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***Innovations for
Access: Workforce
Expansion by
Reducing Barriers to
Access in
Assessment***

***Suzette Mirabal
Unber Ahmad***

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Setting the Stage...

There is a need for expanding the workforce to meet mental health needs across the United States – especially in underserved communities.



Puerto Rican Counselors: Prepared, Passionate, and Ready to Serve

Strong Academic Preparation

Counselors trained in accredited programs, incorporating evidence-based practices, multicultural competence, and clinical excellence.

Bicultural and Bilingual Strength

Deep cultural understanding of the Hispanic/Latino experience and the ability to navigate conversations around family, emotions, and personal challenges in both English and Spanish.

Commitment to Service

Strong personal mission to serve diverse communities, address mental health disparities, and support underserved populations in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Ongoing Professional Development

Active participation in continuing education, professional associations, and supervision to maintain high standards of counseling practice.

Licensure Testing in Puerto Rico



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Testing for Licensure in Puerto Rico

National Counselor Examination – Spanish Language Version

- **200** exam questions
- **160** scored MCQs
- **40** unscored MCQs
- **3 hours and 45 min.** to test
- **6** work domains

	Domain	Percent of Items
1	Professional Practice and Ethics	12
2	Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis	12
3	Areas of Clinical Focus	29
4	Treatment Planning	9
5	Counseling Skills and Interventions	30
6	Core Counseling Attributes	8
	Total	100

Brief History of the NCE-SP

- First offered in 2017 – approximately 8 years of usage
- Examination is offered through PearsonVUE testing centers
 - Secured testing environment
 - Reputable testing vendor
- COVID disruptions
- Continued improvements to processes have yielded **strong psychometric properties** and **continued progress**



Psychometric Properties

Form	ENG - Form A	SP – Form A	ENG – Form B	SP – Form B
N	6,204	124	6,198	76
Mean	102.0	101.8	102.4	98.6
SD	18.4	16.4	18.9	16.4
Min	22.0	50.0	21.0	52.0
Med	102.0	103.5	103.0	98.0
Max	148.0	133.0	147.0	137.0
Passing Rate	73%	79%	73%	68%
Avg Diff	0.67	0.59	0.66	0.50
Reliability	0.92	0.85	0.92	0.86
SEM	5.44	6.28	5.46	6.24
DC	<u>0.94</u>	<u>0.93</u>	<u>0.94</u>	<u>0.95</u>

Data cleaning: Limited to licensure candidates only.

