BOOK REVIEW


The edited volume Adapting Educational and Psychological Tests for Cross-Cultural Assessment makes a unique contribution to the field of international and cross-cultural assessment. Although international assessments have existed for decades, their roles expanded from research-oriented towards policy-oriented tools that currently involve many countries. Assessment results now take part in important policy decisions such as benchmarking for standards of quality. However, international assessments represent only one aspect of this book. The adaptation of educational instruments to multiple languages is also applicable to multilingual educational systems (i.e., Canada and Switzerland, for example) as well as in cultural contexts affected by high levels of immigration. In the latter situation, countries implement standardized assessment in multiple languages, even when not officially bilingual (i.e., the increasing importance of Spanish in the United States). In these contexts, educational debates and policy development agendas involve the accurate assessment of multiple cultures and languages, a topic that is embedded in the title of the book which reads cross-cultural assessments rather than cross-national assessments.

The increasing number of participating countries illustrates the importance of test adaptation within the international context: from 12 countries and 8 languages in the first IEA study in 1964 to around 60 countries and over 40 languages in PISA 2006 and TIMSS 2007. While earlier international studies simply replicated methodologies developed for a single language instrument, more recent assessments expanded and adapted these methodologies to new multicultural and multilingual contexts. Demands for validity and cultural appropriateness within this broader context add complexities to instrument development, and later to phases of analyses and interpretation of results. Ensuring that instruments assess the same construct across languages and cultures represents the underlying topic of this book.

The editors expand the term test translation to the broader and more flexible term of test adaptation that now embraces

all activities from deciding whether or not a test could measure the same construct in a different language and culture, to selecting translators, to deciding on appropriate accommodations to be made in preparing a test for use in a second language, to adapting the test and checking its equivalence in the adapted form. (p. 4).

Test adaptation deals with broader issues such as the impact of differences in text lengths between languages, item formats, directions, and verb tenses. Consequently, this definition encompasses both changes in the instrument because of regional differences, as in the case of instrument differences between the various English-speaking countries as well as due to multiple languages as in the case of differences between languages.

The last decade witnessed significant progress in this field including the development of the International Test Commission (ITC) Guidelines for Test Adaptation. Designed to “improve the quality of test adaptations around the world” by providing standardized procedures to improve
validity as the primary outcome of this process, this set of 22 guidelines is presented in chapter 1. Specifically, these guidelines emphasize the importance of cross-cultural validity of the construct as well as of the test across populations and cultures.

Organization of the Book

Each chapter stands on its own in addressing specific aspects of the theme of the book, which consists of two parts. Part I—“Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Educational and Psychological Tests: Theoretical and Methodological Issues” are covered in chapters 1 to 7, which outline important methodological aspects. The authors did an excellent job in emphasizing the importance of achieving full comparability of instruments across cultures and languages and the consequences from failure to do so—validity in its various forms. An interesting discussion includes the difference between bias and equivalence, presented in chapter 2. This section also focuses on methodological procedures to achieve construct equivalence (i.e., chapters 4 and 7 but also chapter 9) including a description of statistical procedures to identify problematic items. It further describes the procedures to evaluate test versions with bilingual students (i.e., chapter 5), and to establish comparability of scores and tests in multiple languages (i.e., chapters 6 and 7).

Part II—“Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Educational and Psychological Tests: Applications to Achievement, Aptitude, and Personality Tests” are covered in chapters 8 to 14 and go beyond methodological issues by focusing on application and research. It examines adaptation and translation issues applied to certification programs (chapter 8), intelligence tests (chapter 9), and admissions to higher education using an example from Israel (chapter 12). It further examines applied research on the equivalence of adapted scales to their original versions (chapter 11), the rationale for simultaneous development of instruments integrating psychological, psychometric, cultural, cross-cultural, and linguistic aspects (chapter 10) and their application to psychological constructs (chapter 14).

Concluding Remarks

This book represents an excellent reference on a broad and increasingly important topic. It successfully compiles into a single volume many important issues surrounding the topic of adaptation and translation by outlining key characteristics on each of the related issues. Although not intended as an exclusive reference on the topic, this well-documented book includes an extensive list of references to guide researchers to explore each issue further. An appealing style also emerges from use of examples that are often embedded into the debates.

The discussions between bias and equivalence, fairness, and validity presented in various instances across chapters are central. Without these, results may be invalidated or incorrectly interpreted. I had the pleasure of working with Ronald Hambleton as the chair of the Cultural Review Panel in the Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD/PISA 2000), a step taken by PISA to ensure fairness in the assessment. Although this review centered on international assessment as my personal area of expertise and experience, the methodologies of test adaptation are essential and have been also applied to other areas besides achievement, including intelligence or personality instruments (Hambleton, 2002).

The increased participation in international assessments has expanded the number and characteristics of the linguistic groups that are involved, as well as the demographic, political, and

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1The ICC Guidelines can also be found online at the ITC website (http://www.intestcom.org/test_adaptation.htm) as well as in Hambleton (2002).