Gelaye Hailemichael skriver här om en mindre del av sin masteruppsats som hon lade fram på Statistiska institutionen vid Stockholms universitet i våras.

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FIGURE 1. THE SURVEY CYCLE. ADAPTED FROM:
HTTP://WWW.CCSG.ISR.UMICH.EDU/INTRO.CFM

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Translation: One of the headaches in comparative surveys

Comparative surveys, also called cross-national surveys or 3M surveys (Multinational, Multicultural, and Multiregional surveys) represent all types of surveys where efforts are made to achieve comparability across countries (Lynn et al., 2006). The concept of multicultural surveys dates back more than 40 years and since then they have grown in importance and magnitude and become very useful.

What makes comparative surveys so special?
Comparative surveys include different nationalities, languages, and cultures, in a multipopulation setting. As Kish (1994) explains it, the classical single population survey sampling methodology needs to be extended to include multiple populations, which is very difficult to design and control. Since the main objective of comparative surveys is to achieve comparability across or within countries, designing the statistical aspects becomes complicated and difficult. Sample design, question development, translation, data collection, data processing and cleaning, file documentation, and distribution get more complicated. In general, it is hard to obtain high quality survey data in any survey, and trying to achieve that in multiple surveys across languages, nations, and cultures is even more difficult. As stated by Lynn et al. (2006):

"Cross-national surveys can be considered to have an extra layer of survey design, in addition to the aspects that must be considered for any survey carried out in a single country".

Smith (2010) divides comparative surveys into two broad sections:
1. Global surveys
   a. General social science collaborations, for example the International Social Survey Program (ISSP)
   b. General-population studies on specialized topics – surveys carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) are good examples
   c. Special-population studies including for example the Trends in International Mathematical and Science Study (TIMSS)
2. Regional surveys
   a. General-topic surveys, such as the European Social Survey (ESS)
   b. Special-population surveys, including for example the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)

There are also comparative surveys that are difficult to classify into the above broad categories, such as global polls performed by commercial companies like the Gallup group and allied associations of commercial firms like Globescan, and harmonization projects under the leadership of Eurostat that aim to produce more comparable results for studies within the European Statistical System (ESS).

Now let us take a look at the famous diagram in the survey world, the survey lifecycle (Figure 1).

For a survey to provide high quality data, it is important to address all the elements in the survey lifecycle. But it is also obvious that different weights will be given to the elements of the survey lifecycle depending on the type of survey.

In a comparative survey, one of the elements in particular needs special attention: the translation.

Translation
When the population under study includes different languages and cultures, translation becomes a serious challenge. Translation is not only a matter of translating the original or source questionnaire (the blue-print of the questionnaire) into the target language. There has to be a way to integrate cultural aspects, in order to get equivalence of meaning between questions in the source questionnaire and its translated version (Harkness, Villar, and Edwards, 2010). In the Gallup World Poll survey in Senegal, the question "how many children are there in the household?" could not be asked. It had to be translated according to the Senegal culture into "how many little bits of God's wood are in the household" (Tortora et al., 2010). Thus the translation procedure is extremely important in multilingual surveys to hit the objective of the
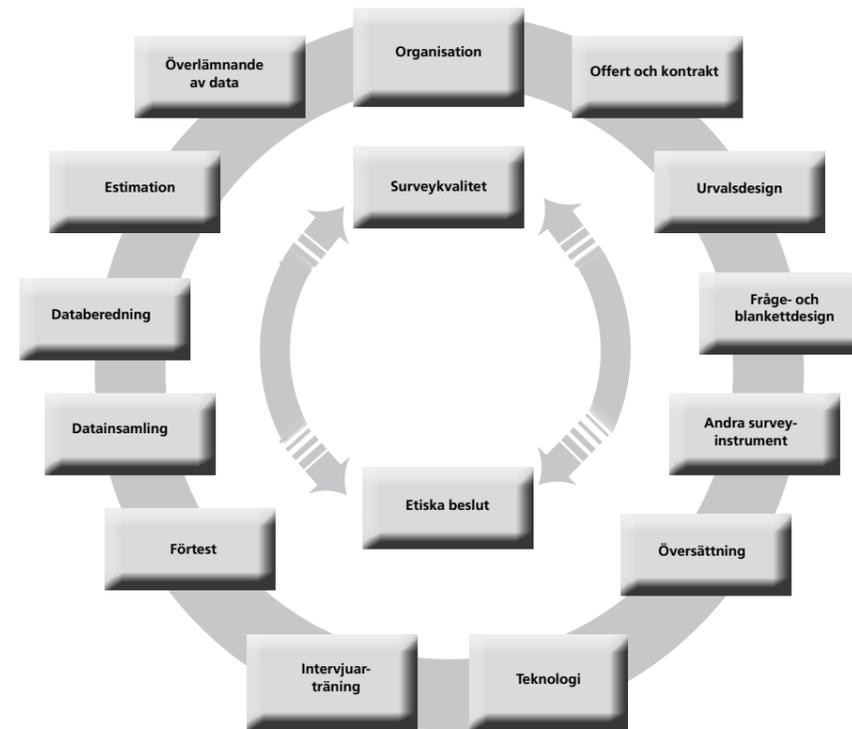
survey. A bad translation can ruin the comparability, the main objective of a comparative survey.

Not recommended translation methods
1. Machine translation: so called "Google- translation" reduces human involvement in the complex translation process.
2. Do-it-yourself ad hoc translation: it is not uncommon that survey materials are translated by "someone's brother who spent six years in the country". Translatology is a science and that fact should be respected.
3. Unwritten or "on site" translation: translation is done during the interview.
4. Back translation: this translation process starts by translating the source questionnaire into the target (translated) questionnaire, then the target questionnaire is translated back to the source questionnaire. Finally, by comparing the two questionnaires, a conclusion is drawn on how close the target questionnaire is to the source questionnaire. If they agree, the translated questionnaire is deemed satisfactory. This type of translation method was, and still is, very much in use to translate and to check the quality of the translation as well. The main drawbacks of this method are that it is costly, it creates confusion, and it makes a loop. As a result, it takes time. In addition, there is no final check of the target questionnaire. Furthermore, "on the process of back translation there are no clear theories, techniques or findings that go

with the linguistic field" (Harkness, 2003).

The currently most recommended translation method for comparative surveys is the Team Translation, also called TRAPD (Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting, and Documentation), by which a group of professional translators and survey people work together to translate, review, adjudicate, and pretest. After pretesting, the translated version is finalized and ready for use, supplemented by documentation of the whole process (Harkness et al., 2010).

As Greenfield (1997) states it, no matter how thoroughly the translation process is done, it is difficult to make it exactly match the source documents. An example of this is the significant translation errors discovered in TIMSS 1995. The Mexican translation into Spanish had errors in style, format, grammar, semantics, and information (Martin et. al., 1999).

To conclude, when more than one language is involved in the survey, a good translation of the survey instrument is a must. There are many translation methods but only one is recommended as the current best one, TRAPD. Model comparative surveys, such as ESS, PIAAC, SHARE, EWCS, and ISSSP use this translation method, but it has to be noted that using TRAPD will not solve all the problems. However, it definitely will increase the chances of collecting comparable data for its intended use.

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