Impact of Modern Geo-Political Change on Language used
Cross-Cultural Quality of Life Research

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Introduction and Objective
In recent decades there has been a great deal of shifting in various geo-political borders throughout the world. In many cases, we have seen multiple countries come into existence where there was previously one larger combined nation (see Figures 1-4). Often before that, there was an older and different arrangement of smaller principalities. Each time such a shift occurs, aspects of culture are affected, including its language.

Further, the progress being made in health-care research and the globalization of newly developing concepts such as ‘quality of life’ are having an impact on the languages in these changing cultures. In some cases, older forms of language are being rejuvenated or strengthened to assist in developing a new national identity. In such circumstances, it is not unusual to find a language without key terms to reflect the newly developing concepts.

The objective of this presentation is to use recent experiences in developing Croatian, Czech, and Slovak language versions of the QOLIE-31 (a standardized QOL measure for persons with epilepsy) to demonstrate examples of these issues.

Impact of Geo-Political Changes on Developing Translations

1. ‘Blended’ or ‘borrowed’ language elements needing to be separated

Neighboring cultures that were originally independent of each other, but later became mixed under a single geo-political influence, often demonstrate a ‘blending or borrowing’ of various words or terms in their language. In recent years, the separation of these cultures into individual countries has been accompanied with the need in some to return to a more pure form of the new country’s original language. It is important that the ethnic origins of translation consultants is in keeping with the origin of the new country in order to assure appropriateness of the language version being developed.

2. Modern globalization of concepts requires the development of new language

As newly independent countries are formed from changes in prior, larger principalities, attempts to revise previously separate and original languages brings the translator up against another difficulty: the original language has no terms for many new concepts in modern health care and global research. This can be resolved in different ways, including: (1) adopt a western (usually English) influence into the language and create a new word; or (2) use a combination of words from the original language to approximate the new meaning; or (3) re-claim an older word from the original language and provide it with an updated meaning. If the language of a new country is being used to assist in establishing (or reviving) a national identity, there will be resistance to the use of option (1), and preference toward the use of (2) and (3).

Changing Geo-Political Boundaries

As newly independent countries are formed from changes in prior, larger principalities, attempts to revise previously separate and original languages brings the translator up against another difficulty: the original language has no terms for many new concepts in modern health care and global research. This can be resolved in different ways, including: (1) adopt a western (usually English) influence into the language and create a new word; or (2) use a combination of words from the original language to approximate the new meaning; or (3) re-claim an older word from the original language and provide it with an updated meaning. If the language of a new country is being used to assist in establishing (or reviving) a national identity, there will be resistance to the use of option (1), and preference toward the use of (2) and (3).

Summary

With advancing technologies and the spread of new global concepts in health and well-being, it is getting increasingly complex to develop culturally appropriate language versions of measures designed to evaluate a patient’s condition-specific quality of life. The shifting of national borders in recent times has innumerable additional impact on this process because changes in culture cause changes in structure and currency of language.

• An increasing expansion of global clinical trials to evaluate pharmaceutical compounds is requiring an increase in available language versions of HRQoL measures. In some cases, it may be that previously developed translations need to be reviewed and updated in light of new geo-political impacts on cultures. In all cases, the standardized criteria for developing cross-cultural adaptations needs to be applied with extra awareness and caution to assure that the ‘in-country’ processes are in synchrony with the definitions, cultural developments, and language developments of the newly formed country and its changing culture.