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Advance translation in the 5th round of the European Social Survey (ESS)

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Summary

To reduce the risk of measurement errors from intercultural problems or poor translations, a so called “advance translation” was carried out in Switzerland (French) and Poland (Polish) for the first time in ESS round 5 during the drafting stage of the English source questionnaire. The two advance translation teams performed a problem-oriented translation with the purpose to get input from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds *before* finalising the source questionnaire for cross-cultural implementation. Comments on translation-related problems ranged from linguistic or grammatical issues to wording, meaning, or intercultural aspects.

This working paper describes the advance translation procedure, gives some examples of the comments and changes made in the final source questionnaire, and provides ideas for further improvement and evaluation of the advance translation method.

Keywords: Questionnaire translation, translatability, multilingual surveys, translation quality, cross-cultural equivalence

Advance translation in the 5th round of the European Social Survey (ESS)

Brita Dorer¹

1. Introduction

In international – i.e. cross-cultural and cross-lingual – surveys, translation plays a crucial role, as a high level of translation quality of the survey instruments is essential for the quality of the resulting data. Producing good translations of survey instruments is, however, a more difficult task than many would think at first glance: in multilingual and multicultural surveys, translated questionnaires must, on the one hand, provide for linguistic and cultural appropriateness in all participating countries and respond to their function as survey instruments in each country. On the other hand, comparability between the various translations must be ensured in order to allow for comparability of the resulting data. Finding the best-possible solution between fluency in the target language and faithfulness to the source questionnaire is therefore considered as one of the most important goals to strive for in questionnaire translation (Kußmaul 2006).

Various methods have been introduced in survey research in order to improve questionnaire translation quality. Examples are the so-called ‘TRAPD’ approach, the team or committee approach (Harkness 2003), or translation verification (Dept, Ferrari, Wäyrynen 2010). These do, however, focus above all on the final translation process itself (this is the case for the team, committee or TRAPD approach) or on the translation results (this is the case for translation verification).

However, also the *source questionnaire* plays a major role for the quality of the resulting questionnaire translations: “Achieving optimal translations begins at the design stage.” (Smith 2004, p. 447).

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A new method has been developed which consists in systematically checking the source questionnaire *before* it is finalised and signed off for translation into multiple language versions. Because of their specific focus on both understanding questions to be asked and on parsing them with the purpose of a later translation in mind, translators are perceived to be good proof-readers of draft source questionnaires (Braun and Harkness 2005, p. 103). From this idea Janet Harkness developed, in the 1990s, the method of performing '*advance translations*'. Both experienced survey translators and survey researchers are asked to translate a pre-final version of the source questionnaire *in advance* of being finalised and to comment on this *ex-ante* translation process. They are asked to perform a problem-oriented translation in order to point out problems (a) they encounter in their ex-ante translation or see for the final translation process, and (b) impairing the later cross-national implementation of the final survey instrument in all participating countries.

Translation (performed in advance) is thus used as a method for enhancing and improving the final translation process before it actually starts: "When source instruments can still be changed, translators can report back and thus help improve the source questionnaire" (Harkness 2003, p. 46). Translation is used as a "problem spotting tool" (Harkness 2007) and thereby as a means of improving the translatability of the source questionnaire and also the cross-cultural implementation of the resulting cross-national survey instrument.

This may appear a huge additional step to be integrated into the – often already quite tight – schedule of major cross-national studies. Is it worth consuming additional time and funds (in most cases, organising such *advance translations* will require additional funding for staff to be paid for an extra amount of work) for this new method?

An advance translation was for the first time implemented in a cross-national social sciences survey in the 5th round of the European Social Survey (ESS). Two national teams of the ESS participated in this exercise: the Swiss team from FORS – Swiss foundation for research in social sciences, Lausanne, and the Polish team from the Centre of Sociological Research – Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw. Both teams performed ex-ante translations of the new parts of the English ESS source questionnaire to be used in round 5 and commented on their work extensively.

This paper describes and analyses this process, draws first conclusions on the usefulness of this advance translation method and points out suggestions for future improvements².

2. Other types of ex-ante translation or translatability assessments for survey translations³

Although so far no ‘advance translation’ exercise as such had been executed in the context of a major international survey, other examples should be mentioned where (previous or "ex-ante") translation is considered to be a useful element during the drafting stage of questionnaires for cross-cultural implementation.

Some surveys use source questionnaires in two different languages. In cases where a ‘second’ source version is a translation of a ‘first’ source version⁴, this translation process also helps improve the source version(s) as, for example, “problems and residual errors in the international source version” (Dept, Ferrari and Wäyrynen 2010) can be detected and removed. An example is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), “...the first major international survey using two different source languages ...” (OECD 2009, p. 88):

“This parallel development of the two source versions assisted in ensuring that items were as culturally neutral as possible, identified instances of wording that could be modified to simplify translation into other languages, and indicated where additional translation notes were needed to ensure the required accuracy in translating items to other languages.” (OECD 2009, p. 35)

“In this respect, the development of the French source version served as a pilot translation, and contributed to providing National Project Managers with source material that was somewhat easier to translate or contained fewer potential translation problems than it would have had if only one source had been developed.” (OECD 2009, p. 87)

Dept, Ferrari and Wäyrynen (2008)⁵ recommend to perform “... ex ante translation in at least one language ...” even in the case of limited budgets.

² By the time finalizing this working paper, an advance translation has been initiated in the 6th round of the European Social Survey. This exercise should, however, not be considered in detail nor compared to the round 5 experiment in this paper.

³ The fields of controlled language and translation-oriented writing which are relevant amongst others for technical translations and technical documentations (cf. e.g. Göpferich 2008) will be treated in a later version of this paper.

⁴ The two source versions may also be developed in parallel with no translation being involved.

⁵ All three authors are senior staff at cApStAn, a service provider specializing in developing linguistic quality assurance and linguistic quality control systems for use in multilingual, multinational and multicultural surveys. cApStAn has been involved in many important international surveys since 2000, amongst others PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, PIAAC, SHARE, and ESS.

