ESS Round 8 SQP Coding Guidelines

A. Specifications for SQP coders

In ESS Round 8, the National Coordinators (NCs) will be asked to perform a check of ‘form differences’ in their national language versions for a sample of 17 items, using the coding system developed by Willem Saris and Irmtraud Gallhofer in the Survey Quality Prediction (SQP) platform.

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 17 items in the source language, 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 intended to help improve the comparability across all ESS country versions in Round 8 and in the future.

The procedure for ESS Round 8 will be as follows:

1. After cApStAn verification has been completed, each NC will receive an email from UPF asking for the final versions of the questionnaire in the target language and the showcards.

2. The final country versions should be sent to Teresa Queralt (teresa.queralt@upf.edu) and Diana Zavala-Rojas (diana.zavala@upf.edu) with copy to Brita Dorer (ess_translate@gesis.edu) and 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 system at sqp.upf.edu. The system assigns the user a ‘task’. It includes all 17 questions that have been preselected in Round 8.

3. Once logged in, the coder (the NC or a member of their team) should code the 17 items in the ‘task’, according to the instructions provided in these guidelines and the definitions in the Survey Quality Prediction Programme Codebook. Countries should

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1 This document was written for the European Social Survey (ESS). The Core Scientific Team of the ESS requests that you use the following form of words to cite this document: European Social Survey (2016). ESS Round 8 SQP Coding Guidelines. London: ESS ERIC Headquarters c/o City University London.


set aside one working day to complete the task. Once the task is finalised, the NC should inform Teresa Queralt at teresa.queralt@upf.edu (with copy to Brita Dorer, Diana Zavala-Rojas 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 English source version has 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. If there are no differences in the codes or, once clarified, if the differences are due to unintended coding mistakes, 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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<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 must 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>
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<tr>
<td>C.1) A difference in the linguistic characteristics that may be warranted e.g. different number of words or syllables.</td>
<td>If the differences are unavoidable due to linguistic characteristics, no change is recommended.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.2) A difference in the codes of linguistic characteristics that may not be warranted e.g. very different number of sentences or 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>
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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. It is important to take into account that only 17 items are checked in
the SQP coding task for Round 8, 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 17 items in the first language of the country. However in countries where the survey is translated into more than one language, NCs are welcome 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. Therefore in Round 8 it has been decided that all items related to the MTMM experiments will be evaluated using SQP plus 8 items from the new core items and rotating modules. NCs should code the total number of items related to the experiments (17). In addition, they should provide the formulations of test questions I2-I10. Countries should set aside half of a working day to complete the task. The selection of items to code is A2, A3, B37, C9, C10, C33, C34, C35, C36, C37, C38, C39, C40, C41, D4, E21 and E30. Although the test questions in section I will not be coded (I2-I10), CST members at UPF will check that the repetitions are formulated correctly, therefore these questions and their showcards should also be sent.

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 assigns users a ‘task’ 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).

What is a ‘request for an answer’? 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 options that the coder must select from on each survey item characteristic, a yellow box is presented containing definitions and examples that are meant to help the coder select the right code for each characteristic. The ‘SQP Coding Instructions’ and the ‘SQP Users’ Manual’ available on the ESS8 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 Codebook carefully before starting coding and contact Teresa Queralt at UPF 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.

The file 'SQP Coding Help Screenshots' provides 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 into 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 “Questions” tab, the user should select “ESS Round 8” at the “All Studies” field, the language in which the questions will be coded and the country for which these questions apply (Figure 4). 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 5). Coders should base their codes on the country questionnaires and showcards.

For example, as shown in Figure 5, the interviewer instructions and the Refusal/Don’t Know options never appear in the screens, but the coder should check 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 8). 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.

For any difficulties or queries about the coding process, please contact Teresa Queralt (teresa.queralt@upf.edu) and Diana Zavala-Rojas (diana.zavala@upf.edu) for support.