languages consultations. Rather than translating "wanting a job" countries have translated "waiting for a job". Parallel translation and review (and adjudication) are meant in particular to pick up issues such as these. These oversights can easily happen but one can expect that they are spotted in a carefully implemented team approach. (See section on [Final copy-editing](#)).

24.5 Imbalance between cognitive processes

To put it in psycholinguistic terms, understanding involves *bottom-up* and *top-down processes*, Bottom-up processes take the textual material as a basis, top-down processes activate world knowledge, experiences, etc. (Kußmaul, 1995, 2007). Make sure that those processes are kept in balance. Too heavy use of top-down processes may lead to translations that divert too much from the actual source text and which, consequently, may compromise data comparability.

Example 18 (ESS Round 6, core item A3):

"Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people" gets translated as "Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be mistrustful with strangers?"

Following experience or stereotypes, a translator seems to have thought of strangers in connection with "can't be too careful" and thus rendered the abstract term "people" by "strangers" (= top-down processes). He or she did not adequately take into account that "people" in the English source is not specified and so covers both people you know well and strangers, so the textual material itself (= bottom-up processes) was probably not adequately taken into account.

Questionnaire-Specific Practical Translation Guidelines

25 Consistency

25.1 Consistency within the questionnaire

Please make sure that *scales* which occur repeatedly throughout the module/questionnaire are translated consistently. For example, an ‘agree / disagree’ scale at the start of the questionnaire should usually be translated in the same way when it appears at the end of the questionnaire. Make sure, however, at the same time that the scales are appropriate for all contexts in which they occur. If, for linguistic reasons, you need to use different scales or parts of scales (e.g. due to gender of words; translation of the response category ‘a great deal’ (see below)), where the English source text uses the same scale or response category, please document the reasons for this decision.

Example 19:

In many languages, the response category ‘a great deal’ needs to be translated according to the question text at hand; in these cases, therefore, a consistent translation of ‘a great deal’ across one entire questionnaire may *not* be possible.

Please also make sure that *instructions* which occur repeatedly throughout the questionnaire are translated consistently. Make sure at the same time that these instructions are appropriate for all contexts in which they occur. Sometimes, reformulations or small changes are needed to make them fit new and/or different contexts. In the ESS, many of these will already be in the core questionnaire and this should be the first point of reference. For repeat modules refer back to the translation in the previous round.

TIP for consistency (Mossop, 2007):

If you have standard translations for “Please use this card”, “Code one answer only” or similar, assemble them in advance and let your translators know.

Key terms or phrases that carry the same meaning and that are used repeatedly throughout the questionnaire and/or from question to question should be translated consistently. Thus, the stimulus can be maintained. Otherwise the respondent may think of a new context although previous contexts are in fact meant.

A further word of caution: Languages differ in their structure and their use in context. Therefore, where the English language can use one word across different linguistic contexts, other languages may be required to use different words for different contexts (an example is the English word ‘government’). It is therefore essential to choose the correct translation for the specific context of the question.

In addition, some words in the English language may be polysemous, which means they carry different meanings depending on the context in which they are embedded. E.g., in some contexts “fair” may be meant in the sense of “just”, in other contexts it may be meant in the sense of “equal”. Different words will then probably be required in your national language. Therefore, do not blindly copy-paste but always determine the meaning of the source text first and then determine the translation. If necessary, ask for an annotation to be provided to help guide your choice.

However, if you find that core parts of your national questionnaire have not been translated consistently, this does not mean that you should change the questionnaire. Only if the existing translations are incorrect or inappropriate will a change to an existing translation be accepted. In this case, consistency over time is more important than consistency within the questionnaire. Please remember that proposed changes to existing translations need to be agreed with the ESS translation team and ESS ERIC HQ for changes to existing translations.