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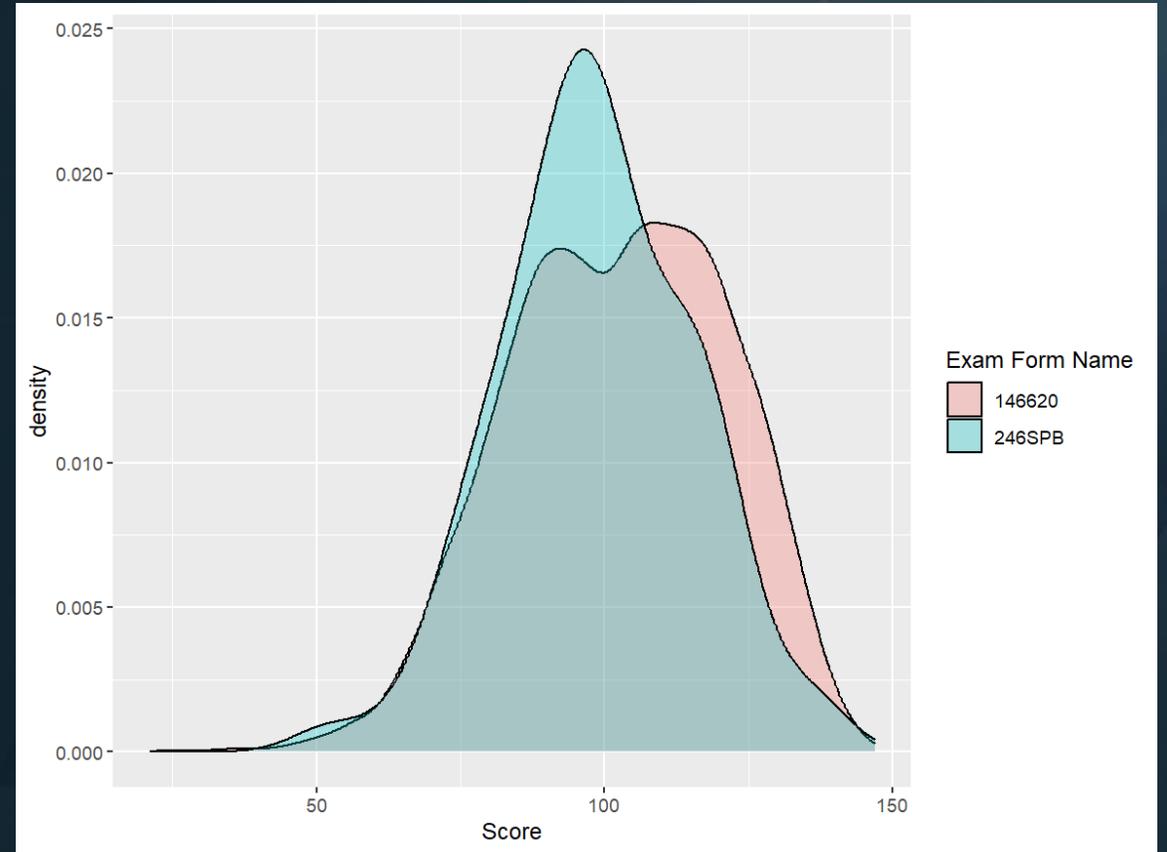
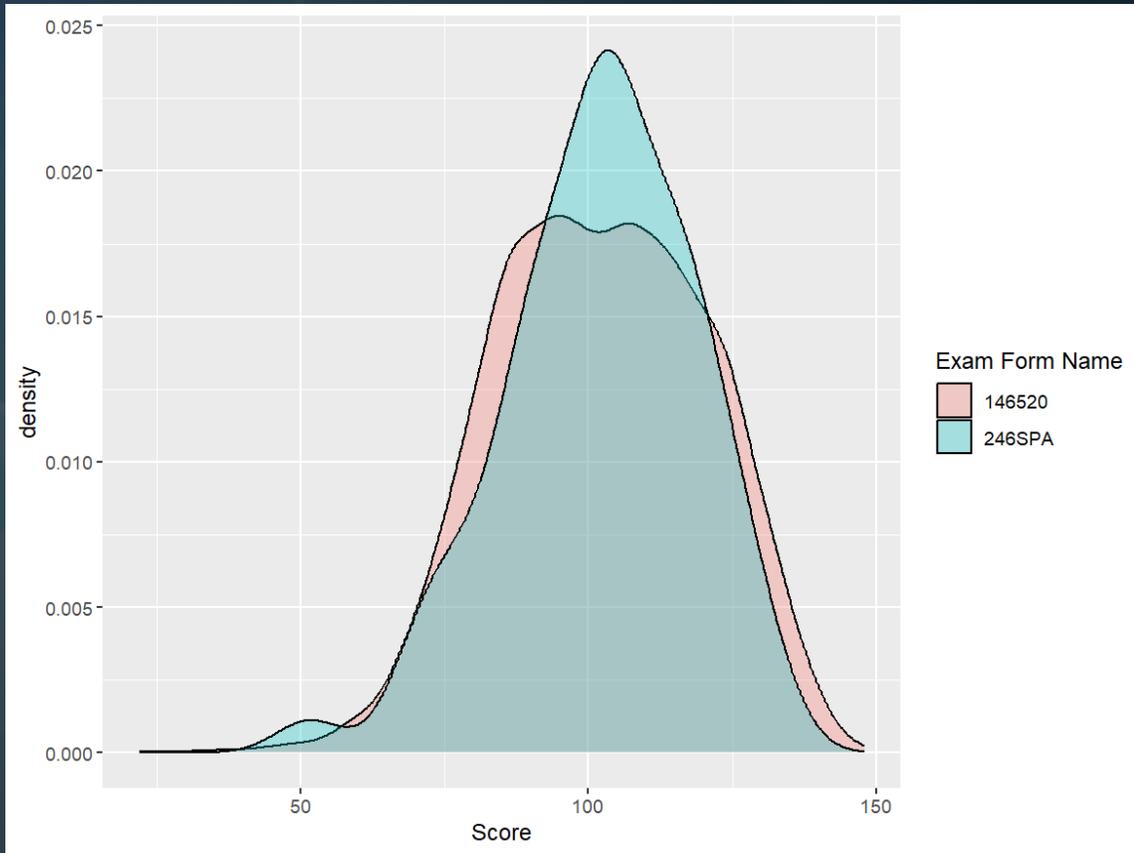
