

How Selected Language Groups Coped with Census 2000

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This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Census Bureau staff. It has undergone a Census Bureau review more limited in scope than that given to official Census Bureau publications. This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress.

The Census Bureau must provide everyone living or staying in the United States on Census Day the opportunity to be counted in Census 2000. To assist in questionnaire response, Census Bureau staff developed many programs for non-English speaking respondents. Some of these programs were:

- Walk-in questionnaire assistance centers in places like libraries, civic centers, and community grocery stores, some with bilingual clerks
- Separate toll-free numbers for respondents to call and receive help in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese
- Census forms in one of the same five languages
- Translations of the census form into 49 languages to assist respondents in filling out the English version of the form

The Census Bureau desired to better understand how non-English speaking respondents coped with the decennial census, and whether or not the intended recipients of the programs actually used them. Even more important, we wanted to know if the right people even knew about the programs. We performed a follow-up survey of census long form responding households that indicated Spanish, Vietnamese, or Russian is spoken at home.

We conducted the follow-up survey by telephone with specially trained bilingual interviewers in July and August, 2000. This survey asked questions about

- general census awareness,
- the purposes of the Census,
- the language assistance programs,
- and the respondents' use of such programs.

This study focuses on respondents in the Spanish-, Vietnamese-, and Russian-speaking language groups, with a sample of English-speaking respondents for comparison purposes. Results from this study will help evaluate the effectiveness of the language assistance programs and will help in the planning of the 2010 Census.

THE SAMPLE DESIGN

The Census long form provides information about languages other than English that are spoken in the home. We identified our sample from preliminary census files, and took half of our sample from those households mailing back their census forms, and half from those receiving a visit during non-response follow-up. Within each of these groups, we selected households where the first person listed on the form indicated that he or she spoke a language other than English at home. Figure 1 is a snapshot of the long-form questions defining our sample.

The census form question reads:

Figure 1. Universe definition for sample.

11 a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?

Yes

No → Skip to 12

b. What is this language?

[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

(For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)

c. How well does this person speak English?

Very well

Well

Not well

Not at all

We only selected households in which Person 1 responded that they spoke Spanish, Vietnamese, or Russian at home.

- Spanish was chosen because it represents the largest non-English language group in the United States.
- Vietnamese was chosen from the four Asian languages for which actual census questionnaires were available in that language.
- Russian was chosen because it represents a large, non-Asian language group for which an actual census questionnaire was not available in that language.

We did not select more language groups because of resource and time constraints.

We allocated the sample in the following manner:

- For each language group, 25% of the sample came from those respondents indicating that they spoke English *Very well* and *Well*,
- 25% came from the *Not well* category,
- and the remaining 50% came from the *Not at all* category.

This distribution ensured that we would be able to produce estimates for respondents in the *Not well* and *Not at all* categories. In order to produce estimates with a reasonable level of variance, our goal was to have 500 completed cases for each language for each group (both the mailback and the nonresponse followup groups).

To ensure that the interviewing yielded at least 500 completed cases per language per group (250 for English), we randomly organized the sample into groups referred to as *panels*. We released panels to the interviewers one at a time, and the supervisors carefully monitored the progress and completion rates of the surveys. As the number of completed forms approached 500, the supervisors stopped releasing panels to be interviewed and focused on resolving and completing *all* remaining cases in those panels already released.

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument has questions about general census awareness, about form completion, the use and awareness of language assistance programs, and non-response follow-up questions. Space limitations preclude a more detailed explanation of the questions in this paper. It is important to note that certain questions are omitted for some of the language groups. For example, we did not ask the Russian-speaking respondents questions about the census form in Russian or about the use of a toll-free number in Russian because these services were not available. Further, we did not ask the English-speaking respondents questions about the use of a non-English census form and Language Assistance Guides.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

As stated before, these results are preliminary, and could change in subsequent processing. Further, we have not yet applied sampling weights to the results.

In this section, I will present overall completion rates, some broad results on respondent awareness and opinions of the census, and then some more interesting results about respondent awareness of the language assistance programs.

For this study, we considered a case resolved (and not in the *completed* category) if:

- there was no phone number available for the household and if telephone number research yielded no results,
 - if the number was disconnected or no longer in service,
- or if five attempts were made to reach the household at various times of the day, each yielding no contact.