25.2 Consistency across rounds

The ESS principle of asking identical questions across rounds alongside new questions heavily influences the translation process. For repeat questions, exactly the same translation should always be used. Only where serious mistakes are found should a new translation be considered. Always raise this with the translation team at GESIS and ESS ERIC HQ. In general, old questions are kept, unless serious mistakes are found, and new questions are translated from scratch. However, this general principle has quite some facet, which shall be listed now:

New core questions or modifications of core questions: Please work carefully through the “changes between rounds” document provided on the intranet to ensure that all changes of the source questionnaire have been implemented in your translations. This checking also involves checking of numbers, e.g. whether show card numbers have changed. In the case of new or modified core items, *care should be taken of consistency needs between existing and new translations.*

New rotating modules: If a rotating module has been largely developed from scratch, this is the easiest case for translation because then the entire module requires new translation. Note that even here, however, some items may draw on translations from earlier rounds or from the core questionnaire (this will always be noted in a translation footnote).

Partial replication of rotating module: If a rotating module is a partial replication of an earlier module, then old translations should be kept in identical format whilst new items should be newly translated. In Round 11, many of the items from the module on “Social inequalities in health and their determinants” were already fielded in ESS Round 7 and a list of these will be made available on the ESS 11 Intranet. When producing the new translations, care should be taken, though, of consistency needs between old and new translations in order to make the reference chain clear to respondents. If, for example, a new question is added as a follow-up question to an already existing question, the translation of the follow-up question should be harmonised in terminology and phrasing with the already existing translation of the old question. In short: *The amount of translation needed may be reduced in the case of a replication module, but no less thorough work is needed in order to produce a coherent module.*

When using the (T)VFF, we strongly recommend to copy into this document your already existing translations so that your translators know the context in which the new questions are embedded. This copy-pasting may be done either before translators receive the form or may be done by translators on an individual basis. At the latest, the entire questionnaire context should be available during review so that teams are in a position to make reasoned decisions.

26 Adaptations

26.1 Unforeseen adaptations

The rule in an *ask-the-same question (ASQ) approach* is that adaptations should not be undertaken unless they have been approved by the translation team at GESIS and / or ESS ERIC HQ. As there are many different definitions and also levels of ‘adaptation’, we would like to define what ‘adaptation’ should refer to in the ESS context: **Adaptation in this context refers to making the text more suitable to the socio-cultural context of the target culture, e.g. by deliberately modifying question content, independent of language change** (see Harkness et al. 2010). It, therefore, does not refer to purely linguistic ‘adaptation’ such as when a verbal construction is rendered by a noun construction or if, e.g., the term “How often” needs to be translated by a structure like “How many times” because only this structure would be correct in the target language.

Example 20 (ESS Round 6, item B14):

During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?
Have you ...worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker?

One country queried, regarding “badge/sticker”, whether the focus should only be on these two types of political symbols or whether the entire range of political symbols should be referred to. This query was raised because in this country symbols different from badge/sticker are in use. The Core Scientific Team (CST) stressed the following: “You should aim for functional equivalence. And so if badges/stickers are not usual political symbols in your country but flags or scarves are the usual symbols you should use these. If you have many different examples then you might need to try and find a word or two that summarises all of them.” This demonstrates that adaptations can be incorporated as part of the ESS ASQ translation procedures. However, such adaptations should always be discussed with the ESS translation team at GESIS and ESS ERIC HQ.

Example 21 (ESS Round 6, item F45a):

Using this card, which of these descriptions applies to what you have been doing for the last 7 days?
...in community or military service*

* This code does not apply to JOBS in the military but to compulsory military service only.

In [example 21](#), the show card which lists different activities/situations is meant to be translated and not to be adapted. However, translating “community or military service” in a country where these types of activities do not exist would not be appropriate. And so in this case this code should be excluded from the show card following approval from the translation team and ESS ERIC HQ. In Round 11, the marital status / relationship status questions require similar adaptation and this is outlined in the marital status consultation document. If countries feel anything is inappropriate in their context, they should discuss this with the translation team at GESIS and document any omissions, if approved.

26.2 Inbuilt adaptations

In some circumstances, the source text already provides for adaptations. Among others, this is indicated by “[country]”:

Example 22 (ESS Round 6, item B24):

Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education* in [country] nowadays?

