

Spanish Respondent's Choice of Language of Survey Materials: Bilingual or English Only?

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Abstract

Nielsen has used self-reports recorded in a paper diary for television audience measurement since the 1950s. Nielsen sends bilingual Spanish and English materials to TV Ratings Diary service households that had any indication of Spanish usage in the household. This has long been assumed to be the best practice, as anyone in the household can use the materials whether they prefer to read English or Spanish. However, the bilingual materials may be perceived as more complex by survey respondents, but there was no empirical data to support that position. As viewing choices have increased and television technology has evolved, respondents increasingly have difficulty accurately and completely recording all viewing information in a paper-based diary.

In response, Nielsen recently developed a “mailable meter”, a smaller self-installed television meter that captures tuning data. With this system the respondents complete a very simple viewing log in lieu of the more complicated viewing diary. Nielsen has been conducting an ongoing series of methodological tests to determine the viability of this concept. As part of the research and development of this new system, in July 2008, Nielsen conducted a field test with more than 400 households in a heavily Hispanic market. In order to maximize the benefit of a more technological solution, one must still examine the burden placed on respondents in following instructions to complete the survey. Since this study focused on how Hispanic households would react to this new methodology, respondents were given the option of what type of materials (English only or bilingual) they would prefer to receive. Therefore, respondents in that study who spoke Spanish during recruitment calling, or answered a question that indicated that they or someone in their home was a Spanish speaker, were asked an additional question about their preference for the language of the log and survey instructional materials.

Key words: Bilingual Materials, Choice of language, audience measurement, media behavior

1. Acculturation

Increasingly in the survey industry, the concept of acculturation is coming to the forefront as an important consideration in survey design and methodology. Webster defines acculturation as “cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture”. When viewed from a survey participation perspective, the level of acculturation of the respondent is a critically important factor in how a Hispanic person perceives information and thus how they react to survey materials. Two of the most commonly used measures of acculturation are the language used at home and how well the respondent speaks English. Thus the language treatment given to a Hispanic target group must be an important consideration in survey planning.

2. Methodology

A random digit dial (RDD) sample of 9,586 phone numbers was selected in the El Paso, Texas market. The Nielsen Call Center recruited 459 households that agreed to install meters and complete logs of their households' viewing for one week. Of these 459 households, 431 were mailed survey packets. Of those 431 households mailed packets, 280 respondents indicated that they or someone in their home speaks Spanish. Therefore, these 280 respondents were asked their preference for language of viewing log and instructional materials and mailing of materials was based on that response. In addition, a post survey follow-up study was mailed to all households that received meter packets to gather information about their survey experiences.

3. Summary of Findings

Surprisingly the results showed that nearly three out of four respondents (73%, 203 of 280) to this question preferred English only materials. There was a predictably strong

connection between the amount of Spanish use in the home and a request for bilingual materials. Among Spanish dominant respondents (spoke only or mostly Spanish, or Spanish and English equally at home) 65% (70 of 108) requested bilingual materials. Conversely, only 4% (7 of 172) of non-Spanish dominant households requested bilingual materials.

- Among English only materials households only 4% reported that instructions were difficult
- Among bilingual materials households:
 - 66% reported looking at Spanish instructions more, 17% looked at both languages equally and 17 % looked at English more
 - 31% reported never looking at English instructions, but only 2% reported never looking at bilingual instructions
 - Only 2% reported that instructions were difficult
- Table 1 shows that nearly all respondents were OK with materials received, whether they were asked or not and regardless of the type they received.

4. Conclusions

The broad implication of this research may indicate a need to examine the methodologies one employs when sending survey materials to bilingual populations.

- The implication of this research is a need re-examine the methodologies one employs when sending survey materials to bilingual populations to maximize the usability of the survey instruments. Don't assume all bilinguals should receive bilingual materials.
- Providing a choice of language of materials for the bilingual survey respondent is an important consideration that may improve response rates and data quality.
- In order to maximize the benefit of a more technological solution, one must still examine the burden placed on respondents in following instructions to complete the survey.
- In considering what special treatments one might need to give unacculturated Hispanics, consider the importance of language used to this group.

Table 1. Received English only would have preferred bilingual?

	n	No	Yes	Didn't matter
Not asked preference on materials	111	92.8%	0.9%	6.3%
Requested English Only materials	123	74.0%	6.5%	19.5%