In the medical field, the *MAPI Research Institute* recommends performing a so-called ‘Translatability Assessment’ of Patient-Reported Outcomes (PRO) for cross-cultural use, and also offers this as a service⁶. Native target speakers who are linguists experienced with “linguistic validation and therefore fully aware of the requirements for linguistic validation”⁷ and also “sensitive to cross-cultural differences in the context of PRO”⁸ instruments analyse pre-final questionnaires with the following questions in mind: What does the original question measure and does the translated formulation clearly reflect this? Are there any elements that might be inappropriate in the target language/culture? How can the original be improved for facilitating translation? (Conway, Patrick, Acquadro 2008). MAPI thus recommends that experienced linguists analyse, comment on and recommend a re-formulation of pre-final source questionnaires before being finalised in order to facilitate translation and cross-cultural implementation. However, neither an ex-ante nor an advance translation is carried out in this method.

3. Advance translation in the European Social Survey, round 5 – method used

The national teams from two ESS⁹ countries participated in this experiment: Poland for Polish and Switzerland for French. The reason why only two countries were involved was the fact that the budget earmarked for the advance translation in ESS round 5 only covered costs from two teams. The selection of the teams followed different criteria: first, countries needed to volunteer for this exercise; second, the countries chosen needed to cover – together with other countries carrying out different commenting exercises before the fieldwork period, such as the pilot survey, National Coordinators commenting in a specific task group ‘shadowing’ the questionnaire design process or also the multinational questionnaire design teams (cf. European Social Survey 2009) – a broad range of cultural and linguistic groups participating in the ESS.

They worked on the ESS 5 pilot questionnaire, more or less in parallel with the fielding of the pilot study, that is, in early 2010. Both teams delivered their advance translation comments

⁶ MAPI Institute is an international company with a special interest in advancing the worldwide use of patient-reported and clinical assessments through linguistic validation for appropriate cross-cultural use and interpretation. Mapi Institute (MAPI). *Translatability Assessment*. <http://www.mapi-institute.com/linguistic-validation/services/translatabilityassessment> (accessed 29 December 2010).

⁷ Information received from Christelle Giroudet from MAPI Institute on 12 October 2011.

⁸ Information received from Christelle Giroudet from MAPI Institute on 12 October 2011.

⁹ More information on the European Social Survey can be found at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>.

two months after receiving the source text and about three months before the source questionnaire was finalised.

To reduce costs, a split approach was used, that is, both countries translated only parts of the questionnaire. Items of particular interest in the view of finalising the source questionnaire were selected, mostly from new items or items that had been modified from former ESS rounds. Table 1 gives an overview of the assignment of the different sections to the two national teams.

Table 1: Items selected for the ESS round 5 advance translation (in total 108 items)

Section	Items selected	Countries doing the advance translation
Section A (Media use)	Three new introductory texts	Poland
Section B (Trust in criminal justice)	The entire section (63 items)	Switzerland
Section C (Demographic questions)	New items were selected, amongst others referring to marital status. (8 items)	Poland and Switzerland
Section D (Work, family and well-being)	New items (34 items)	Poland

The two advance translation teams followed the recommended ESS translation process of parallel translation and team discussion¹⁰. Both teams followed the ‘Optimum procedure’ (see below in Appendix 1): Two parallel advance translations and a subsequent review meeting, including the two translators and a third reviewing person. At least one of the translating persons was supposed to be an experienced (survey) translator. The teams were asked to perform a problem-oriented translation, aimed at gathering additional intercultural input before finalising the source questionnaire. Only the comments received from the two teams were analyzed in the further process, not their translations as such.

3.1. Composition of the teams

It has been suggested by Braun and Harkness that the teams performing an advance translation include both experienced translators and survey researchers. If the translations were only made by survey researchers, there may be the risk of poorer translations from a translation science/linguistic point of view; e.g. word-by-word translations oriented too much towards the source questionnaire may be the consequence. If, however, only trained translators were to translate, there may be a risk that they do not understand the

¹⁰ A discussion of the ‘team approach’ recommended for survey questionnaire translation can be found in Behr (2009).

measurement issues to a sufficient extent (Braun and Harkness 2005, p. 104)¹¹. In ESS 5, in both cases, the National Coordinator, i.e. an experienced survey researcher, acted as the reviewer/adjudicator, and at least one trained and experienced translator was involved in the translation.

3.2. Documents and instructions given to the participating national teams

Before starting the advance translation, both national teams received the “Instructions for the advance translation project of the European Social Survey (ESS)”, enclosed in Appendix 1, which all participating parties were asked to follow. They were instructed to: (a) execute a problem-oriented translation; this means that if a translation was unproblematic not to spend too much time on finding a *perfect* formulation. To mention all the problems encountered was considered as more important than producing a perfect translation. (b) The problems were to be described and documented in the following way: First, the participants should choose a problem category (see Table 2), using the drop-down list in the “problem category” column. In case of doubt about which category to select, they were told that “it is more important to have identified a problem than having assigned it to the right category” (European Social Survey 2009). (c) All participating parties were asked to then comment on their problems in a separate column in their own words. (d) Whenever possible, a solution for the problem mentioned should be given. (e) The entire documentation should be written in English to ensure that it could be understood by all participating partners in this international project.

The two national teams received an identical excel spread sheet containing all the items in English to be worked upon. This sheet contained different columns:

- a) Three columns for the English source questionnaire: Item number/type of unit; Source text; Annotations;
- b) Nine columns for the advance translation: for each of Advance translation 1 (first translator), Advance translation 2 (second translator), and Review (decisions taken in the review/adjudication session), there was a translation, a problem category, and a comment column.

¹¹ A description of the recommended choice of the team members can be found in the ESS Round 5 Translation Guidelines (European Social Survey 2010).