* The “state of education” (see too, “state of health” in B29) covers issues of quality, access and effectiveness/efficiency.

Countries are usually supposed to add the country name (e.g., Russia, Sweden) where “[country]” stands. It may very well be, however, that using an adjective rather than a noun may be more appropriate (e.g., Russian, Swedish). The context will clarify which of these translation approaches fits best.

Example 23 (ESS Round 6, item B32):

Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries? Please use this card.

In the above example, countries have ended up saying ‘bad or good for the German, French, Spanish, etc. economy’.

26.3 English questionnaires: a special case of adaptation

The nature of adaptation as defined above (“... making the text more suitable to the socio-cultural context of the target culture ...”) may become obvious when looking at the special case of within-language adaptation required for the two English-language questionnaires used in the ESS: in the UK and in Ireland the English source questionnaire needs, in some instances, to be modified and adapted for national implementation, although no translation is involved here.

26.4 Additions

Also, additions may in some cases be made for reasons of adaptation – for further information please refer to section on [‘Additions’](#).

27 Layout

In general, the layout in the source questionnaire should be preserved as closely as possible. The translated version and the original should look *exactly the same* except for the words. For example underlining, such as in [example 24](#) below, serves to highlight words or phrases that need to be stressed by the interviewers. Please maintain this emphasis in your language. This may at times mean that you need to stress different words or groups of words if a close translation has not proved possible. If more appropriate in your language, you can also use bold letters or similar for the intended effect.

In [example 24](#), it was important to ask for the respondents’ opinion about democracy *in general* rather than related to the situation in their specific country. By underlining (or highlighting in another way) it should be made obvious for the interviewer – and the respondent – where the focus lies in these questions:

Example 24 (Introductory phrase in ESS Round 6 source questionnaire):

Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general ...

Layout can also play a role when deciding on translations for interviewer or respondent instructions. If the instruction reads “Please tick one box” (as in the self-completion supplementary questionnaires), the translation for “box” should match the symbol that is eventually used, such as “□” or “o”. Equally, the translation for “tick” should match the actual action (tick? mark? touch?), which can also depend on the survey mode.

Some examples from previous rounds where the layout was found to be different in the translated and in the source version include: (a) show cards containing the start of the response sentence when the original did not or vice versa; (b) show cards putting the answer codes in boxes, omitting numbering of the categories or drawing arrows to indicate the end points, where that was not the case in the original; (c) questions that were formatted as single questions with their own answer scale are formatted as batteries. Such differences in layout should be avoided.

28 Special case: response categories (RC)

Translation of scales is among the greatest challenges in questionnaire translation (Behr, 2009; Harkness, 2003; Harkness et al., 2004, Harkness et al., 2010, Villar, 2009). A couple of dimensions will now be dealt with.

28.1 Intervals

Make sure that the intervals are comparable to the English source text. If the English source has no *overlap* or *gaps*, then the translated question should not have them either.

Example 25 (ESS Round 6, item A1):

No time at all
Less than ½ hour
½ hour to 1 hour
More than 1 hour, up to 1½ hours
More than 1½ hours, up to 2 hours
More than 2 hours, up to 2½ hours
More than 2½ hours, up to 3 hours
More than 3 hours
(Don't know)

For example, if, in the translation, the third category (“½ hour to 1 hour”) and the fourth category (“More than 1 hour, up to 1½ hours”) both include “1 hour”, unambiguous assignment to a response category is not assured any more. If, in the translation, neither of those categories include “1 hour”, then the respondent would be at a loss as to which category to assign his or her answer of 1 hour. To ensure comparability, the same intervals as in the source scale should be produced.

28.2 Labels of categories

Try to produce labels which are as equivalent as possible to the English source text and which work at the same time in the target language context.

(a) Try to mirror the intensity of scale points as expressed in the English source. For example, the translation of “quite interested” (cf. Example 26) should have a lower intensity than that of “very interested”, whilst “hardly interested” should be less in intensity than “quite interested” and so on. Make sure that the qualifiers (very, quite, etc.) that you choose for the labels adequately convey the graduation required.