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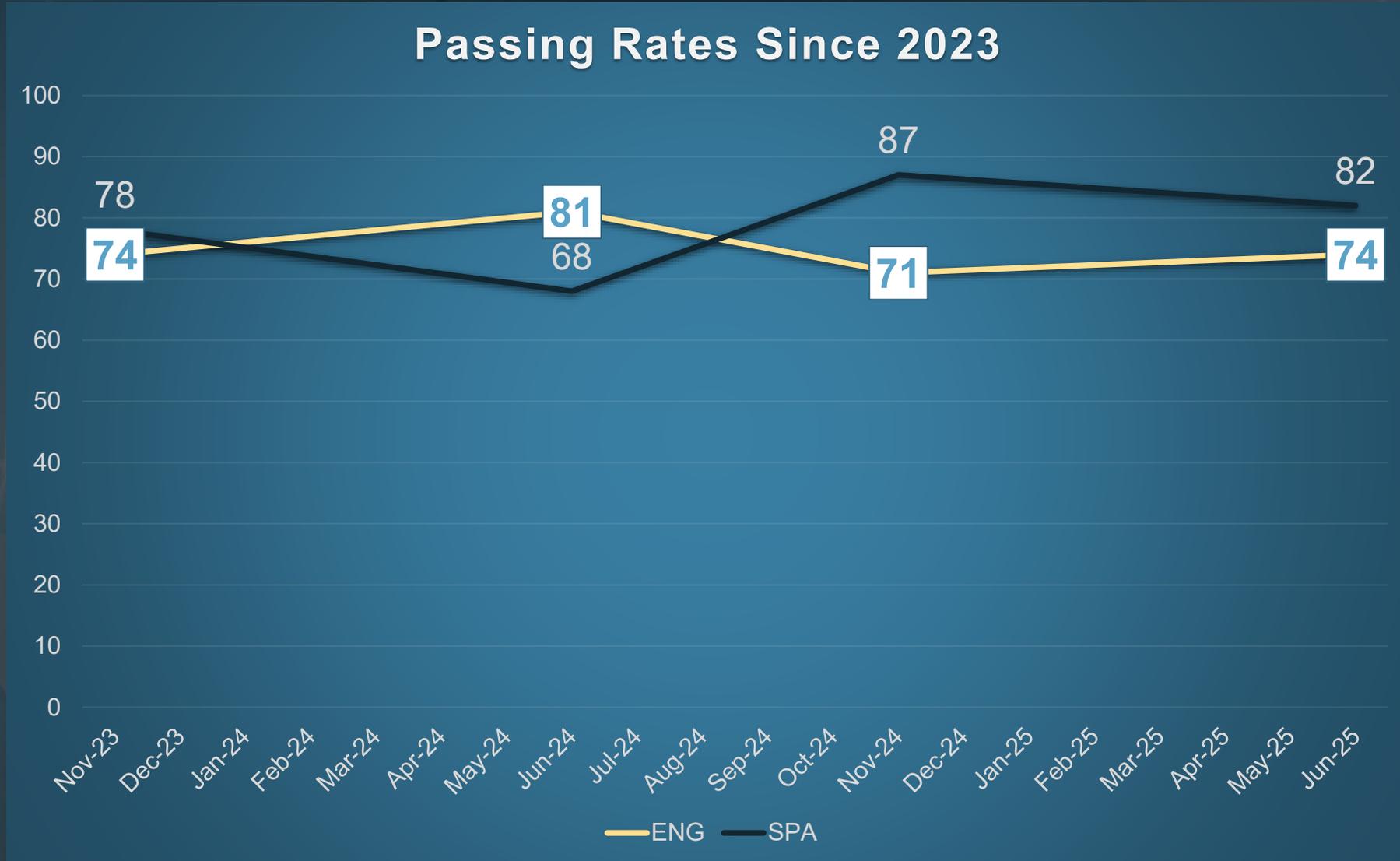
