

# SSI POV: Online

## The Importance of Interviewing in the Native Language While Conducting International Research

### Can We Just Target English Speaking Respondents in Our International Study?

As the economy struggles, we find more questions and requests coming our way to interview in English rather than the native language of the country. SSI has always held the belief that we should respect and protect our respondents by interviewing them in their language. Even though these respondents may “speak” English, they may not have the vocabulary capacity or the same understanding of nuance compared to someone who speaks English as their native tongue.

A study conducted in April 2011 supports our stance.

A questionnaire was administered to respondents in China and Germany on SSI’s Opinion World panels. In each country, we screened respondents asking if they “spoke” English. If the participant self reported that they do speak English, they then became eligible for the experimental group in our study. There were two questionnaires for each country, one in English and one in the native language of the country. Other than the language, the two questionnaires were identical within each country. The questionnaires differed slightly between the two countries due to localization.

### SSI’s Research

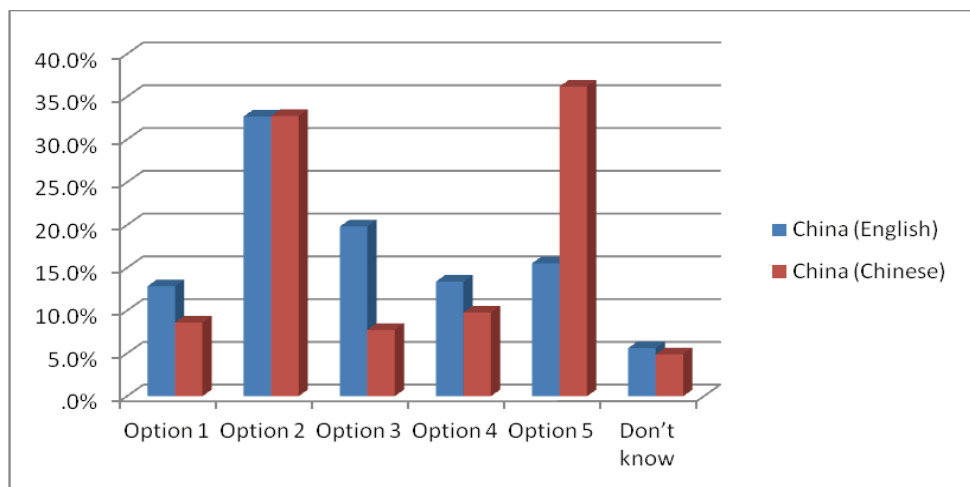
In the graph below, we show the results from our Germany test looking at online behavior. We asked respondents when they last paid a bill online. As you can see between the English and the German versions, we see different results. In a case like this, we do not know what the correct answer should be but we would have to assume it is equivalent to the version completed in the native language of the country.



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We saw similar trends when we asked respondents to watch a video clip of a commercial. Again, one commercial was in English and one identical but in their native language. Following the commercial, participants were asked a few questions. One of the questions asked participants to fill in the blank as it related to the slogan of the commercial. As we can see in China, the data was all over the place. The same was true for Germany.



Unknown biases also may arise in targeting respondents that speak a second language. For example, we found in Germany, the education of those who spoke English was much higher than those who were in our German questionnaire. This finding came as a discovery while digging into a separate variation in the data. Had we just accepted the data the way it was, we would never have seen that by creating this target, we were creating a sample that was not representative of Germany.

In addition to looking at the data, we also looked at the respondent experience. At SSI, we recruit our participants in the native language of the country they are located in. The participants then have the expectation that this is language they will be interviewed in moving forward. When looking at SSI's QUEST (Questionnaire Experience Satisfaction Tool) open ended responses, we found that respondents were confused that the survey was in English. Granted, there were many others that were excited that they had a chance to "practice" their English skills in the survey, but overall the QUEST score (calculated using the respondent score from the QUEST questionnaire, drop rate, and median time) was lower in both countries when the English questionnaire was displayed.

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## SSI's Recommendations

So in summary, can you target only English speaking respondents in your international study? I guess the answer is yes, but SSI strongly advises against it. The translation costs would only be a fraction of the cost of the research study as a whole but it could save a lot of money in the long run. The scariest scenario is when you do not know that your data is wrong and end up making costly business decisions based on this misrepresentation. In addition to poor data, it shows disrespect to our global respondents. We need participants in order to keep our industry and our research thriving, as such, we need to respect and recognize the cultural differences of our respondents.