

THE CANADIAN TRAVEL SURVEY: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Catherine Fournier ¹

Abstract: The Canadian Travel Survey is conducted every month across Canada. A new survey is planned for 2004. The objective of this research was to ensure that its vocabulary is current, sets the right tone, and facilitates the collection of the appropriate data referred to WTO domestic trip concepts of a departure from the usual environment. The author wants to stress that caution should be exercised in assessing this research. Because of the qualitative nature and particularly its small sample size, results are indicative rather than conclusive.

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¹ This article reproduces part of the reports developed by Catherine Fournier Inc. for the Phase two of the research project “Qualitative Exploration of a New Introduction for The Canadian Travel Survey”. The research was carried out during April 2002.

INTRODUCTION

Objectives

The main research objectives of Phase Two were:

- To explore reactions to two different introductions to the Canadian Travel Survey planned for 2004. The two English introductions contrasted the terms *trips* and *travel*. The two French introductions contrasted the terms *voyages* and *déplacement*.
- To examine two survey text options in terms of benefits, drawbacks and likelihood of capturing trips. Option 1 was simply *trips/voyages*. Option 2 was *out-of-town trips/ voyages à l'extérieur de la ville*.
- To establish whether different trips are captured in Option 2 if the phrase *out-of-town trips/voyages à l'extérieur de la ville* was replaced by *trips of at least 80 kilometres away from home/ voyages d'au moins 80 kilometres de distance de votre domicile*.
- To determine whether the French term *voyages* can be force fit upon same-day trips (*voyages aller-retour le même jour*), given the obstacles encountered in Phase One.

Design

A total of 20 depth interviews were undertaken between April 2 and April 10, 2002. Each depth interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes.

Two large urban centres were selected, Toronto and French Montreal.

- Five interviews were conducted with residents of the Greater Toronto Area.
- Four interviews were conducted with residents of the Greater Montreal Area.

Two medium-sized urban centres were selected: Regina, Saskatchewan (English) and Trois-Rivières, Quebec (French). In both locations, some respondents were from the city itself while others were brought in from outlying suburbs and rural communities.

- Seven interviews were conducted in Regina. Two of the interviews involved residents of Regina proper, three involved residents of bedroom communities (Lumsden, Balgonie, and Kronau), and two of the respondents lived in rural areas (Edgeley and Riceton).

- Four interviews were conducted in Trois-Rivières. One of the interviews involved a resident of the city proper, one a resident of Cap-de-la-Madeleine, a neighbouring suburb, and two of them involved residents of rural areas (one from St-Célestin on the south shore and one from St-Boniface, north of Trois-Rivières and outside of Shawinigan).

Respondents met the following recruitment criteria:

- a mix of men and women 18 to 65 years of age;
- a mix of people who were working and non-working;
- one student;
- a range of education levels;
- all but one respondent per city had a household income above \$50,000 a year—one respondent per city had a lower income;
- at least two respondents per city regularly commuted to work or school by car, train or bus;
- a mix of frequent and moderate travellers in each city (see below), and
- at least one respondent per city who travelled on business.

For the purposes of this research, the following definitions were applied.

Frequent travellers were defined as those who had taken part in three or more of the following activities six or more times in the past year:

- visited out-of-town family or friends;
- went camping or to a cottage;
- took weekend getaways of one to three nights;
- took holidays of four or more nights away from home;
- took out-of-town business trips.

Moderate travellers were defined as those who had taken part in at least two of these activities three to five times in the past year.

INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research yielded clear results regarding what to do in terms of:

1. which introduction to use in both languages;
2. whether to include a distance reference (*out-of-town trips/ voyages à l'extérieur de la ville*) in both languages;
3. how to express *overnight trips* in both languages;
4. how to express *same-day trips* in French.

The trickiest issues are:

- a. how to express *same-day trips* in English;
- b. how to deal with respondents who do not have a *town/ville*;
- c. whether to use *out-of-town/ à l'extérieur de la ville*;
- d. capturing *activities* in English.

What is Clear

1. **The Introductions.** Introduction B (*trips*) is recommended in English since it is broader in scope, includes both short and long trips, encompasses pleasure and business, and has a wider focus: mode of transport, activities, sights visited, and dollars spent.

Introduction B can also work in French as long as the word *voyages* replaces *déplacements*. There are difficulties with the word *déplacements* as it might not include pleasure trips or vacations.

2. **Distance reference.** Option 2 (*out-of-town trips/voyages à l'extérieur de la ville*) is recommended in both languages primarily because it has the potential to capture more trips.