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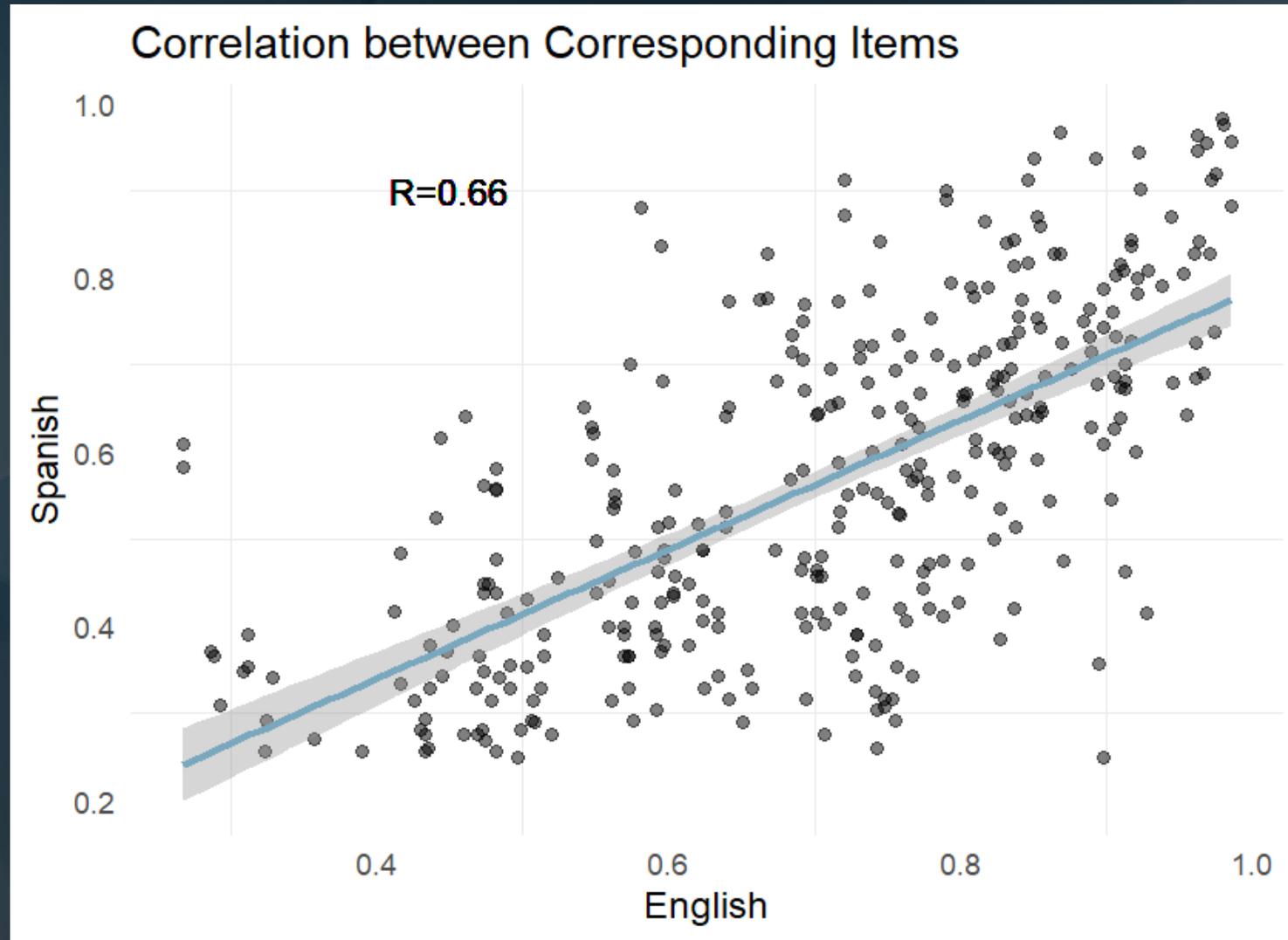
Psychometric Properties