Example 26 (ESS Round 6, item B1):

How interested would you say you are in politics – are you...
very interested,
quite interested,
hardly interested,
or, not at all interested?

(b) In [example 27](#) we would expect countries firstly to produce labels that convey the intensity of “extremely”. “Extremely” is a *fixed reference point*, i.e., an extreme end point on the scale where nothing can go beyond it. The same extremity should apply to corresponding labels in the translations. We are not requiring a literal translation of “extremely”; we rather call for the same “extremeness” – this might be represented in non-English languages also by ‘completely’, ‘fully’, ‘absolutely’, ‘totally’, etc. It is important to take into account that “extremely” should not be translated using a word equivalent to “very” because they do not have the same graduation i.e. ‘very’ has less intensity.

Example 27 (“extremely” scale):

Extremely bad
Extremely good

We would also expect countries to produce a linguistically *symmetrical scale* in cases where the English scale is linguistically symmetrical. By a linguistically symmetrical scale we mean: “extremely” on both ends of the scale.

However, experience – and literature – dictates caution: In some languages there may not be a close equivalent to “extremely” that collocates, that is, typically occurs in conjunction with the corresponding adjective ‘good’, ‘satisfied’, ‘happy’, etc. In addition, while “extremely” works with both positive and negative adjectives in the English language, in other languages there may not be an adverb available that can work at both ends of a scale. In these cases, it will not be possible to employ linguistic symmetry.

However, what should normally be avoided is swapping between bipolar and unipolar scales (e.g. *bad* <-> *good* becomes *not good* <-> *good*). This decision should only be taken as a last resort and must be discussed with the translation team at GESIS.

To get a better impression of the linguistic forces at work when translating response scales and to see where research is urgently needed and to support interpretation of results we would like to ask countries to document their scale translation *in case of an unavoidable deviation* making use of a literal, explanatory back translation into English.

(c) Experience tells us also that, where the English language can use the same scale unchanged for a number of items (e.g., “extremely bad” – “extremely good”), this may not be the case in other languages which need, for instance, to adapt the adjective in gender and number to the corresponding noun. Also

in this case, we would like to ask countries to document *any deviations* such as additional show cards added for such reasons. Please contact the translation team at GESIS in case of doubt.

(d) Experience has also shown that for some countries the translation of “not at all often” is problematic. Some countries may solve this problem by using an adverb in the form of “never” in a given context. In this case, we would like to ask countries to contact the translation team at GESIS.

(e) Remember that response categories that can be used consistently in English may be translated in different ways within one questionnaire in another ESS language (see Example 19 for translating the response category ‘a great deal’).

28.3 Length of labels

Try to keep the length of labels as equivalent to the source as possible. This means: If the English label only contains individual words / phrases (extremely good, not at all, to some extent, etc.), please do not produce entire sentences such as ‘I am *not at all* happy with the government’s work’. Contrary to that, if the English source questionnaire contains entire sentences as response category (e.g., “I plan for my future as much as possible” or “I never plan my future”), the translation should contain entire sentences as well rather than simply saying “as much as possible” or “not at all”.

In case this is, for linguistic reasons, not possible in your language, please consult the ESS translation team.

28.4 Balancing, gradation and other interrogative forms in the question text

This paragraph refers to introductory phrases such as “To what extent”, “How difficult or easy ...” or “To what extent do you agree or disagree ...”.

“To what extent do you agree or disagree ...” or “How difficult or easy ...” is a deliberate wording technique in order to introduce the range of answer categories. Simply asking “Do you find it difficult or easy to ...” or “Do you agree or disagree ...” would not match the answer categories if those range from “Very difficult” over “difficult” and “easy” to “very easy”. So please try to match this open phrasing, if possible, in your language.

In addition, try to the extent possible to mirror the deliberate balancing in your language (“agree”/“disagree”; “difficult”/“easy”). This balancing suggests to the respondent that all answers are equally valid.

If there is a WH-word (i.e., an interrogative word that in English usually, but not always, begins with wh-, such as *what, why, where, which, who, or how*), try to reflect the meaning in your translation.

