ESS Round 9 SQP Coding Guidelines¹

A. Specifications for SQP coders

In ESS Round 9, the National Coordinators (NCs) will be asked to perform a check of ‘form differences’ in their national language versions for a sample of 20 items, using the coding system developed in the Survey Quality Predictor (SQP) tool²³.

The objective of the SQP coding process is to prevent unnecessary deviations between the source questionnaire and the country versions by comparing a number of formal characteristics of the items. SQP coding is meant to improve language versions by making NCs more aware of the choices that are made in translation, and the impact these choices can have on comparability, validity, and reliability of the question.

CST members at UPF have completed coding of these 20 items in the source questionnaire; and will compare the resulting codes to those submitted by the NC in each participating country. UPF will then send a report to the NC providing information and suggestions that are meant to help improve the comparability across all ESS country versions in Round 9 and in the future.

The procedure for ESS Round 9 will be as follows:

1. After cApStAn verification has been completed, and the translation team at GESIS (Brita Dorer, brita.dorer@gesis.org) confirms this, each NC will receive an email from UPF asking for the final versions of the main and supplementary questionnaires and showcards. In the case of multilingual countries, national teams are required to conduct SQP Coding in one language, although it is recommended to do it in all of them.

2. The final country versions should be sent to the ESS UPF team (sqp.ess@upf.edu) with copy to Brita Dorer (brita.dorer@gesis.org) and to the ESS CST country contact.

3. The team at UPF will provide a username and a password to allow NCs to access the SQP coding tool at sqp.upf.edu.

3. Once logged in, the coder (the NC or a member of their team) should click "Database", select “ESS Round 9”, select country and languages and code the 20 items, according to the instructions provided in these guidelines and the definitions in the ‘SQP Coding Instructions’. Countries should set aside one working day to

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complete the task. Once the task is finalised, the NC should inform the ESS SQP team at sqp.ess@upf.edu (with copy to Brita Dorer, and the country contact).

4. The team at UPF will compare the codes made by NCs in the target language(s) with those made by UPF for the English source version. The codes for the English source version have been coded separately by two different expert coders at UPF, after which the codes were discussed and a consensus was reached for each code.

5. The NC will then receive a report from UPF with information about the differences between the codes for the country version(s) and the source. For those countries using the Translation Management Tool (TMT), the item-by-item commentaries will also be indicated in relevant fields in the TMT. If there are no differences in the codes or the differences are due to unintended changes, the process is immediately signed off. If there are differences, they can lead to one of three outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of deviations found (source vs. country version)</th>
<th>Action taken</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) A difference that cannot be warranted, for instance a different number of response categories, leaving out a “don’t know” option or/and an instruction for the respondent.</td>
<td>The country version should be amended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) A difference that may or may not be warranted e.g. use of complete sentences in the scales instead of short texts. In some languages it is necessary, in some others this may be a fact of stylistic choice</td>
<td>Amendments in the translation are recommended to keep the principle of functional equivalence in translation if the language structure allows keeping the item characteristic the same as in the source questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.1) A difference in the linguistic characteristics that may be warranted e.g. different number of words, syllables.</td>
<td>If the differences are unavoidable due to linguistic characteristics, no change is recommended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.2) A difference in the codes of linguistic characteristics that may not be warranted e.g. very different number of sentences extreme deviations in the number of words.</td>
<td>Amendments in the translation are recommended to keep the principle of functional equivalence in translation if the language structure allows it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Categories for differences in the SQP codes for two languages


6. NCs should discuss with UPF the reasons for the differences. In case A) the item and the codes should be modified in the questionnaire and in SQP. After this, the process is signed off by UPF. In cases B) and C) NCs should engage in discussion with UPF and document if the recommendations were implemented in order to sign
off the process. If translation changes are derived from SQP Coding process, a new version should be created in the TMT (only for countries using this tool). It is important to consider that only 20 items are checked in the SQP coding task for Round 9, but suggestions resulting from the process could also apply to other parts of the questionnaire that were not coded. NCs should check the rest of the questionnaire to apply any necessary changes consistently. However, NCs should avoid making changes to language versions of the items that have been used in previous rounds. In case of serious deviations, proposed changes should be discussed with CST members at HQ (ess@city.ac.uk) and GESIS (ess_translate@gesis.org) before country versions are signed off.