Exhibit 1: Extract from the Excel spread sheet used for the advance translation in ESS 5

Item number / type of unit	Source Text	Translation annotations (footnotes in word document - not to be translated)	Advance Translation 1	Problem Category	Comments 1	Advance Translation 2	Problem Category
D7	Using this card, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.		Na ile zgadza się P. lub nie zgadza z następującym stwierdzeniem. Przy odpowiedzi proszę posłużyć się kartą.	No comment		Posługując się tą kartą, proszę powiedzieć, na ile zgadza się P. lub nie zgadza z następującym stwierdzeniem.	Other
	The government ⁵⁷ should			Grammar	A more exact translation renders the phrase a little awkward: "...aby zapobiegać		Meaning

While the two translators and the reviewer were free to write in their own words in the 'Advance Translation' and in the 'Comments' columns, the 'Problem Category' columns contained drop-down lists in every cell with the pre-specified problem categories, where the translators and reviewers each had to select one category (an example of the work in the different columns is depicted in the excel spread sheet in Appendix 1).

Table 2: Problem categories to be used in ESS round 5¹²

Abbreviations of Problem Categories	Definition of Problem Categories
NC	No Comment.
AL	It would be appropriate to use a different AL phabet in the target language, e.g. for lettering the answer categories A, B or C.
CI	<p>Culturally Inappropriate / requires adaptation, if allowed. This category covers diverse things such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source text refers to entities or situations that do not exist in the target culture, e.g. <i>tram, choice of doctors</i>. • Source text refers to entities or situations that do exist in the target culture but not in the same way as in the source culture or as intended in the source text, e.g. <i>work contract</i>. • The target text could be understood on two levels if a 'close' translation is undertaken. <i>E.g.:</i> In China, the question 'How many children live in your household?' could be understood as a political question asking for adherence to the one-child-policy rather than understood as a simple question asking for the household composition. • Measurement, currency, etc. require adaptation (yard, €, etc.) • Inappropriate assumptions, do not work in target culture.
DE	<p>Any comments regarding flawed source text DEsign, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • missing response categories; • questions difficult to answer; • double-barreled questions; • double negatives; • unbalanced scale; • inconsistent use of words, elements.
DI	<p>Differentiation in the source text cannot be kept up in the target text, such as <i>invoice</i> and <i>bill</i> – these terms may have the same translation in the target language. Or: differentiation is not clear, e.g., it is not clear what the difference between <i>insult</i> and <i>abuse</i> is.</p>

¹² This is the list of problem categories as used in the advance translation in ESS5. As this was the first time an advance translation was carried out in practice, not all categories proved to work in the intended way (see chapter 5), and so it has been decided to amend this list for the future, for instance for the advance translation in the 6th round of the ESS.

(Table 2 Continued)	
GR	<p>Comments pertain, among others, to the following GRammatical or syntactical areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g., syntactical particularities are difficult to retain in the target text without increasing the burden of target culture respondents or making the text awkward in the target language (e.g. “<i>do you, - or would you -</i>”); • E.g., same syntactical structures cannot be maintained (e.g. split-up items such as “... <i>being viewed a) as competent, b) as capable, c) as moral, d) with respect</i>”); • E.g., it is not clear which part of the sentence goes with which part. • E.g., “<i>Before what age are ...</i>” is difficult to render, it must be rephrased in the target culture, which means loosing or adding a year to the calculation. • E.g., “<i>if at all</i>” can only be rendered by an additional sentence and thus makes the question more complex and burdensome.
ID	This is an ID iomatic expression in English. Specify the meaning or rephrase the source text.
ME	<p>This comment encompasses many different meaning scenarios, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of the source text is unclear, the translation is difficult unless further help is provided regarding the intended meaning of the concept/term; • the scope of meaning is difficult to cover in the target text; • gender-references are not clear and/or problematic; • Pronouns are not clear or problematic (e.g., <i>you</i>).
RC	<p>Special case Response Categories, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to translate the response categories, especially the qualifiers. A literal translation does not work. • The response categories in the target text need to take into account number and gender; therefore, what remains unchanged in the source text undergoes change in the target text (<i>bon</i> and <i>bonne</i> in French depending on the noun they refer to).
O	O ther (please specify)

4. Advance translation comments and findings

4.1. Problem categories chosen by the advance translation teams for their comments

The problem categories were selected to a different extent. Table 3 shows the distribution of the categories as selected by the teams – by questionnaire section. Every comment made

during the entire advance translation process was counted here, i.e. coming from advance translators 1 and 2 and from the review meetings.

Looking at the categories chosen shows the types of comments made by the teams. This should, however, be put into context: as explained below in the Instructions document, the countries had been told that it was more important to provide any comment at all than to use the 'right' category. So in some cases, the comments made would have fitted with another category too.

Table 3 shows that the highest number of comments related to Design, which may seem a rather less translation-related problem category. In many cases this reveals how much the teams commented also on questionnaire design issues and on logical or more structural problems or questions within the source questionnaire. But often this category was also used for asking clarification about certain terms or words, thus bearing a higher potential impact on translation. Examples are "family income" (see Table 5), where the advance translation team asked whether the concept of 'family' is to be kept or if not rather 'household income' should be referred to. A net distinction between the concepts of 'household' and 'family' is not only important for measurement purposes, but also when it comes to translation (cf. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and Warner 2008). Also when one team asked for a definition of 'paid work' (and labelling this comment under the Design category), the impact may be both design- and translation-related.

With the next two categories, Grammar and Meaning, the connection to translation difficulties is more obvious: (a) In the context of the Grammar category, the teams often pointed out problems translating the source questionnaire into their language from a grammatical or syntactical point of view. [An example from the Polish team: Item C28a: Around how large a proportion of the household income do you provide yourself? Comment from the Polish team: "Change of subject in the sentence because 'provide' is somewhat hard to translate. PL reads: 'How large a proportion of the total household income does your income represent?'"] (b) In the Meaning category, the teams would often ask for more clarification for their translations. [For example: B7: In the past 2 years, did the police in [country] stop you or make contact with you⁹ for any reason? ^[9] 'You' as in 'the police stopped or made contact with the respondent personally'. Comment / query from the Swiss team: "The exact meaning of 'being stopped' is difficult to be translate: being arrested, asked questions, talked to in the street? Render by something like 'call in' (interpeller) and 'contacted' (contacter).] Because languages differ in their grammatical and syntactical structure, resolving such grammar-related problems in the final source questionnaire may be helpful especially for

those languages or language groups having pointed out the specific problems, whereas meaning problems will presumably have a more immediate impact on a broader range of languages (see also chapter 4.3).

