

Test Translation Matters

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Test Translation Matters (TTM) is an occasional publication of Second Language Testing, Inc. (SLTI). The purpose of TTM is to inform educators, testing specialists, and the public on matters and issues concerning the translation or adaptation of standardized tests. TTM will be archived on the SLTI website, www.2LTI.com, so that readers can search back numbers for information on issues of problems they are encountering. We realize that our readers' time is limited so individual issues will be short, dealing only with one or two specific matters in test translation. The focus, at least initially, will be test translation and adaptation in the context of K-12 state assessment programs. TTM notes are written by Charles Stansfield, SLTI President, although at times contributions by specific specialists will be invited. Comments on individual notes and issues are welcome. If you don't wish to receive further issues of TTM, simply send an email to Cstansfield@2LTI.com. Anyone wishing to be added to the list should send a request to the same address.

Audio versions of state assessments in the student's native language

Two states, Ohio and Michigan, recently began producing audio versions of their state assessments in subjects other than English language arts. The purpose of the audio translation is to allow students to hear a native language version of each test item. The audio provides an automatic translation of any meanings conveyed by the item that may not be clear to the student from the English text in the test booklet. Thus, the translation provides the student access to test content, in parallel with students whose native language is English.

Ohio produces audio versions of its math assessments for grades 3-8 in five languages: Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, and Somali. In most cases, the audio version functions as follows; while the student is taking the state assessment, he or she can listen to a CD containing an audio version, in translation, of the stimuli and items in the test booklet.

Ohio began producing the CDs partly for cost efficiency. The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) reimburses districts for the cost of an interpreter to do an oral translation of the test for students. The ODE calculates that it can save money by producing an oral translation on CD when the number of students taking the test reaches 75 or more. The CD also provides for a standardized rendering of the oral translation.

Michigan provides either a VHS video cassette or a digital videodisc (DVD) of its math assessments for grades 3-8 and for high school in Spanish and Arabic; social studies and science assessments are also available in Spanish and Arabic at three grade levels. The DVD contains individual pictures of the English version of each test item in the test booklet. Accompanying the item is the voice-over translation of it. A student can pause the video while he or she is answering each item, or the audio can be replayed before the student answers. After writing or marking the answer in the answer document, the student merely advances the DVD player to it. If a student uses a VHS, he or she can also pause, back-up and reply the native language translation of the items. ELLs usually take the tests in a special room containing the VHS or DVD player, or they may take it in the regular classroom if such equipment is available there. The regular Michigan

assessments are untimed, so students using this accommodation have access to the time they may need to take advantage of it.

Translation verification study

A translation verification study is different from a translation review. Translation reviews are done as part of the test translation process. In a review, another translator examines the translation of each item and makes editorial revisions or improvements. The comments go back to the original translator, to an adjudicator, or to the test translation manager. Several such reviews and revisions may be done as needed, usually in an iterative fashion. After each review the translation is revised and may then be sent out for an additional review.

A translation verification study involves verifying that each item is testing the same thing in both languages. Specifically, the reviewer in a translation verification study must determine four things.

1. Is the item aligned to the same content standard?
2. Does the item maintain the intended reading level of the item?
3. Does the item maintain the intended difficulty level of the item by ensuring that the item was not simplified or clarified?
4. Does the item maintain the essential meaning and style in translation?

When an item has been directly translated without modification, the reviewer has to determine if the translation is appropriate or not. When a translation is not appropriate, the reviewer identifies the problem. Sometimes items are modified or adapted slightly to make them more appropriate in terms of language or context. Examples are changing the names, place, activities, or seasons mentioned in the contextualization of an item. If the item has been modified or adapted in some way, the reviewer has to determine if the modification is appropriate and if the modification has changed the content, reading level, or difficulty level of the item.

If the answer to the four questions posed above is “Yes” for all items, one can safely conclude that the translated version measures the same knowledge, skills and abilities, and has the same content validity, as the English version. When the English and non-English versions assess the same content, use the same format, have equal number of items, follow the same test administration and scoring procedures, and are used and interpreted in the same way, we can conclude that the English and non-English versions are measuring the same content in two different languages. When this is the case, there should be no need to conduct a separate standard setting study. Similarly, there should be no need to separately equate or link the two versions, since the items are the same in both languages and the verification study has shown, though subject matter expert judgments, that the items are inherently not more easy or difficult in either language. Thus, both versions can be scored on the same scale and scores on each version have the same meaning in terms of student mastery of the state content standards for the subject. Similarly, when the answer to the four questions posed above is “Yes” for all items, one can conclude that both language versions show the same degree of alignment with the state content standards. If an alignment study has been done on the English version, the results will apply to the non-English version as well. Consequently, there is no need to conduct a separate alignment study for the non-English version.