Passing Rates by Language



Item Analyses



Exam Adaptation Procedures



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Guidelines for Translation & Adaptation

NBCC adheres to Guidelines for Translation and Adapting Tests published by the International Test Commission

- Pre-condition
- Test development
- Confirmation
- Administration
- Scoring
- Documentation



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Goal is to adapt the exam for comparable usage – not to translate literally!

Focus on procedures to ensure validity – not congruence of outputs!

SME Engagement

- All SMEs are required to have taken and passed the NCE and/or NCMHCE
- Required to be bilingual fluent
- Almost all are currently NCCs
- SMEs are currently counselor educators, clinical supervisors, and practicing counselors
- Cannot be training providers
- Required to complete training to demonstrate competence in translation

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- Over 70 bilingual SMEs and growing!
 - Representing 19 states and territories
 - Representing various cultural backgrounds
- **Roles**
 - Participate on Work Analysis Task Force
 - Item Writing
 - Exam Review
 - Translating Items



Training for Translations

The best qualified translators must be experts in:

- The content basis
- The language
- The culture
- Item writing best practices
- Translation best practices

Extensive training is required



Training for Translations

Training includes understanding of:

- Item writing security (secure portal)
- SMEs sign NDAs before viewing content
- Understanding the minimally-qualified candidate
- Avoiding cuing
- Avoiding literal translations
- Avoiding figurative language
- Maintaining difficulty of the translated item
- Accounts for cultural and contextual factors

Same meaning

EN: *He kicked the bucket.*

TL: *Él murió.* (Correct literal meaning)

✗ *Él pateó el balde.* (Incorrect idiomatic translation)

Check for metaphors/idioms

EN: *Break a leg!*

TL: Use the cultural equivalent for “Goodluck” (e.g., *¡Mucha suerte!*)

Do not make the translated item easier

EN: The lion preyed on the deer.