In addition, Table 3 also reveals problems the teams encountered with the categories offered in ESS 5. The teams suggested – and used – the new categories ‘Consistency’ and ‘Idiom/Wording’ (for the newly suggested categories, see also chapter 5). In 7 instances, invalid categories were mentioned. This further underlines the need for more clarification about the intended use of the categories in the future.

Table 3: Number of problem flags of the provided categories in the advance translation in ESS 5

Problem category	Number of occurrence in Section A ¹³ (P)	Number of occurrence in Section B (CH)	Number of occurrence in Section C (P+CH)	Number of occurrence in Section C, items C41-42 ¹⁴ (P+CH)	Number of occurrence in Section D (P)	Number of occurrence in total
AL (Alphabet)	-	-	-	-	-	-
CI (Culturally Inappropriate)	1	11	1	9	4	26
DE (Design)	2	23	13	8	32	78
DI (Differentiation)	1	-	6	-	5	12
ID (Idiomatic Expression)	-	21	2	1	3	27
ME (Meaning)	4	6	11	3	26	50
RC (Response Categories)	-	1	1	4	5	11
GR (Grammar)	1	31	8	1	16	57
O (Other)	1	8	1	2	16	28
Several Categories	4	3	5	4	8	24
[NEW/Other: CONSISTENCY]			1	-	-	1
[NEWLY SUGGESTED: IDIOM/WORDING]	3 NEWLY SUGGESTED CATEGORY: IDIOM/WORDING			1 [NEW/Other: WORDING]	9 [NEW/Other: IDIOM/WORDING]	13
Invalid categories mentioned (abbreviations unknown or similar)		5	-	2	-	7

4.2. Forwarding the advance translation comments to the questionnaire design teams

The advance translation comments as received from the two national teams were first of all analysed and summarised by the ESS translation expert, i.e. by the author of this paper. For each ESS 5 questionnaire section, a word file was set up containing a table with the following columns (see Exhibit 2):

- a) Item number/Part of questionnaire
- b) Question

¹³ For the different sections in the questionnaire, see Table 1.

¹⁴ Items C41 and C42 (on the past and current marital status and relationships of the respondents) are listed separately here and the advance translation comments were sent to the questionnaire design team in a separate file from the other section C items. This for the following reason: these were the only new items in section C and they were particularly complex, containing several marital status / relationship categories (for which it was highly relevant to receive comments on the translatability and cross-cultural applicability) and an implementation note. They were treated separately in the questionnaire design process.

- c) Advance translation 1 – Problem Category
- d) Advance translation 1 – Comment
- e) Advance translation 2 – Problem Category
- f) Advance translation 2 – Comment
- g) Review – Problem Category
- h) Review – Comment
- i) Comment/recommendation [of ESS translation expert]

In the case of sections for which the advance translation was executed by both national teams, columns c) to h) were repeated for both languages. In the column 'comment/recommendation', the ESS translation expert analysed and commented on the comments from the advance translations and from the review session(s), listed and/or summarised them. These word tables were then forwarded to the ESS questionnaire design teams (QDTs)¹⁵ in order to be considered when finalising the source questionnaire wording.

¹⁵ In the ESS, there are two questionnaire design teams (QDTs) in each round, one for each rotating module. (The rotating modules are the part of the ESS source questionnaire that is new in each round. Therefore the advance translation mainly focuses on these modules.)

Exhibit 2: Example of advance translation comments in a word table, as sent to the questionnaire design teams

Item number / Part of questionnaire	Question	AT1 – Problem Category	AT1 – Comment	AT2 – Problem Category	AT2 – Comment	Review – Problem Category	Review – Comment	Comment / recommendation Brita
D7	Using this card, please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement.			Other	Same wording as in previous ESS rounds			-
	<p>The government⁵⁷ should do much more to prevent people falling⁵⁸ into poverty'.</p> <p>[57] 'Government' in the sense of <u>all</u> governments and NOT only the people now governing / present regime. The 'state' can be used instead of government if appropriate.</p> <p>[58] 'Falling' - moving from</p>	<u>Grammar</u>	A more exact translation renders the phrase a little awkward: "...aby zapobiegać popadaniu ludzi w biedę" instead of "... by ludzie nie popadali w biedę"	<u>Meaning</u>	"Government" (at all levels) has no single equivalent in PL and is always difficult to translate. Options available are "the state" or "the authorities"	<u>Several categories</u>	ME: "Government" (at all levels) has no single equivalent in PL and is always difficult to translate. Options available are "the state" or "the authorities". "The state" was selected here. GR: "To prevent people from..." has no direct syntactic equivalent. PL text	- "the government" difficult to translate, but I think the annotation is sufficient - "To prevent people from..." is, syntactically, difficult to express in PL. I think this is fine and no change is needed.

4.3. Consideration of advance translation comments by the questionnaire design teams

In their finalisation process, the questionnaire design teams (QDTs) considered mainly the last column from the ESS translation expert, which contained the analysed and summarised advance translation comments. The immediate comments from the advance translation teams were considered to a much lesser extent.

The way in which both QDTs took the advance translation comments into account was documented in different ways. For both rotating modules, templates were kept and updated during the questionnaire design process, containing amongst others the advance translation comments. However, only in the case of one module (*Work, Family and Well-Being: The Implications of Economic Recession*), was the feedback of the questionnaire design team on the advance translation comments documented – allowing a more direct idea of the QDT's assessment of the advance translation comments. In the case of the other module (*Trust in the Police and the Criminal Courts: A Comparative European Analysis*), the advance translation comments were just listed but not commented upon any further in the template.

The ESS translation expert was not directly involved in the process of deciding on how to follow-up on the advance translation comments. Therefore, to know how the QDTs had reacted on the advance translation comments, an ex-post analysis of the Question Module Design Templates needed to be carried out. For both modules the extent to which the advance translation comments were taken on board by the design teams can be traced back by analysing the final questionnaire and comparing it to the pilot questionnaire.