B. The coding process

All participating countries will code 20 items in the first language of the country. However in countries where the survey is translated into more than one language, NCs are welcomed to code the same questions in other languages (the SQP program will be set up to allow for this). In countries coordinated by two NCs, each team should code their respective language versions.

In previous rounds, the SQP coding process produced valuable information to detect deviations in language versions that could affect the measurement quality of the items as well as the design of the test items. Therefore, in Round 9 items related to the MTMM experiments, and a selection of items of module G will be evaluated using SQP.

Countries should set aside one and a half working days to complete the task. The selection of items to code is C32 to C40, G6, G8a, G9a, G10a, G11a, G13a, G18, G20, G21, G26, and G30. Although the test questions will not be coded, the SQP team at UPF will check that the repetitions are formulated correctly in Section I. The implementation of the randomisation in Section D will also be checked in some questions, although they will not be coded.

C. SQP terminology and coding system

Before national teams start coding in SQP, it is recommended that they familiarise themselves with some general guidelines, terminology and the characteristics evaluated in the program in order to facilitate the coding effort.

The program asks users to code some characteristics of a ‘survey item’. A survey item typically consists of two core components: The ‘request for an answer’ (usually called question) and the ‘response scale’ (or response options).

The program uses the term ‘request for an answer’ because the texts used to obtain respondents answers are not always questions. There are also imperative sentences, stimuli, and other combinations of linguistic forms which are not interrogative sentences (‘questions’). However, regardless of the kind of text, they are all requests for an answer (Saris & Gallhofer, 2007, Chapter 3).
There are other components which are optional but can accompany the request for an answer, such as interviewer and respondent instructions, definitions of a concept or a scale, introductions, or phrases intended to motivate the respondent - ‘motivation’.

These components are evaluated in SQP if they are presented immediately before or after the request for answer.

Based on this decomposition of the survey item, SQP presents the characteristics to code in the following sequence:
1. The characteristics of the request of an answer.
2. The basic response options or answer scale choices.
3. The presence of optional components: instructions for interviewers and/or respondents, definitions, additional information and motivation for the respondent.
4. The presence of an introduction is evaluated in terms of linguistic characteristics such as the number of sentences, words and subordinate clauses.
5. Linguistic characteristics of the request for an answer.
7. The characteristics of the show card, if present.

Next to the coding options, a yellow box is presented containing definitions and examples that are meant to help the coder select the right choice. The ‘SQP Coding Instructions’ and the ‘SQP Users’ Manual’ available on the ESS9 intranet (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/intranet/nc/) contains additional definitions, explanations and examples of the characteristics asked about during the coding process. Please read the SQP Coding Instructions carefully before starting coding and contact the ESS UPF team if you have any questions about the coding process.

In the programme it is possible to go back and revise an earlier coding decision if necessary.

On the next few pages we provide some annotated screenshots as an explanation of the various parts of the program.

1. Session log-in
The first screen shots (Figure 1 and Figure 2) provide information to log in the programme. After logging in, the option “Questions” should be selected at the main menu (Figure 3).

2. Access to the database
Once the database has been accessed through the “Database” tab (Figure 3), the user should select “ESS Round 9” at the “All Studies” field, the language in which the questions will be coded and the country for which these questions apply (Figure 4 and Figure 5). Coders do not need to finish coding in one session; they can enter the system as many times as needed.

3. Reference text for coding
The program shows the item to be coded, including the introduction (if present), the request for answer and the categories. However this text is just a reminder and it is not
the object of coding (Figure 6 to Figure 8). Coders should base their codes on the country questionnaires and showcards.

For example, as shown in Figure 6, the interviewer instructions and the ‘Don’t Know’ option do not appear in the screens, but the coder should base the information in the questionnaires to see if there are instructions or not.

4. Task finished
The program will also display a message when the coding of an item is completed (Figure 9). By selecting ‘View quality prediction’, you can see a tentative prediction of the reliability and the validity of the question. This prediction is not final, because the codes have to be reviewed by the UPF team in order to avoid unintended mistakes that may affect the quality predictors.

By selecting ‘Back to question list’ coders can go back to the screen that displays the summary of the items.

5. Useful information
SQP has a ‘Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)’ section helpful during the coding process. SQP Users’ manual and SQP Coding instructions can be downloadable from the “Help” tab. A link to video tutorials is also available. For any difficulties or queries about the coding process, please contact the ESS UPF team for support.