Option 2 is preferred in English because it seems more inclusive and it helps respondents focus better than simply using *trips*.

Although preference divides in French, the phrase *à l'extérieur de la ville* seems more likely to make respondents think in terms of both short and long trips. It also helps diminish the tendency to think of *voyages* primarily as distant trips or vacations.

3. **Overnight trips.** We learned in Phase One that the term *overnight* should not be used in English since some respondents take it to refer to trips of just one night away from home. Much clearer is the expression used in Phase Two, *trips of one night or more away from home*.

The French equivalent is also very clear, *voyages d'une nuit ou plus*. There is no need to add *away from home*; it is implicit.

4. **Same-day trips in French.** The phrase *voyages aller-retour le même jour* (*trips where you go and return the same day*) very successfully captures trips where no nights are spent away from home. Importantly, respondents understand and accept the use of *voyages* in this context, indicating that it is possible to force fit *voyages* upon same-day trips.

What is Not Clear

- a. **Same-day trips in English.** Under same-day trips, respondents have a tendency to include some trips where one night is spent away from home. This issue needs to be addressed.

One possibility is to allow the interviewer to make the correction once the details of all trips have been recounted.

Another is to consider using a literal translation of the French since no confusion resulted with the French term. This might be *a trip where you go and return home on the same day*. However, this alternative was not explored with respondents.

- b. **No town/ville.** How do we deal with rural respondents who have no town? It may be necessary to provide the interviewer with prompts in this event.
- c. **Capturing distance.** Respondents report distance in terms of time, not kilometres or miles, and have the most confidence in these time estimates.

While it is better to provide some measure of distance than not to provide any, it is not clear whether the better option is *out of town/à l'extérieur de la ville* or a specific distance measurement such as 80 kilometres. Both have merit.

If a precise measurement is used, there is evidence that 80 kilometres is too far since it causes the loss of some "good" trips. It may be necessary to allow some respondents to use a time measurement since some have no concept whatsoever of distance in kilometres or miles.

- d. **Activities.** Whereas the French term *activités* seems to include both social and physical activities, there is some tendency in English to include only physical activities. It may therefore be worth qualifying the term (e.g. *both social and physical activities*).

Also, one or two respondents started to mention group activities in which they had not taken part. It therefore seems worth considering inserting the word *personally* into the question (e.g. *What activities did you PERSONALLY engage in on this trip?*).

- e. **Main purposes.** In the first question read to respondents after the introductions, Question 2 where the interviewer reads the full list of main purposes all at once, there seems to be little or no confusion. At this point of the interview, the category terms seem to present no problem and all trips are captured.

Therefore, the following comments are only applicable if respondents are ever to be asked to give examples of each main purpose, one by one. For respondents, some of the categories overlap. Also, *Personal reasons/fins personnelles* is an especially baffling category in both languages. Finally, it may be worth considering using the English term *work-related* instead of *business* as a result of the insight gained from the one low-level low-income respondent in Toronto.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/ENGLISH CANADA

This executive summary presents the major findings of the 11 depth interviews that comprised the English Canadian portion of Phase Two.

Five interviews were conducted in Toronto on April 2, 2002, with residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Seven interviews were conducted in Regina on April 3 and 4, 2002; two respondents lived in Regina proper, three of them in bedroom communities around Regina, and two of them in rural areas (a man from Riceton and a woman who lived on a farm outside of Edgeley). In each city, half the respondents were frequent travellers and half moderate travellers. The French portion of Phase Two was conducted separately later this week.

The main purpose of this research was to examine reactions to...

- two introductory statements to the Canadian Travel Survey that contrasted the words *trips* and *travel*, and
- asking respondents to remember *all the trips* they took that ended in March vs. *all the out-of-town trips* they took that ended in March.

The Introductions

Overall, most respondents in both cities prefer Intro B, *We are doing a survey about trips Canadians take* to Intro A, *We are doing a survey about travel by Canadians*. [Preference might have been slightly biased in Toronto since the word *recently* was used in Intro A only]. Intro B is preferred for the following reasons:

- it is broader in scope, including more trips:
 - both long and short trips, big and small (Intro A might focus more on extended trips, or out-of-country trips).
 - both pleasure and business (Intro A might exclude business)
- it focuses on both mode of transport and activities (Intro A tended to focus more on mode of transport)

Both Intros make respondents think of destinations and choice of accommodation. Additionally, Intro B makes respondents think of sights visited and dollars spent; in contrast, Intro A makes respondents think of warm climates as well as travel inside Canada, and mode of transport.