SP: El león se comió al ciervo (The lion ate the deer)

Translation Checklist

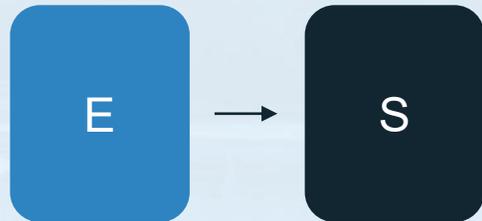
1. Same meaning
2. Same difficulty
3. No omissions/substitutions/additions
4. No metaphors/idioms
5. Same format
6. Same length of distractors
7. Same emphasis on words
8. Only one correct answer
9. Appropriate SVO order
10. No grammatical cues
11. No gender cuing
12. Impacts of punctuation
13. Stereotyping
14. Inflammatory topics
15. Unfamiliar topics
16. Culturally relevant
17. Check units of measurement

Translation Design: Forward Translation

- For our extant work:
 - Forward translation +
SME committee review

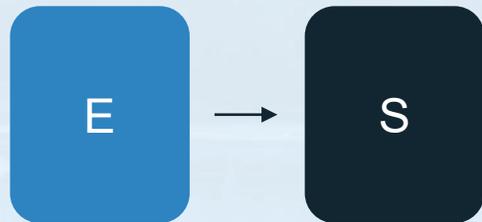
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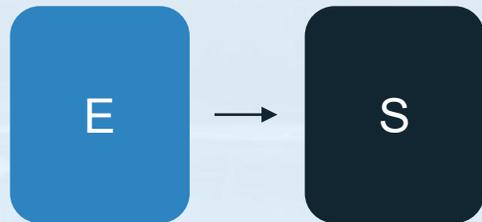
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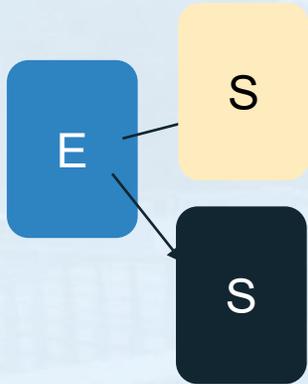


Translation Design: Double Forward + Reconciliation

- For our current nationwide work:
 - Double forward translation + reconciliation + SME committee review