This leads to the following results: The numbers given in Table 4 result from merely counting how often the final questionnaire wording reflected the comments made in the advance translation: In total, **108** items were commented on in the advance translation. In **164** 'lines'¹⁶, comments were made by one or both advance translation team(s). Out of these 164, in **50** lines the changes made in the final ESS 5 questionnaire were either completely or partly according to the advance translation comments. In **66** lines, the advance translation comments were not addressed with the corresponding changes. In **36** lines, it is not obvious if the change applied was triggered by the advance translation comment or by another comment or analysis made during the questionnaire design process, e.g. from the pilot

¹⁶ 'Item' refers to individual questions in the ESS 5 pilot questionnaire; 'line' refers to various instances contained in the questionnaire, where translations were required, such as intros, bridges, questions, response categories, each in a separate line in the advance translation excel template.

analysis results¹⁷. In the remaining **12** lines, the advance translation comment was either not relevant, did not clearly suggest a change (it was for instance only a question) or the question/item was changed or deleted in any case, for example because of poor question performance or pilot findings, such as high non-response or unexpected correlation.

Table 4: Distribution of advance translation comments leading to a change in the final questionnaire or not

Category	Advance translation comments reflected in the final questionnaire wording?	Number of occurrences
1	Advance translation comments leading to changes in the final questionnaire, which are in the direction of the advance translation comments (entirely or only partly in this direction).	50
2	Advance translation comments leading to no changes in the final questionnaire.	66
3	Changes in the final questionnaire where it is not sure if they could have been caused by the advance translation comments.	36

The changes applied to the questionnaire wording – i.e. Category 1 in Table 4, which is most important for us in this context – have different forms (examples of these types of changes made in ESS round 5 are listed in Table 5):

- Changes in the wording:
Often elements in the source questionnaire were reworded; in many cases this made the text easier to translate. However, as only one or two languages were to comment in this advance translation, only lexically caused translation problems for one or two language pairs (French-English and/or Polish-English) could be taken on board here and probably other languages or language groups would have requested other changes in many instances. This underlines why ideally as many languages and cultures as possible should be involved in an advance translation.

¹⁷ As mentioned in chapter 3, the advance translation was carried out in parallel to the pilot surveys in Bulgaria and UK. The following analyses of the pilot surveys were considered by the questionnaire design teams besides the advance translation, when finalizing the source questionnaire: Scales / Factor analysis, Item non-response, Bulgaria fieldwork report, UK fieldwork report, Results of Supplementary tests, JUSTIS Project results of round 2 Cognitive Interviewing (for the module on Trust in Justice), QDT analysis. This paper does not analyze how the findings from the pilot survey analyses and from the advance translation compare to each other, whether the findings were rather concordant, supplementary, competing or contradicting each other. The findings from the pilot analyses were not studied in detail by the author of this paper and they are not considered here as this would exceed the scope of this working paper.

- Changes in the design/of a concept used:

In many instances, the advance translation teams detected weaknesses in the design of questions or in the use of concepts¹⁸ (see also Table 3 showing the high number of occurrence of the problem category 'Design'). These changes are not typically to be caused by the advance translation as often, the issue is less a translation or intercultural problem but rather a weakness in the design or structure of the source questionnaire. However, in the questionnaire design stage, of course, each and every comment on the draft stage of the source questionnaire is a valuable input. As discussed in chapter 4.1, changes to the wording and to design/concept used are often linked to each other, like the example of 'household income' vs. 'family income' given in Table 5.

- Changes in the syntax:

Sometimes the syntax in the source text was changed. This could (a) be connected to a language-pair specific problem to translate certain syntactical structures from English into a fluent and 'natural' language use in the target language; or (b) consist in detecting syntactical weaknesses in the source text which would be difficult to translated in most of the languages (the example given in Table 5 consisted in splitting up a sentence into two parts which was felt to be too long and cumbersome in the pilot questionnaire version). For the language pairs involved this kind of changes will in most of the cases improve translatability and translation quality; however, probably in many cases again the findings in this category are language specific – so again it would be ideal having as many languages or at least language groups (with their different syntactical structures) as possible involved in the advance translation.

- Changes in the design: interculturally problematic choice of examples:

One specific design element in cross-cultural survey research is the use of examples. When it has been decided to use an example in the source questionnaire¹⁹, it must be ensured that it 'works' in all target languages and cultures; there is no use giving an example that is not understood or even misleading in a target language or culture. Table 5 shows an example which was felt misleading by one of the advance translation teams and has therefore been removed from the source text. This contributed rather to enhancing cross-cultural implementation of the source questionnaire in the various ESS

¹⁸ Here the author does not refer to the – content-related – concepts as part of the questionnaire design process, but to linguistic concepts.

¹⁹ The advantages and pitfalls of using examples in cross-cultural surveys should not be discussed in this paper.

countries than facilitating its translation. Also for this category, input from as many cultures as possible is required in order to learn about as many sensitivities as possible from the different cultures.

- Annotations added:

In the ESS, annotations (i.e. footnotes) are added to the source questionnaire in order to explain certain words or expressions to the translators / for the translation process. They are thus not meant to be translated – but are an important element of the ESS translation process as often they precise in which sense certain elements in the source questionnaire should be understood and translated. One purpose of the advance translation was to find out where the translators needed more clarification in order to produce correct and precise translations. In many cases footnotes were added as a consequence of the advance translation comments, and these changes did presumably contribute to streamlining and improving all translations produced of the ESS 5 source questionnaire.

- Footnotes deleted:

In some instances, footnotes were also deleted because the advance translation teams felt that they were misleading. Both the act of adding and of removing (or also amending) footnotes from the source questionnaire is directly linked to the final translation process and therefore an important effect of the advance translation.