We define a completed case as one in which all “essential” questions were answered. The “essential” questions are those about census awareness, the use of the English census form, the use of the language assistance programs, and non-response follow-up questions. A partial complete case resulted when the respondent answered “essential” questions about general census awareness and the use of the English census form. To examine the general cooperation rate, we also examined those cases in which the respondent did not answer at least one of the “essential” questions about general census awareness. These cases were not included in the analysis of results. Overall completion rates are given in Table 1 below (for both mailback and nonresponse followup groups):

Table 1. Preliminary Completion Rates

Outcome	<i>English</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
Completed	668	1236	1174	1178
Completion Rate	80.4 %	64.9 %	88.5 %	74.5 %
Partial Complete	11	62	37	94
Partial	20	113	34	112
Refusal	132	493	82	197
Totals	831	1904	1327	1581

Broad results on awareness, opinions

Please note that these results are preliminary, and we have not yet obtained results for all the different groups in question. However, it is safe to say that there was a general awareness of Census 2000 among our survey respondents, and for the most part, they understood the purpose of the census.

Respondents generally agreed that:

- census answers are not used against them,
- the promise of confidentiality can be trusted,
- and the law requires a response to the census.

There was some disagreement among the language groups, namely:

- English respondents were more likely to believe that the census does not include non-citizens,
- And Vietnamese respondents were more likely to disagree that the census matters for the family and community.

For the rest of the preliminary results, I will focus solely on the group in the category of speaking English “*Not at all*” who were enumerated in Non-response Follow-up. This group is of interest since they did not respond to the census in the first place, and their answers to this follow-up survey hopefully can give insight into reasons behind their not returning their census forms. Neither weights for this survey nor weights for the long-form sample have been included in these results. The following tables provide preliminary results.

Table 2 shows the results to a question evaluating census awareness.

Table 2. Were you expecting to get an English form?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
English	82.4 %
Russian	55.4 %
Spanish	82.0 %
Vietnamese	50.7 %

Table 3 shows the level of awareness of Questionnaire Assistance Centers.

Table 3. Did you hear about Questionnaire Assistance Centers?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
English	24.3 %
Russian	12.3 %
Spanish	43.7 %
Vietnamese	15.8 %

We asked respondents answering “No” to the previous question if they would have obtained help at a Questionnaire Assistance Center had they known about one (See Table 4).

Table 4. Would you have obtained help at a Questionnaire Assistance Center had you known about one?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
English	34.2 %
Russian	68.7 %
Spanish	90.8 %
Vietnamese	62.6 %

Of our follow-up survey respondents who were enumerated in Non-response follow-up and indicated that they speak English “not at all,” there appears to be a high interest in using a Questionnaire Assistance Center had they known about one.

We followed the same pattern of questioning when asking about the awareness and use of Telephone Questionnaire Assistance (See Table 5).

Table 5. Did you know about Telephone Questionnaire Assistance?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
English	55.0 %
Spanish	44.2 %
Vietnamese	19.7 %

Tables 6-10 show the same pattern of interest—respondents in this follow-up survey had a high interest in using the language programs had they known about them. See the following tables.

Table 6. Would you have called Telephone Questionnaire Assistance had you known about it?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
English	46.62 %
Spanish	92.6 %
Vietnamese	64.3 %

Table 7. Did you know about the Language Guide?

Language	<i>Percent “Yes”</i>
Russian	11.9 %
Spanish	33.5 %
Vietnamese	22.4 %

Table 8. Would you have used the Language Guide had you known about it?

<u>Language</u>	<u>Percent "Yes"</u>
Russian	83.1 %
Spanish	90.0 %
Vietnamese	74.6 %

Table 9. Did you hear about the Spanish/Vietnamese form?

<u>Language</u>	<u>Percent "Yes"</u>
Spanish	78.4 %
Vietnamese	42.5 %

Table 10. Would you have requested the form had you heard about it?

<u>Language</u>	<u>Percent "Yes"</u>
Spanish	89.1 %
Vietnamese	68.1 %

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

There were some specific challenges regarding the translation, the questionnaire design, asking for Person 1 during the introduction of the interview, lack of time to test the form, and the training.

Translation. Some of the issues that respondents raised regarding the translation of the Census form were the same issues that we faced with the translation of the questionnaire. We instructed the translators to keep the language simple, but not all of the issues were worked out when we started the interviewing. For instance, one Vietnamese interviewer attended a training session and was very excited to participate. She would have been an excellent interviewer. However, she called in the next day to say that she would not be able to interview since she had a difficult time reading written Vietnamese. She had been in the U.S. for over 20 years, and her command of the written language was not what it had been. She had received little schooling in her own country before arriving here. Other interviewers expressed concern that the language on the form was a little too formal.

Another issue occurred with the Russian translation. The phrase “census taker” in Question 45 (“Did a census taker visit you at your home...?”) was translated

as “census meter.” The Russian-speaking interviewers said that the word that was used for census taker was the same word that is used in spoken Russian for “odometer,” “machine,” and “gauge.” Our translators informed us later that their translation was correct, and one of the more educated interviewers agreed. However, she said that it is a more formal term, and while respondents would probably understand the question, they would still think of the “meter.” The Russian-speaking interviewers came up with another translation of this question (“Did a census representative...?”) and the call center supervisors posted this at every phone center. This took care of the problem.