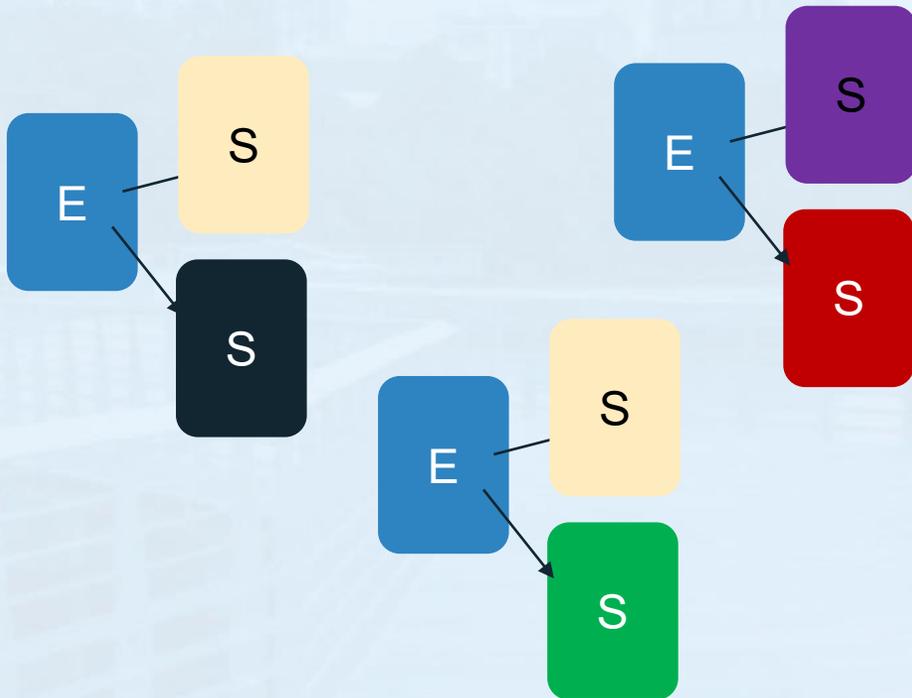
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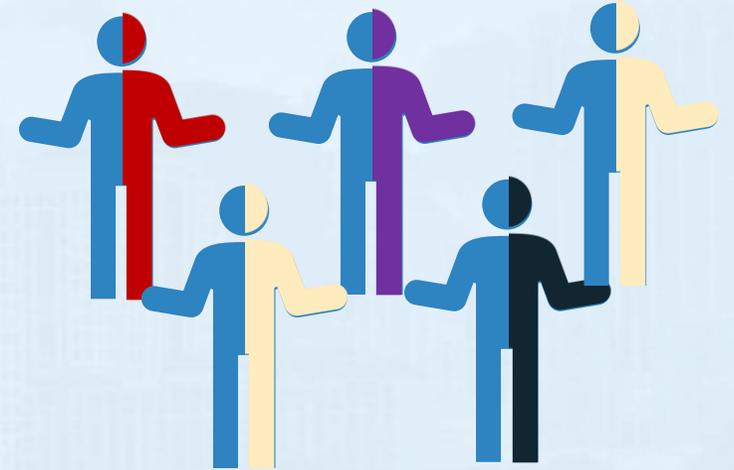
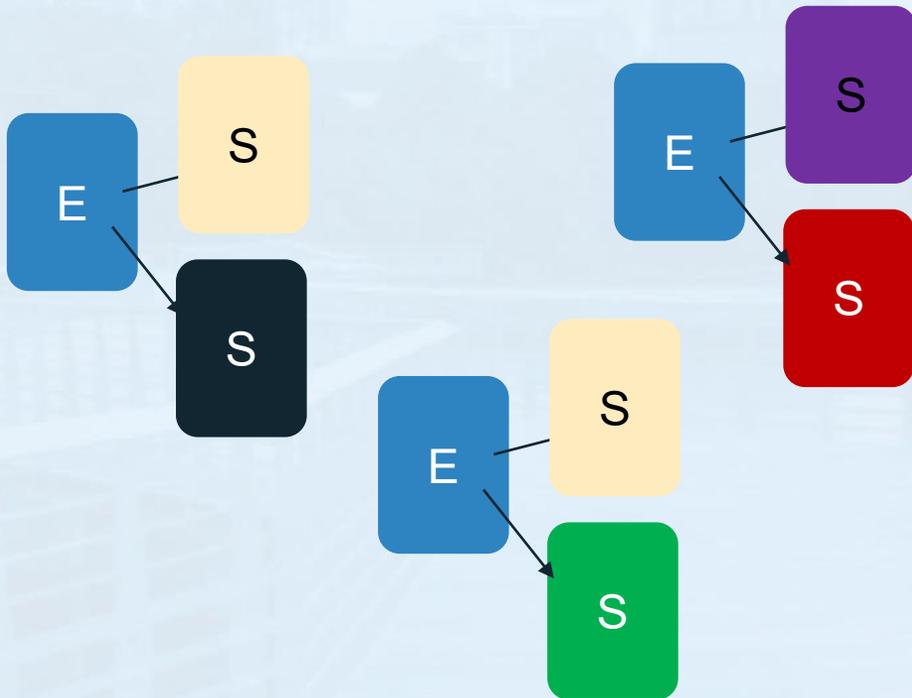
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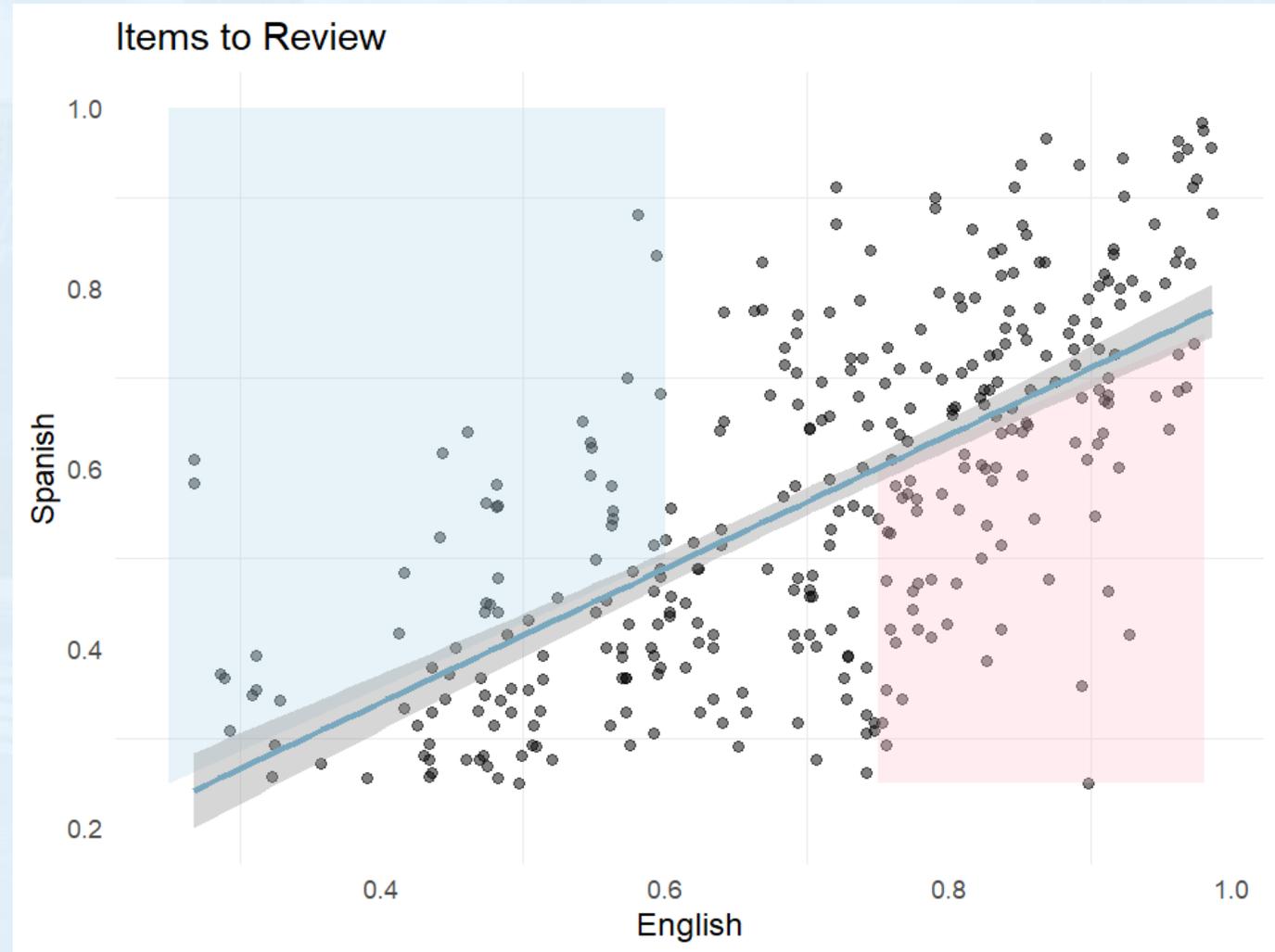