Table 5: Types of amendments in the final questionnaire, influenced by the advance translation comments

Types of amendments in final questionnaire influenced by advance translation comments	Examples
Changes in the wording	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire (B21): <i>To what extent do you think it is always your duty to accept the decisions made by the police in [country]?</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: - "Accept" in the sense of "comply/obey/follow"? [<i>accept is inappropriate, implies legitimacy. We need to adapt with "soumettre" which implies acts as well.</i>]</p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire (D18): <i>To what extent is it your duty to back⁵⁵ the decisions made by the police even when you disagree with them?</i> [55]: <i>Back in the sense of 'support'.</i> ⇔ 'accept' replaced by 'back' with an annotation</p>
Changes in the design/of a concept used	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire (D9): <i>Please tell me whether or not each of the following has happened to you in the last three years? [...] Have you had to manage on a lower family income?</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: Is that "family income" or "household income"? How about respondents who live alone, in one-member households? Would they consider their income to be "family income"? (there is no family/no family filter before this question) Not clear what "family income" refers to. → Add a translation note? [<i>Does this situation refer to young people who are fully supported by their parents?</i>]</p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire (G8): Using this card, please tell me to what extent each of the following has applied to you in the last three years. [...] <i>I have had to manage on a lower household income.</i> ⇔ 'family income' replaced by 'household income'</p>
Changes in the syntax	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire (C40b): <i>How useful would what you have learnt during this training or education be if you wanted to go and work for a different employer?</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: - Should we split this long sentence? E.g.: Now, please think of what you have learnt during this training or education. How useful would it be if you wanted to go and work for a different employer?</p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire (F70b): <i>Now please think about what you have learnt during this training or education. How useful would what you have learnt be if you wanted to go and work for a different employer or firm?</i></p> <p>⇔ syntax changed according to advance translation comment</p>

<i>(Table 5 Continued)</i>	
Changes in the design: interculturally problematic choice of examples	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire INTERVIEWER NOTE (B49): [...] <i>'Community service refers to a sentence OTHER than a prison sentence or fine where the offender is asked to perform a task or tasks that benefit the community e.g. cleaning litter from the streets'</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: - In some countries, community service is not performed in the public – perhaps we can add another example which is less 'seen' by the public? <i>[In Switzerland, community service would not normally be performed in the street or in the public space. Too high level of language and abstract definition.]</i></p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire: Interviewer Note (D38): <i>'Community service refers to a sentence OTHER than a prison sentence or fine where the offender is asked to perform a task or tasks that benefit the community'</i> ⇔ example deleted</p>
Annotations added	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire (B24): <i>The police in [country] generally have the same sense of right and wrong as I do.</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: - Precise what is meant by "right and wrong"? - Police should not decide about right or wrong themselves.</p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire (D21): <i>The police generally have the same sense of right and wrong⁷ as I do.</i> [7] <i>'Sense of right and wrong' in terms of 'feeling of morally right or wrong from a personal point of view'.</i> ⇔ explanation added in a footnote</p>
Footnotes deleted	<p>EXAMPLE:</p> <p>1. ESS 5 Pilot Questionnaire (C11a): <i>Do you think that your job is/was considered by your employer to be...</i> RC: <i>...a temporary or fixed term⁴⁵ job lasting less than 12 months,</i> ^[45] <i>'Fixed term' means a fixed amount of time whereas 'temporary' means no duration is specified.</i></p> <p>2. Advance translation comment: Meaning of "temporary" and "fixed term" not clear, the difference is not obvious and the footnote does not really help. [...]</p> <p>3. ESS 5 Final Questionnaire (F23a): <i>When your job started do you think that it was considered by your employer to be...READ OUT... [...]</i> <i>...a temporary or fixed term job lasting less than 12 months</i> ⇔ footnote deleted because it was misleading</p>

When counting the number of changes actually applied to the source questionnaire in the direction of the advance translation comments and comparing these to the problem categories selected for these comments (see chapter 4.1), there is no evidence that specific problem categories would have caused more or less changes than others. In general, the

following categories had very often been selected in items changed in the direction of the advance translation comments: Culturally inappropriate – Grammar – Wording/Idiom (new category suggested by the advance translation teams) – Meaning – Design. This shows that, in total, all categories were considered by the questionnaire design teams to a comparable extent and that the categories all have a comparable relevance for finalising the source questionnaire.

Looking at the type of changes applied to source questionnaire items as a consequence of the advance translation comments (see Table 5), it can be seen that they mainly consisted in (a) rewording the source text, i.e. finding new words or expressions for the source questionnaire or also changing the source text from a syntactical point of view (e.g. splitting up sentences or creating sub-clauses); and (b) in adding footnotes/annotations or modifying existing footnotes in order to give additional guidance for the translation process. Both types of changes (this is, rewording the source text and adding footnotes) are changes that would typically have been expected in view of facilitating the final translation process.

5. Summary/Preliminary results/Suggestions for the future

An advance translation was for the first time performed in an international social science survey in ESS round 5. This paper described the procedures and presents first results. For a final assessment, the method however still needs to be more thoroughly analysed.

A general strength of the advance translation method is the room provided for early input to the source questionnaire development, before it is finalised, through actual translations – as it has been stated that translators are good proof-readers of draft questionnaires (Braun and Harkness 2005, p. 103). These translations are performed in a systematic manner, *ex-ante*, under the same conditions as the translations of the final source questionnaire, following the translation strategy recommended for translating survey questionnaires, i.e. the so called ‘team approach’. As long as the questionnaire design in the source language is not yet completed, there is still the chance to modify the source text; translation-related problems to be expected can still be considered and resolved, as can be critical points for a later cross-cultural implementation of the survey. In the example discussed in this paper, this chance of making advance translation comments was widely used, and a relatively high number of changes was made at least in the direction of these advance translation comments. So the overall results suggest that advance translation may have been a useful step.

Potential weak points of the advance translation method may, first, be the efforts in terms of organisation, time, staff and financial means necessary in order to carry out an advance translation bearing valuable results. This needs, however, to be weighted against the contribution that a higher translation quality means to the overall quality of a multilingual survey.

Furthermore, as the steps of commenting, interpreting and understanding are based around language, there is always a somewhat subjective nature in an advance translation, and the results are not easily reproducible. This is, however, addressed by having several persons involved in each of these steps, resulting in a larger variety of input.

Weaknesses detected in the advance translation exercise discussed in this paper are rather related to the specific implementation of the method in this specific case, i.e. the 5th round of the ESS. Therefore, weaknesses detected during this specific advance translation exercise may be translatable into general recommendations on how to implement the advance translation method on a wider basis.

