Linguistic Justice Division
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Considerations for Translation when Conducting Research with Survivors of Gender-based Violence

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Translation

▌ Overview

This document provides a) a practical definition of what translation typically refers to; b) a brief overview of the key issues to consider in multilingual and multicultural gender-based violence research studies; c) clarifications of some of the common misconceptions regarding translation of research materials, and d) an example followed by discussion questions.

▌ What is translation?

We can think of translation as a process in which a translator takes a written message in one language and transfers it into a different language, maintaining all or most of the original meaning and tone of the original message. This is often a complex cognitive process that not only requires a high degree of linguistic competence (i.e., being fluent in both languages), but also strong cultural and contextual competence (See **Considerations for Interpretation** for more details).

▌ Translation Considerations in Gender-based Violence Research

In gender-based violence research, translation is a key element for ensuring meaningful and equitable language access for multicultural participants. Although the accurate translation of research materials is critical, further adaptation and considerations may be needed to truly provide culturally and contextually responsive materials. That is, a literal or verbatim translation of written documents may be grammatically correct, but it may not be appropriate for the target population. If culture and context are not a central part of the translation process, research materials are likely to not be understood as intended or, if the language used is too formal, it may simply not be understood at all. Therefore, research materials must be translated accurately and thoughtfully, integrating trauma-informed principles and cultural and contextual considerations, to ensure the validity of the data when working with multilingual and multicultural participants.

Additionally, researchers must consider whether they need to translate data collected prior to the analytic process. If that is the case, it is important to make sure that data are also translated accurately and thoughtfully, and that culture and context are part of the analytic process.

▪ Common Misconceptions when Translating Research Materials

Accurate and Thoughtful Translation of Research Materials...

Does Not...	**Does...**
Guarantee that the communication between data collectors and participants will always be effective. Data collectors might still need to further clarify questions and probe to clarify answers. (See **Negotiation of Meaning** for more details).	Ensure meaningful and equitable language access to multilingual and multicultural survivors participating in research.
Automatically ensure that participants will be feel comfortable and safe during the data collection process. Further data collection training with a clear focus on culture and context is necessary (in the language in which data will be collected).	Provide a first step in integrating a linguistic justice framework to the research study when paired with additional adaptations, training and supervision of staff as needed throughout the entire research process.
Integrate a linguistic justice framework to the entire research study.	

Example

The Complexities of Translating 'Advocate' in Spanish

In the U.S., an 'advocate' typically refers to someone providing direct support to survivors of gender-based violence. However, in Spanish, there is not a literal translation for the word advocate that accurately captures the essence of the role. If translators do not have a background in gender-based violence, they might not be familiar with the work of domestic violence / sexual assault (DVSA) advocates. Thus, they might be inclined to translate the word 'advocate' using some of its common dictionary translations such as 'abogado' (lawyer) or 'defensor' (defender). Both of these words are grammatically correct translations of the word advocate; however, they are unfit translations for the DVSA context.

In the gender-based violence field, it is increasingly common to use the word 'intercesor(a)' as a translation for 'advocate' as it means someone who intercedes on behalf of another person. However, it is not a very common word and might not be understood by all Spanish speakers. For that reason, researchers might consider adding a note the first time the word is used to explain that 'intercesor(a)' will be used to refer to survivors' advocate(s).

As this example illustrates, incorrect or unfit translations of field-specific terminology might cause confusion and result in unreliable data. Thus, it is important to ensure that research materials are translated accurately and thoughtfully as discussed above or reviewed by trained professionals familiar with gender-based violence terminology in both languages.

Discussion Questions:

- What could have been some potential consequences of using the literal translation of advocate as 'abogado' or 'defensor' in research materials?

- What might be some of the benefits of investing in further explanation of field-specific terminology in research materials that have been translated to one or more languages?

Acknowledgment

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