Example 28 (ESS Round 4, core item B2):

How often does politics seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what is going on?
Never, seldom, occasionally, regularly, frequently

Regarding [example 28](#): A translation along the lines of “It is sometimes said that politics is so complicated that one doesn’t really understand what is going on” with the response categories translated as “I never have this impression”, “I seldom have this impression”, ... would deviate without

reason from the formal characteristics (WH-question) of the source text and should not be implemented, although this happened in one country in the past.

In case this is, for linguistic reasons, not possible in your language, please consult the ESS translation team.

28.5 Consistency between question and response scale

Question and corresponding answer categories should match, both in terms of their design (see 28.4 above) as well as linguistically:

Example 29 (ESS Round 4, item B39):

And, using this card, would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

Response categories: Cultural life undermined vs. cultural life enriched

In this example, the translation chosen for “cultural life is [...] undermined or enriched” in the question itself should also be used in the response categories. Be careful not to use different translations for “cultural life”, “enriched” or “undermined” in the question stem and response categories.

28.6 Scale layout

Do not change the layout of the scale, e.g. a horizontal scale should never be changed into a vertical scale. Equally, do not reverse the order of the response categories, e.g. “extremely happy” – “extremely unhappy” should not become “extremely unhappy” – “extremely happy”. If form changes like these are made, they would always be seen as a deviation.

29 Annotations – from a practical point of view^{16 17}

In the ESS, annotations help to clarify the intended meaning of a source text concept, phrase or term. They are not meant to be translated verbatim or be added as footnotes to the questionnaire in the target language. Sometimes, however, annotations contain paraphrases which may (partly) be used in the translations themselves. The example question below and the corresponding annotations help to explain how annotations are to be used.

Example 30 (ESS Round 4, item B3):

How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up* about political issues**?

* Forming an opinion

** “Political issues” in this context refer to political debates, policies, controversies etc.

The annotation for “make up your mind” reads “forming an opinion”. The annotation thus explains an English idiom. Countries may end up using a translation that is a literal translation of “forming an opinion”, since this is what is common in their language. That is, the **footnote text may be used and**

¹⁶ For a process-oriented point of view on Annotations, see [section 10 in Part A](#).

¹⁷ On annotations, see also Behr and Scholz (2011).

translated in the questionnaire, but it should NOT keep the form of a footnote! The translated ESS questionnaires should NOT contain any footnotes.

The annotation for “political issues” reads “Political issues in this context refer to political debates, policies, controversies, etc.” To the extent possible, countries should not translate “debates, policies or controversies” but rather use these examples in order to find a generic expression covering all these and other examples. Countries have ended up saying things like “political topics”, “political issues” or “as regards the field of politics”.

30 Final copy-editing / proofreading / cross-checking

As typos, punctuation issues, copy-past mistakes, unidiomatic linking of sentences or other mistakes due to **oversight or carelessness** have repeatedly been detected in ESS translations, we ask the national teams to carry out the following steps – as part of the existing TRA steps:

- Carry out **thorough copy-editing / proof-reading and cross-checking** steps of the entire questionnaire in its final version in the target language(s). This should both be done (a) before submitting your translation(s) to verification, and (b) before finalising your translation to be used for the fieldwork.
- For this task it is typically useful to have at least one professional translator or trained linguist in the national team, as these professions are normally used to a thorough copy-editing work when finalizing texts (see [section 5](#)). We recommend printing out both the source and target texts, to make sure nothing disturbs you, and to carefully compare and go through the whole questionnaire and all show cards.
- This step should be complemented by **reading aloud the entire survey instrument** prior to finalizing the translations. This should help avoid e.g. lack of linking particles between phrases or other issues that become obvious when reading the entire questionnaire aloud; reading aloud the translated ESS questionnaires makes the more sense as these instruments will later be used in oral face-to-face interview situations, so that it is crucial that the text sounds fluent when spoken out aloud (see also [section 21](#)).

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Appendix 1: Overview of TRAPD / the translation and assessment steps in the ESS since Round 5