Findings from the advance translation experiment carried out in ESS round 5, leading to some general methodological recommendations for the implementation of future advance translations inside and outside the ESS²⁰:

1. A simple count of the number of items changed in the final ESS 5 source questionnaire from advance translation comments shows that the advance translation did have an impact on finalising the ESS round 5 questionnaire: In 50 out of 164 commented lines changes were made according to the advance translation; in 36 lines the advance translation may have been the cause for changes; and in 66 the advance translation comments were not heeded in the final wording. Having, in more than half of all 'lines' studied, changes in the direction of the advance translation comments or where it is at least possible that they had been caused by the advance translation comments, seems to be a quite high percentage and thus overall impact of the advance translation. However, as it was not always obvious if changes had really been triggered by advance translation comments or by other steps during the questionnaire design process, such as the pilot analysis, one important finding is that the *documentation* needs to be improved in future exercises: the reaction of the questionnaire developers/questionnaire design

²⁰ The author wishes to acknowledge also the comments made by both national teams on their experiences and suggestions for the future.

teams to each and every advance translation comment should be consistently documented on an item-by-item basis.

2. As for the *problem categories*, both national teams and the author found that some of the categories were either not clearly defined or not correctly used. For example the 'ID/Idiomatic Expression' category was often used in the sense of problems finding the right 'Wording/Idiom' – and not in its original sense (i.e. to point out idiomatic expressions in the source text that are problematic to keep in the target version). So a new category 'Wording/Formulation' was asked for by the teams. Another category that the teams missed was 'Consistency' in order to clearly point out consistency-related issues. In addition there should be a combined 'Grammar/Syntax' category. The category 'Alphabet' was not applied at all and should not be used any more in this form in future ESS exercises. As a consequence, the choice and definition of problem categories was modified when initiating the advance translation in the 6th round of the European Social Survey.
3. Many comments made are highly language-/culture- and country-specific (see chapter 4.3). In order to gain preliminary input from as many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as possible, it is therefore recommended to perform an advance translation in *as many countries and languages as possible*.

For an overall judgement of the usefulness of the advance translation, it is, however, necessary to consider not only quantitative, but also *qualitative* aspects: What impact do single advance translation comments have on the final translation process? Did they help improve cross-cultural implementation of the source questionnaire?

In order to assess the actual contribution to improving the overall quality of translations into 30+ language versions, the final translations into all language versions would need to be analysed. (For the 5th round of the ESS, however, this was not yet possible when finalising the current version of this paper.) Furthermore, changes in the quality of the ESS questionnaire translations may be influenced not only by the advance translation, but by other elements too, including amongst others: pre-testing exercises in ESS round 5, results from the pilot surveys (i.e. both elements contributing to the source questionnaire wording); changes within the national translation teams; translation verification and SQP Coding²¹ – two translation quality assessments introduced in ESS 5 for the first time (i.e., aspects having a direct influence on the translation quality).

²¹ For further explanations see European Social Survey (2010).

For this reason, a test is required controlling the aspects having an impact on the translation quality other than the advance translation. In order to perform such a test of the usefulness of advance translation, the method of Think-Aloud Protocols (TAPs) will be applied²². The author of this paper will set up an experiment as follows: for ESS 5, all changed items will be selected in their pre-advance translation version (i.e. taken from the English pilot questionnaire) and in their post-advance translation version (i.e. taken from the English final ESS 5 source questionnaire)²³. Then these items will each be translated into German and into French: 15-20 persons (German and French native speakers) will be selected for the thinking-aloud experiment: they will be asked to answer these questions and to 'think aloud' while responding. In addition they will be asked to try and interpret the questions in any way they deem possible. In addition, if possible, also the people translating these items into German and French will be asked to think aloud while translating.

These thinking-aloud sessions will be recorded and think-aloud protocols (TAPs) will be drafted. A subsequent analysis will consist in comparing whether and, if yes, to what extent the quality of the translated questions differs between the pilot and the final questionnaire. The hypothesis is that the advance translation will contribute to improving the translatability of the English source items and thereby to improving their translation quality. Recording the comments of translators, while translating the modified items, is expected to show that the modified post-advance translation items are easier and/or better to translate than the original ones.

Further hints of the relevance of performing advance translations would be given in a fieldwork test. For this purpose, respondents should be selected in order to be asked the pre- and the post-advance translation versions of modified items in the English and in translated versions. The quality of these items would then be analysed, for instance in terms of response behaviour during these interviews, such as non-response. A possible method would be to run a web-survey, but this test has not yet been planned for in detail.

²² The method of thinking aloud is explained e.g. in: Göpferich (2006).

²³ As the advance translation for the 6th round of the ESS has been initiated by the time of finalizing this paper, it is planned to run a comparable think-aloud experiment using the pre- and post-advance-translation items of the ESS 6 source questionnaire too.

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Appendix 1

Instructions for the advance translation project of the European Social Survey (ESS)

Thank you for participating in this methodological project. In this document we will provide you with the following information: goal of the project, general information on the ESS, methodology of the advance translation project, comment grid.

Goal of the project

The goal of the advance translation that you are about to carry out is

- to identify translation and cultural problems at an early stage during the design process of the ESS source questionnaire; and
- to help improving the source questionnaire for cross-cultural implementation.

This project is undertaken since experience across large international survey projects has shown that some translation and cultural problems only become apparent when a translation is attempted. We are pursuing this path with this project; we aim at testing and assessing the impact of advance translations on the design process.

General information on the ESS and the survey mode

The questions which you are translating and assessing are currently developed for the rotating modules of Round 5 of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS is an academically-driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. Now in its fifth round, the survey covers over 30 nations.

The *interviews* in the ESS are conducted face to face and the interviewers read out the questions to respondents. Most of the questions in the survey are in a closed answer format, that is, respondents are asked to respond using a fixed number of response categories that are offered to them. The response categories are usually printed on a card that respondents look at when making their answer choice. So the response categories are often read out *and* can also be seen on the card.

The *source questionnaire* is developed in British English. It contains questions, answer options, instructions for the respondents and instructions for the interviewers, which all require translation.

The *target population* in each country is defined as “all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language” (ESS 2009).

