TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF THE SPANISH VERSION OF THE READINESS TO CHANGE QUESTIONNAIRE

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The Readiness to Change Questionnaire instrument by Rollnick et al. (1992) has become a standard in assessing stages of change among substance users. It has found such widespread acceptance that recently it has been translated into Spanish by Rodriguez-Martos et al. (2000). This Spanish translation will be a valuable addition to the tools available for substance misuse researchers and clinicians. We applaud the effort by the Rodriguez-Martos group for their scholarly and well-done contribution. However, we find ourselves with some uneasiness about the translation of several of the items from the English language to the Spanish.

Item 1 in English is ‘I don’t think I drink too much’. This was translated to ‘Yo no bebo demasiado’. We feel that a more appropriate translation would be ‘Yo no pienso que tomo demasiado’. Similarly, item 8 in English is ‘I am at the stage where I should think about drinking less alcohol’. This was translated to ‘Creo que ha llegado el momento en que debería plantearme beber menos’. We believe a more effective translation would be ‘Me encuentro en la etapa en la cual debería pensar en tomar menos’.

Also, in item 7, the English version appears as ‘Anyone can talk about wanting to do something about drinking, but I am actually doing something about it’. This was translated to ‘Cualquiera puede manifestar [sic] su intención de hacer algo en relación con la bebida, pero yo ya estoy haciéndolo’. First, there appears to be a misspelling in the Spanish version to the word ‘manifestar’. According to El Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado (2000), the correct spelling of the word is ‘manifestar’, which translates as ‘to manifest’ (Oxford Spanish Dictionary, 1994), and is defined as: to make evident or certain by showing or displaying (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2000). Clearly, this definition does not relate to the original English version, which states the idea ‘to talk about wanting’. Consequently, using the action verb ‘manifestar’ in the translated Spanish version does not convey nor interpret the original English action ‘to talk about wanting’. In the English version, a cognitive process is being described, whereas in the translated Spanish version an action is being defined. To remedy this incongruence, we suggest that the translation appear as ‘Cualquiera puede decir que quiere hacer algo en cuanto a tomar, pero de hecho yo estoy haciéndolo’.

Other than these few items, we conclude that the Rodriguez-Martos group has made a valuable contribution to the literature and has moved the science of addiction forward.

REFERENCES


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I really appreciate the comments on the Spanish version of the Readiness to Change Questionnaire made by Fisher et al. (2002), because they pose a challenging question. I understand that the Spanish language is spoken in many different countries with various meanings (taking into account both use and usage) attached to the same words. As a matter of fact, Spanish translations of English questionnaires made in Latin America often need a new validation in Spain, because of the same confounding factors. For example, in Spain we always use the verb ‘beber’ referring to drink alcohol, whereas in many Latin American countries ‘tomar’ is the common verb. The alternative translations suggested by the authors would sound strange in our country. We tried to be loyal to the meaning of the items, more than to the literal wording. Anyway, the back-translation was in agreement with the original English version. In item 1, ‘Yo no bebo demasiado’ was the chosen translation precisely because of the frequency of this statement, spontaneously done with these very words by patients who don’t think that they drink too much. Concerning item 7, ‘manifestar su intención’ has exactly the same meaning as ‘decir que quiere’. If there was a misspelling in the article published, it would be an overlooked typing error; however it didn’t appear in the test used by the patients. Item 8 was also translated using the wording a Spaniard would use for describing this situation. Our team discussed thoroughly the Spanish version of the test before engaging in its validation. We are aware that this can be a very tricky question and we wouldn’t like to have the old Italian adagio applied: Traduttore traditiore. The difficulties in understanding some of the items might rather be attributable to the double negative statements. Anyhow, language is always a fascinating topic for discussion.

REFERENCE