Committee Review and Reconciliation

- All items on the NCE-SP are reviewed for:
 - Content relevance
 - Item writing best practices
 - Typographical accuracy
- Items are reviewed at least 3 times before they are published.
- Committee review is the last step
- Exam Form Review:
 - Multi-day meetings
 - 8-15 bilingual SMEs
 - Review each item
 - Discuss issues with translation/adaptation
 - Decide on final version of the item

Ongoing Auditing & Evaluation

- After testing, all items are reviewed for:
 - Differential item functioning
 - Differences in difficulty
 - Unexpected performance



Additional Supports



2025 

✓ Pop-Up English

✓ Dual Terms When Indicated

✓ Translation Glossary

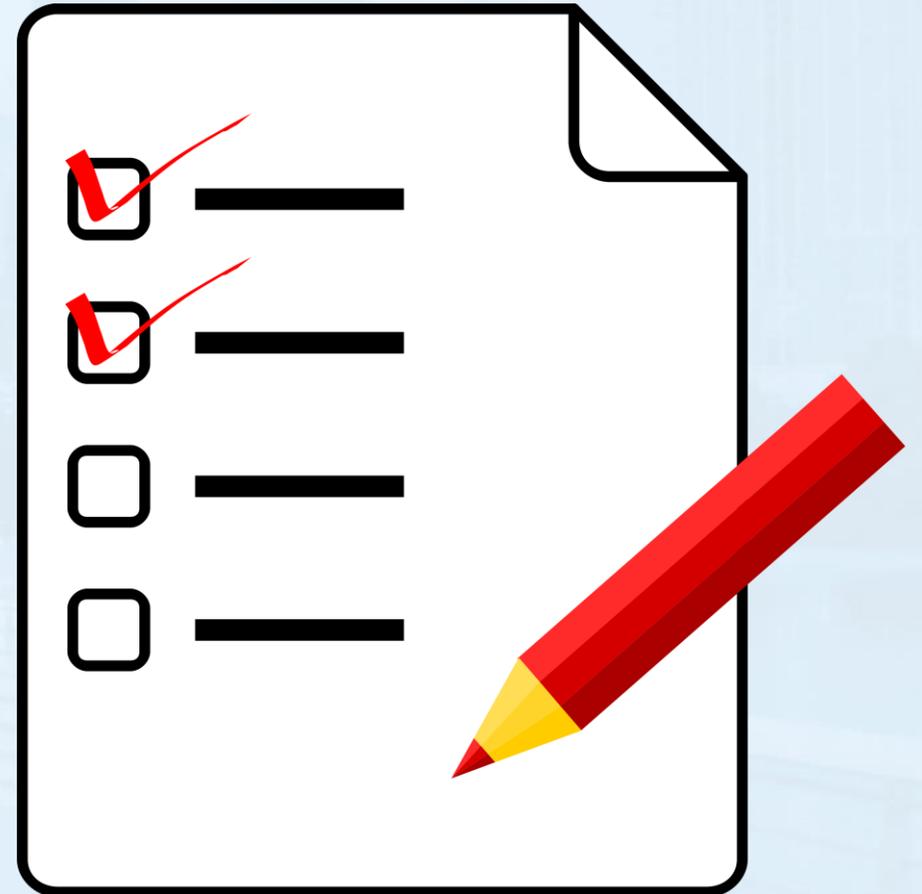
Test Administration

- NCE-Spanish will be available via PearsonVUE test centers in the mainland US in late 2025/early 2026
- NCE-Spanish will also be available for at-home remote testing
- PearsonVUE is a reliable, reputable partner to ensure exam security and a standardized testing procedure for high-stakes examinations.
- Scores are available immediately after testing



Overall Adaptation Check

- Conceptual appropriateness – the construct exists!
 - Checked by qualified SMEs
- Minimize construct irrelevance variance
 - Checked by SMEs and statistical support (DIF)
- Translate appropriately
 - Checked by qualified SMEs
 - Instructions translated, format is appropriate
 - Gather pilot data to inform translation edits
- Confirm performance
 - Conduct statistical analyses
 - Review with SMEs
- Administer & Score comparably
 - Executed by PearsonVUE



The Value of the Spanish Language Examination



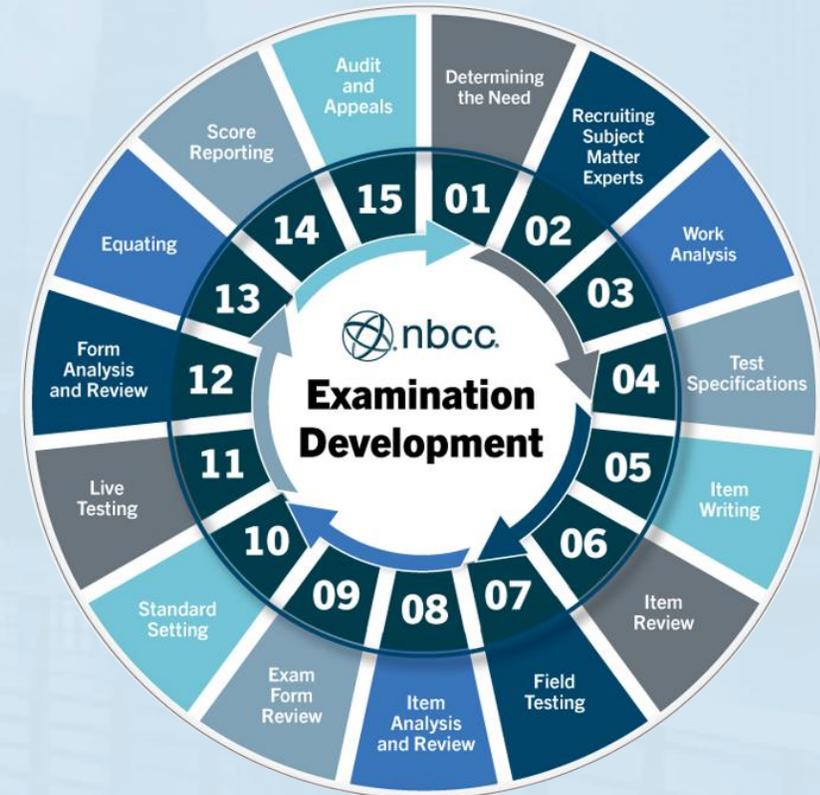
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National Counselor Examination - Spanish

- The examination is carefully adapted into Spanish
- Significant input is gathered from various SMEs from different backgrounds
- Statistical properties are strong and showcase stable decisions on the basis of the examination
- SMEs verify appropriate translation
- The translation is done according to best practices and is comparable to the English language exam



Additional Translated Products

CPCE-SP

- Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination
- Available in Spanish August 2025

NCMHCE

- National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination
- Will be available in Spanish early 2026

Expanding the Workforce: Meeting the Needs of Spanish-Speaking Clients

Linguistic Access

- Offering the NCE in Spanish allows competent counselors to demonstrate their knowledge in their native or preferred language.

Enhanced Client Care

- Counselors proficient in Spanish can better establish therapeutic rapport, facilitate emotional expression, and engage families in treatment processes.

Addressing Disparities

- Spanish-speaking clients often face barriers to care; culturally and linguistically matched counselors reduce stigma, increase trust, and improve outcomes

Supporting National Workforce Expansion.

- Bilingual counselors are positioned to meet the growing demand for culturally responsive mental health services across the U.S

THANK YOU!

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