

20+ language tips for effective humanitarian data collection



Worried about language barriers affecting the accuracy of the data you need to design quality programs and respond effectively to people's needs? Learn how you and your colleagues can reduce language biases and gain more reliable data.

PAYING ATTENTION TO LANGUAGE THROUGHOUT THE

5 PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION !

AND WHAT ABOUT TIPS FOR REMOTE DATA COLLECTION?



PLANNING

- **Evaluate** relevant language(s) spoken and understood by targeted people
- **Plan** the involvement of dedicated staff to translate the form into relevant language(s)
- **Recruit** data collectors who speak the relevant language(s)

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- ▶ **CONSULT** existing data on language(s) spoken and understood in the targeted area
- ▶ If no data is available, **CONTACT** key informants or organisations on the ground for advice on relevant language(s)



PREPARATION

- **Use** plain language that data collectors and respondents can understand

clear & appropriate terms

consistent language

concise wording

- **Use** multiple-choice or yes/no question formats with relevant answer choices, whenever possible, *to reduce the risk of mistranslation and data analysis mistakes*
- **Ensure** data collectors can input the answers of open-ended questions in the language respondents use
- **Use** graphic or visual aids, *especially when conducting surveys among people with low literacy levels*
- **Translate** the form into the relevant language(s), *to avoid putting interpretation burdens on the data collectors - if translation is not possible, at least use a glossary*

Ask native speakers to read the original version of the form and highlight all parts that could be difficult to translate, then discuss solutions with them

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- ▶ **SHORTEN** the form as much as possible, with succinct and essential questions only
- ▶ **OPT** only for single- or multiple-choice question formats with well crafted answer choices, especially for SMS-based data collection



TRAINING & PILOT

- **Pilot** the translated form with data collectors and targeted people

Consider testing the data collectors' comprehension of key words and concepts

- **Prepare** guidance tools for the data collectors on the content of the form and key language aspects to consider
- **Hire** an interpreter for language support during the training, if needed

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▶ **DEDICATE** ample time during remote training of data collectors to **discuss** the content of the form, key terms and good remote communication practices

▶ **PROVIDE** guidance to data collectors on addressing language-related issues in remote data collection



DATA COLLECTION & MANAGEMENT

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- **Ask** respondents for informed consent in easy-to-understand language, both at the beginning and at the end of the survey
- **Ensure** daily adequate quality control of the data by the survey manager in relation to language: identify options that might have been selected due to misunderstanding or language barriers, check all "other" boxes ticked to see if the free text associated did correspond to an option, etc.

Consider recording some of the interviews using a voice recorder, for quality assurance purposes

- **Debrief** the data collectors regularly during the survey process to discuss any questions or terms that create problems or confusion and agree together on solutions

▶ **ENSURE** data collectors ask questions clearly and employ the correct tone in the absence of visual and physical cues

▶ **TAKE THE TIME** to explain who you are and why you are collecting data so respondents feel at ease, before asking them any questions



DATA ANALYSIS & DISSEMINATION

- **Debrief** data collectors at the end of the survey process about any overall language-related issues
- **Translate** the open format answers into a language the data analysis team understands as soon as possible after the data is collected

Ask data collectors to clarify the meaning of the recorded answers if needed

- **Ask** a native speaker to proofread the analysis report and any other outputs in the language in which they are written
- **Share** the analysis in relevant language(s) with targeted people and other local stakeholders
- **Document** all relevant language information and associated methodological difficulties encountered to facilitate any future data collection

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▶ **SHARE** the analysis in different formats such as posters, local radio, SMS or via key informants

▶ **DOCUMENT** any particular language information and difficulties for remote data collection

Do you have any questions? Get in touch with us: Eric DeLuca eric@translatorswithoutborders.org and Maev de France m_defrance@cartong.org