It is our understanding that the Spanish translation was very good, and there were very few complaints from the interviewers about it. Still, the way Question 48 was worded in English (“How did you feel about participating in the Census?”) made it difficult to get a usable translation in Spanish. While the translation was correct, we feel it did not solicit the same types of responses that the English version did. Many Spanish-speaking respondents, upon being asked how they felt to have participated in the census, simply responded “*Me siento bien,*” or “I feel well.” It is unclear whether this response was given because it is a stock answer to the question “How do you feel?” or if the respondents truly felt that there were no issues with their answering the census questions.

Questionnaire design. During the interviews, we had to instruct the interviewers to re-order the introductory questions so that the correct person could be called to the phone and then the interviewers could state the mandatory information at the beginning of the survey. Otherwise, the interviewer might have gone through the whole introductory speech and then had to repeat it once the correct person was called to the phone.

There was a series of five questions that asked for the respondents’ level of agreement with certain statements about the census. This got very confusing for the respondents because the interviewers continually had to repeat the statement, “Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement.” During the questionnaire design, there was some discussion about the wording of the response choices. We felt that it might be difficult to relay this information over the phone. There was a suggestion to ask the respondent if he agreed or disagreed, and then probe to find the level of agreement or disagreement. We decided, however, to keep the response categories as they were because of comparison needs against other surveys.

Problems with interviewing only Person 1. We selected the sample based on the answers for Person 1. The interviewers had access to Person 1's name, age, sex, and language group. Most of the time, it seems that Person 1 was also the one that had filled out the form. Because we wanted to get the opinions of the person who actually filled out the form, there were occasions when Person 1 had to call someone else to the phone to answer the survey. This created some confusion with the introduction sequencing.

Testing the form. There were extremely tight deadlines to implement this survey, and there were delays in getting OMB approval. We were required to change the wording of many questions and even remove some in order to get the necessary approval. Because of these deadlines and the need to get the questionnaire out to the field as soon as possible (to reduce the recall error), we were unable to sufficiently test the questions. We tested the questionnaire sufficiently for the skip patterns, but we were unable to test the translated questionnaires before the survey. This would have helped identify some of the language issues that arose during the interviews.

Training. The English- and Spanish-speaking interviewers, for the most part, had extensive experience and training with telephone surveys. However, the Russian- and Vietnamese-speaking interviewers, for the most part, had never worked in a call center environment. This presented special challenges regarding training. The author (who presented the training), explained to the call center supervisors that the newer interviewers would need to be trained in telephone interviewing techniques. We provided the training on the specific questionnaire, and addressed issues that were specific to the languages. This type of training was a little bit disconcerting for the call center supervisors, as it required them to be more flexible. During the first few days of training and interviewing, we were able to monitor the English-, Spanish-, and Russian-speaking interviewers during their phone calls. This was good, since we caught many errors before the interviewers made them a habit. Based on those errors, we reviewed the procedures and issues we had discussed in training, and reiterated them to the Vietnamese operators. We did not have anyone to observe the Vietnamese operators, but during training, we had them do extra paired practicing. This is one of the limitations of the survey.

Timing of the waves. The original plan was to do the first wave of interviewing in May and June and have the second wave occur in August and September. This would have given the respondents in each wave the same amount of time, on average, from the original

response to the follow-up survey. Since the OMB approval delayed the beginning of the first wave to July, we then decided to push back the second wave interviewing to September and October. This proved to be a problem, however, for two reasons. First, the fiscal year began in October, and funding became a concern. Second, we discovered that since the Russian- and Vietnamese-speaking interviewers had been hired on a special non-citizen status, they were only allowed to work for a period of time spanning 60 business days, which was then modified to 60 *calendar* days, which significantly reduced the amount of time we could allot between waves. In fact, some of the interviewers that had been hired first had to be let go before finishing the second wave. We needed to train a few new interviewers for the second wave. This training went much more smoothly than the first one because many of the kinks and issues had been worked out. During the analysis of the responses, we will need to account for this discrepancy in starting times for the waves. This will most likely have an effect on recall error.

CURRENT CONCLUSIONS

Respondents were generally aware of the census and were expecting to get a form. Respondents viewed the language assistance programs as a good idea, but respondents did not know about them as much as they could have. It appears that for our follow-up survey respondents in the census non-response follow-up who speak English "*not at all*" would have used these programs had they known about them.

PATH FORWARD

This study provides very useful information about language groups, and is a report on a work in progress. We will use it as a springboard for further research.