

TRANSPLANTING PERSONALITY INVENTORIES

LUCITA S. LAZO

Department of Psychology
University of the Philippines

The process of translation, in order to obtain local personality measures, is examined in the present paper. The effects of language on personality responses as an obstacle in developing psychological measures were discussed. The literature was reviewed to substantiate this contention.

In the endeavor to understand human behavior, the psychologist gathers data about individuals from varied sources including the individual himself. A very popular technique is to present verbal stimuli which constitute so-called psychological tests and obtain individual responses, usually verbal, to such stimuli. Specifically in personality measurement, these verbal responses as behavior samples are presumed to reveal something about the individual.

When locally developed measures are not available, tests are usually borrowed. For instance, in the Philippines there is a dearth of measuring and assessing devices. More often than not American tests are used perhaps because English is known to be a second language to Filipinos. Although these tests are conveniently borrowed, these are not necessarily valid in the Philippine setting. Hence, this practice does not in fact solve the problem of obtaining good measures of psychological characteristics which serve as raw data for research.

While the literacy rate in the Philippines has increased, it remains a fact that English is but a second language to Filipinos. Yet, there remains too the need for valid psychological measures of personality within the easy grasp of the majority of Filipinos and, thus, that will assure us generality of findings.

To fill this gap, American tests are immediately translated into Filipino. Such practice often stops upon obtaining another linguistic

version of the tests — the validity of the translated test version is usually taken for granted or, at best, shelved for further investigation that is frequently not undertaken at all. One other course taken by probably well-meaning but much too occupied test-users is to “intuitively” validate personality descriptions obtained on such test versions without the benefit of systematic descriptions. The lone published study which seriously undertook the task of validating a test translated into Filipino is Tan’s (1968) Filipino version of the Sack’s Sentence Completion test.

Theoretically any form or version of a psychological test must be shown to be valid on the basis of standard psychological criteria before it can be used at all.

An implicit assumption when tests are translated is that the translation will yield an equivalent set of stimuli and, consequently, elicit responses comparable to those given to the original test. This is quite apart from questions of validity.

That this assumption is ill-advised and unwise is evidenced by a number of studies comparing responses of bilinguals to presumably equivalent sets of stimuli, one set of stimuli being a mere translation of the other. For example, Ervin (1964) found that achievement themes were more common in English stories among women subjects while themes expressing verbal aggression against peers and autonomy or withdrawal from others were more common in French stories made to TAT pictures. In a

study on the stimulus ambiguity of the Philippine Thematic Apperception Test, Ventura (1973) found that story endings were more ambiguous in Filipino than in English.

Further, Gavino (1968) showed that common word associations differed depending upon the medium in which the stimulus word is expressed. In another study, the same subjects' responses to the English original and the experimental Filipino version of the MMPI were shown to have low correlation (Lazo, 1972).

Interpretations of test results may then be contaminated by language factors, and different personality profiles may consequently be obtained. For instance, different word associations could be a function of language dominance and consequently the power of a personality test such as the Association Adjustment Inventory may be affected. Even if the magnitude of such language effects is found to be minimal, in the end this remains to be known. Further, this raises the practical issue of establishing linguistic equivalence between the original and the translated test versions.

When such translation equivalence is demonstrated, in effect, a parallel version of the original test would have been evolved. Test theory systematically accounts for different versions of any given test in what is referred to as the theory of parallel tests and prescribes that these forms satisfy definite criteria for statistical and psychological validity. Any two parallel tests must of course deal with the same subject matter and measure the same construct and must have equal means, equal variances, and equal covariances (Gulliksen, 1950; Nunnally, 1967). The former constitutes statistical validity.

The language factor in translated tests may possibly add a variance. Lonner (1968) found test-retest reliability of .91 in contrast to cross-language correlation of .80. Greater variance may thus be expected of the translated version. This may then be construed as statistical invalidity. Misinterpretation of this sort can be

avoided if language variance can be assessed and eventually eliminated from the total variance. Thus, the resulting variance on the translation version may be clearly attributed to within-subject variations, assuming that no other systematic source of variance exists.

In other words, systematic language effects must be controlled either by elimination or by holding it constant. The latter can be easily accomplished by first establishing linguistic or translation equivalence. After this is done, variance between original and translated versions may be compared. It is hoped then that these variances are now effects of within-subject variations.

Further, when there are systematic but known language effects, psychological validity may be confounded as pointed out earlier. Operationally, psychological validity is empirically established by correlation of some external measures with test scores. Correlation coefficients are actually cross-products of deviations from the means. Such deviations from the means may be under or over-estimated by a constant value equal to the systematic variance from language effects. This becomes evident only when there are comparative data for the original test versions such as test-retest correlation on a similar sample under similar conditions.

Hence, validity coefficients may be partly determined by language factors. In interpreting the power of the test in measuring a given construct, some ambiguity may result. Again establishing translation equivalence before undertaking validation steps may help eliminate this ambiguity.

REFERENCES

- ERVIN, S. Language and TAT content in bilinguals. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1964, 68, 500-507.
- GAVINO, JASMIN. A comparison of responses to personality test items of English-speaking Filipinos in English and Pilipino. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 1968, 1, 69-70.

- GULLIKSEN, H. *Theory of Mental Tests*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1950. 23, 164-179.
- LAZO, L. A preliminary report: responses to a Filipino translation of the MMPI. *UPDP Reports: Series in Measurements*. 1974 May, 1, 31-36.
- LONNER, W. THE SVIB visits German, Austrian and Swiss psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 1968, NUNALLY, J. *Psychometric Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.
- TAN, A. L. A sentence completion test in Filipino. *Reports from the U.P. Department of Psychology: Series in Measurement. Reports No. 1-5*. 1969 (June).

Subscribe

to the

PSSC SOCIAL SCIENCE INFORMATION

the quarterly newsletter of the

PHILIPPINE SOCIAL SCIENCE COUNCIL

Annual subscription rates: P15.00/US\$8.00

Back issues available at P4.50/US\$2.50 per