General advance translation methodology *** *to be considered by those implementing the project in your country* ***

Any of the following advance translation designs should be implemented; they take the recommended ESS translation process of parallel translation and team discussion as a starting point:

Minimum procedure: Two advance translations and a subsequent review meeting between the two people (translators = reviewers). One person should be an experienced (survey) translator and one person should be a survey/questionnaire design expert.

Optimum procedure: Two advance translations and a subsequent review meeting, including the two translators and a third reviewing person. One of the translating persons at least should be an experienced (survey) translator. Any further persons can take part in the meeting, they cannot, however, be considered in budgeting.

When handing in the advance translation, the personnel employed should briefly be documented in terms of their affiliation, qualification and relevant experiences.

General principles for translators and reviewers

1. Translators and reviewers are equipped with an *Excel* translation template (see example below), containing columns for source text; for translation and comments; and for review and comments. You can add columns as you like, but please do not add rows.
2. Carry out a *problem-oriented* translation/review, i.e., if the meaning is pretty clear and you have two or more *equally suitable* terms or phrases in the target language to choose from, or if the English source text is syntactically and grammatically suitable for translation, do not spend too much time on making the *perfect* translation, since we are particularly interested in any kinds of *problems* you encounter.
3. Examples of problems that you may notice and which deserve comments in the comments column:
 - You may identify issues for potential adaptations across countries.
 - You may note where a translation annotation explaining the meaning of a term or phrase is needed.
 - You may identify syntactical structures that are difficult to render in your language.
4. All the comments you make should be in the English language so that your findings can be understood by all team players in this international project. Please categorise in each case the problem, briefly comment on it, and suggest, if possible, a solution.
5. Use the comment grid provided below for categorisation of the problem. If in doubt about assignment of a problem category, choose the one that fits best in your opinion. Remember, it is more important to have identified a problem than having assigned it to the right category.

We recommend that those producing the first draft translations already make comments in order to keep note of the difficulties they encountered. In any case, the advance translation template provides a column for these comments.

At the minimum, comments need to accompany the reviewed translation version. There is a column available for review comments in the template.

The following are **categories** that we ask translators/reviewers to use when commenting on your translation and/or the source text.

NC: No Comment.

AL: It would be appropriate to use a different **AL**phabet in the target language, e.g. for lettering the answer categories A, B or C.

CI: Culturally Inappropriate / requires adaptation, if allowed. This category covers diverse things such as:

- Source text refers to entities or situations that do not exist in the target culture, e.g. *tram*, *choice of doctors*.

- Source text refers to entities or situations that do exist in the target culture but not in the same way as in the source culture or as intended in the source text, e.g. *work contract*.
- The target text could be understood on two levels if a 'close' translation is undertaken. *E.g.:* In China, the question 'How many children live in your household?' could be understood as a political question asking for adherence to the one-child-policy rather than understood as a simple question asking for the household composition.
- Measurement, currency, etc. require adaptation (yard, €, etc.)
- Inappropriate assumptions, do not work in target culture.

DE: Any comments regarding flawed source text **DE**sign, e.g.:

- missing response categories;
- questions difficult to answer;
- double-barreled questions;
- double negatives;
- unbalanced scale;
- inconsistent use of words, elements.

DI: **D**ifferentiation in the source text cannot be kept up in the target text, such as *invoice* and *bill* – these terms may have the same translation in the target language.
Or: differentiation is not clear, e.g., it is not clear what the difference between *insult* and *abuse* is.

GR: Comments pertain, among others, to the following **GR**ammatl or syntactical areas:

- E.g., syntactical particularities are difficult to retain in the target text without increasing the burden of target culture respondents or making the text awkward in the target language (e.g. “*do you, - or would you -*”);
- E.g., same syntactical structures cannot be maintained (e.g. split-up items such as “... *being viewed a) as competent, b) as capable, c) as moral, d) with respect*”);
- E.g., it is not clear which part of the sentence goes with which part.
- E.g., “*Before what age are ...*” is difficult to render, it must be rephrased in the target culture, which means losing or adding a year to the calculation.
- E.g., “*if at all*” can only be rendered by an additional sentence and thus makes the question more complex and burdensome.

ID: This is an **ID**iomatlc expression in English. Specify the meaning or rephrase the source text.

ME: This comment encompasses many different **me**aning scenarios, such as:

- The meaning of the source text is unclear, the translation is difficult unless further help is provided regarding the intended meaning of the concept/term;
- the scope of meaning is difficult to cover in the target text;
- gender-references are not clear and/or problematic;
- Pronouns are not clear or problematic (e.g., *you*).

RC: Special case **R**esponse **C**ategories, e.g.:

- It is difficult to translate the response categories, especially the qualifiers. A literal translation does not work.
- The response categories in the target text need to take into account number and gender; therefore, what remains unchanged in the source text undergoes change in the target text (*bon* and *bonne* in French depending on the noun they refer to).

O: **O**ther (please specify)

Example for entries into documentation structure:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Item number	Type of unit	Source Text	Translation annotations	Routing	Translation 1	Problem Category	Comments 1
1	1	Intro	Now some questions about whether certain organisations are doing a good or bad job.			Nun einige Fragen dazu, ob bestimmte Institutionen Ihre Arbeit gut oder schlecht machen.	Design	Should „organisations“ be changed to „institutions“? After all, what comes in the following items are rather institutions than organisations.
2	2		CARD X			Liste X	No comment	
3	2		How important is it to you that the police listen to and understand the concerns of people in this area?			Wie wichtig ist es Ihnen, dass die Polizei den Bedürfnissen / Sorgen / Nöten der Leute in dieser Geend zuhört und sie versteht?	Meaning	What does "concerns" mean? In the sense of „worries“ or more in the more neutral sense of „issues“, "things that are of interest to people"? Possibly annotate this word.
4			Use this card where 0 means not at all important to you and 10 means extremely important to you.			Bitte verwenden Sie diese Liste. 0 bedeutet, dass es Ihnen überhaupt nicht wichtig ist und 10 bedeutet, dass es Ihnen äußerst wichtig ist.	No comment	
5							No comment	
6							Several catego	
7							Alphabet	
8							Culturally Inapp	
9							Design	
10							Differentiation	
11							Grammar	
12							Idiom	