OWLQOL

Suggested American Sign Language Translation Approaches and Progress to Date

March 21, 2011

The American Sign Language (ASL) Translation Work Group (TWG) is responsible for the translation into ASL of all English source material needed by the National Center for Deaf Health Research. The Obesity and Weight Loss Quality of Life instrument (OWLQOL) was assigned to us for translation. We were informed that the OWLQOL developers would like to review our translation. This report is provided for that purpose.

The TWG frequently encounters English source material that cannot easily be translated into ASL. Among such translation problems are source material forms (e.g., instrument questions or answers) that embed two or more concepts that would not be embedded in ASL due to the language’s dialogic nature, presumptions of knowledge that are not valid with many deaf persons, or problems arising from the necessity to present ASL visually – on film – rather than in print (e.g., where “skimming” among many answers is possible).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Since some of these problems were presented by the OWLQOL, we herein describe the approach the TWG has taken in translating this instrument into ASL. Before presenting a table of our preferred translation choices, we wish to describe the main problems we encountered working with the OWLQOL and how we proposed to resolve them.

The OWLQOL relies on the use of “I” statements which, in English, assumes “respondent agency.” Using “I” statements in a written English instrument allows the respondent to assess the personal validity of the statement by reading it (in “I” form) to determine if the stated reality matches their experience. This technique in written English does not have a functional equivalent in ASL. In part, this is due to the fact that ASL is not a written language but, more importantly, since agency resides with the ASL signer, “I” statements necessarily have to be translated as “you” statements. That is, the signer on film has to refer to the respondent as “you” since having the signer on film sign “I/me” (referring himself or herself rather than the respondent) would not make sense.

Some of the QOL questions – ones that directly inquire about the internal state of the respondent (e.g., the experience of depression) – lend themselves to this aforementioned translation approach – changing “I” statements to “you” statements. However, other OWLQOL questions do not allow for this rather straightforward form of translation. These other questions employ a two-step logical sequence that requires a different translation approach. These questions first require the respondent to consider a particular experience that may or may not match their reality (or even their knowledge base) and, within the same question, the respondent is then asked to reflect on their feelings or thoughts about that experience. For these two-step questions to be comprehensible in ASL, the steps must be separated from one another. We first must establish that the given experience exists (i.e., is real for some people), then we can ask if the experience is applicable to the respondent.

Finally, the OWLQOL’s 7-point Likert response scale presents the aforementioned challenge where skimming the answer choices on a written page does not equate to presenting each of the scale’s 7 possible answer choices in ASL after every question. This would pose a considerable “viewing burden” on the respondent. Another problem with the answer scale is that ASL often lexicalizes concepts in a much more fluid manner than does English. English utilizes distinct words for different “levels” of the same concept (e.g., the concept of anger or, in this case, the concept of agreement). In contrast, ASL typically would not employ distinctly different signs for each level of the central concept. Rather, the manner in which the central concept is signed would be signed “strongly” or “weakly,” slowly or quickly, with varied facial expressions, or via other, more nuanced variations of the central concept’s general ASL sign. For both of these reasons, the TWG recommends presenting the 7-point Likert scale with only the first and last scale points specifically defined (anchored).

The following table presents our recommended translations. The ASL translations are shown in English for readers of this report, of course. They were not arrived at through a formal back-translation process, that is, translated from ASL to English by someone unfamiliar with the English source material. Rather the TWG determined the ASL translations we recommend and then we back-translated these ourselves to create the table below. We did this to save time in case there are questions or concerns regarding our approach to handling the translation challenges described above. If there are no pressing concerns in these regards, then we would be happy to engage someone to formally back-translate our ASL into English.

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| **Original OWLQOL English Text** | **English version of ASL Translation** |
| Our next set of questions asks about quality of life in relation to weight status. Some of the statements may make you feel unhappy or uncomfortable. | The next several questions are about your weight and how it affects you. Please be aware that the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. |
| Because of my weight, I try to wear clothes that hide my shape. | Some people choose loose clothing to cover up their weight. Is this the same for you? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all something you do” and 7 is “definitely something you do,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel frustrated that I have less energy because of my weight. | Some people get frustrated because of the lack of energy they have as a result of their weight. Is this the same for you? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “no frustration” and 7 is “a lot of frustration,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel guilty when I eat because of my weight. | Some people feel guilty when they eat because of their weight. Is this the same for you? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “no guilt” and 7 is “a lot of guilt,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I am bothered by what other people say about my weight. | Does it bother you when people comment on your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all bothersome” and 7 “very bothersome,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| Because of my weight, I try to avoid having my photograph taken. | Some people either don’t want or avoid having pictures taken of them due to their weight. Is this the same for you? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 “not at all something you avoid” and 7 is “something you very much avoid,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| Because of my weight, I have to pay close attention to personal hygiene. | Some people attend closely to their personal hygiene due to their weight. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “something you don’t all attend to” and 7 is “something you very much attend to,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| My weight prevents me from doing what I want to do. | Does your weight keep you from doing things you want? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all prevented” and 7 is “very much prevented,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I worry about the physical stress that my weight puts on my body. | Some people worry about how their weight will impact their physical health in the future. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not worried at all” and 7 is “worried a lot,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel frustrated that I am not able to eat what others do because ofmy weight. | Does it frustrate you that others can eat things that you can’t because of your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “no frustration” and 7 is “a lot of frustration,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel depressed because of my weight. | Do you feel depressed because of your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all depressed” and 7 is “a great deal of depression,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel ugly because of my weight. | Do you feel ugly because of your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all feeling ugly” and 7 is “very much feeling ugly,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I worry about the future because of my weight. | Do you worry about what the future will be like because of your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all worried” and 7 is “a great deal worried,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I envy people who are thin. | Are you jealous of people who are thin? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “no jealousy” and 7 is “a lot of jealousy,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I feel that people stare at me because of my weight. | Do you feel that people stare at you because of your weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all something you feel” and 7 is “very much something you feel,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I have difficulty accepting my body because of my weight. | Some people who are overweight can accept their body as it is. Other people are unhappy about being overweight and can’t accept their body. Is it the same for you (referring to the group who can’t accept their weight)? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “you fully accept your body” and 7 is “can’t accept your body at all,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I am afraid that I will gain back any weight that I lose. | Do you worry about regaining weight back after you lose it? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “not at all worried” and 7 is “a lot of worry,” pick the number which best fits you. |
| I get discouraged when I try to lose weight. | Do you get discouraged and give up when you try, and fail, to lose weight? On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 is “no discouragement” and 7 is “a lot of discouragement,” pick the number which best fits you. |

1. These and other translation challenges are described in: Graybill, P., Aggas, J., Dean, R. K., Demers, S., Finigan, E. & Pollard, R. Q (2010). A community-participatory approach to adapting survey items for deaf individuals and American Sign Language. *Field Methods, 22*(4), 429-448. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)