

JPSM/MPSM

Survey Methodology Seminar Series

Interaction between Question Context Effects and Respondent Cultural Backgrounds

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Presenter

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Monday, January 14, 2013

12:10-1:00pm

Speaker will be at the University of Michigan

Video Room 368 - ISR South Basement

Room 2208 LeFrak Hall– Maryland

Abstract

Question context effects are one of the most frequently examined measurement errors in survey research. Observational data from multiple multilingual surveys in the U.S. suggested a potential interaction between question context effects for the self-rated health (SRH) question and respondents' Hispanic backgrounds (manifested through Spanish language use), although SRH is largely believed to be immune to context effects in the literature. In order to examine this in a randomized fashion, two sets of experiments were conducted for the SRH item in a multilingual survey. We hypothesized 1) interactions among textual, cultural, and external question contexts based on social cognition and communication theories and the notion of high vs. low context culture and 2) larger context effects for Spanish speakers (mostly Hispanics) than English speakers (mostly non-Hispanics). The experiment randomly assigned subsets of respondents interviewed in English and Spanish to different textual contexts of SRH by varying its order in a questionnaire. The results supported the hypotheses. English-speaking respondents' reports on SRH were consistent across all textual contexts, but simple changes in the textual contexts produced dramatically different reports by Spanish-speaking respondents. Specifically, Spanish speakers reported substantially better health when SRH was asked after specific health condition questions than before any health-related questions. Because language is a proxy for culture, this demonstrated an interaction between textual and cultural contexts. Furthermore, among Spanish speakers, the textual context effects were larger for females and older respondents and differed by comorbidity status, illustrating an interaction among three types of contexts. Implications are twofold. First, context effect patterns observed in one culture do not necessarily apply to another culture. Second, even within the same culture, context effects may vary by respondent characteristics. Hence, context effects studied in a homogeneous group should not be assumed to hold in cross-cultural studies.

The Survey Methodology Program hosts this series of brown bag seminars on survey methods. The purpose is to have informal presentation and discussion of topics in survey methodology. They are open to anyone interested. If you would like more information, or if you have suggestions for methodological topics you would like to see presented, please contact: Jodi Holbrook at 647-3592