Which Option: With and Without *Out of Town*

Out of town means different things in Toronto and Regina. There is much consistency in how it is understood among Toronto respondents; for example, they know they are out of town when they see the city limits sign or when they see the *Welcome to the next city* sign, to some about 100 km.

Regina area respondents respond differently depending on where they live, but even then responses might differ. Interestingly, it also depends on the context of *out of town*. For example, “How far do you have to travel away from home before you would think you are out of town?” yields a tighter and more restrictive response than “What is the meaning of out of town to you?” The latter almost always includes the city of Regina but the former might only include their little town. Overall, “What is the meaning of out of town to you?” provides these responses...

- Those who live in the city think in terms of leaving the city limits, e.g., “When I see the Prairies”
- Those who live in bedroom communities might think of *town* as everything between their bedroom community and the city of Regina (that is, their usual environment); if they are travelling the other way, then approx. 100 km.
- The most interesting and challenging response came from a woman who lives on a farm outside of Edgeley, about 50 km. from Regina. *Out of town* is a meaningless phrase to her since she has no town; it simply does not apply. The other rural respondent who lives in Riceton thinks of *out of town* as about 50 miles out of Riceton.

Overall, respondents in both cities think of their trips in terms of time (e.g., 2 hours away) and not in kilometres or miles. When the question is asked, “How far do you have to travel away from home before you would think you are out of town?”, they again first respond in time.

- Generally, Toronto respondents think of *out of town* as about 100 km. out. This is the same response half of them give to how far away from home they have to travel before they would call it a *trip*.
- In comparison, there is little pattern evident in the responses of Regina area respondents. *Out of town* can be anything from a block and a half to 100 km. away. And, as previously stated, it does not even apply to the woman who lives on a farm; she could offer no alternative phrasing but liked outside of your usual routine. Similarly, a *trip* can be anything from 25 km. away to nothing short of out of the province.

In the end, all respondents in Toronto and most in Regina prefer the question, “Please think about all the *out-of-town* trips you took that ended in March” to the question without the prompt. Not only does *out of town* help to focus them better, it is more inclusive. A few respondents would include more trips with *out of town* (e.g., trips to visit parents in Oakville, trips 350 km. out of Regina to their farm in Tilsdale). Whereas they wonder if they should do so, respondents ultimately do not include commuting or regular shopping, regardless of the question asked.

Both options, with and without *out of town*, are clearer when the main purposes are not read. Some respondents find the phrase *that ended in March/last month* confusing; they cannot figure out why *that ended* is used. A few government employees in Regina interpret *in March* as March of 2001, and not as of a few weeks ago.

Capturing Distance

Although the question was not asked initially, when asked, preference divides in Toronto between these two phrases: *out of town trips* and *trips of at least 80 km. away from home*. More importantly, two visits to parents in Oakville would not have been included if 80 km. had been used.

In Regina, there is some preference for *80 km.* for no other reason than that it is clearer and more precise, less vague. But two respondents would include fewer trips (the farmer would not include two trips into Regina to help her aunt, and one young woman who lives in Kronau would not include a trip into Regina to shop for a bridesmaid’s dress). Conversely, when *out of town* is added, the Balgonie resident would not include routine trips into Regina but would still include pleasure trips to Fort Qu’Appelle.

Other Issues

Same-day trips. Respondents in both cities interpret *same-day trips* differently. Some think in terms of going and returning before they go to bed that night. Others include trips where they spend a night away from home partly it seems because these trips might have been completed in less than 24 hours.

Commuting, etc. A few respondents asked whether they were supposed to include their commutes but when no direction was forthcoming from the moderator they all elected not to include them, regardless of whether *out of town* was used. No one was tempted to include routine shopping, or trips to the bathroom and corner store.

Number of Trips. The number of trips respondents initially remember taking (same-day trips + trips of one night or more away from home) often changes once respondents are asked to tell the moderator about their trips, one by one. In the end, respondents have a high level of confidence in their final estimate of the number of trips they took that ended in March. They do not, however, seem to organize their trips according to any obvious pattern.

Main Purpose. Respondents' main purposes bear little resemblance to the categories used in past surveys:

- *Visiting friends and relatives, pleasure, and vacation/holiday* all tend to overlap.
- Some Torontonians have a very limited interpretation of vacation (a week or more long, often a warm climate) and might classify some shorter vacation-like sounding trips as *pleasure* as a result.
- *Personal reasons* is very rarely understood unless examples are given.
- One low-income low-level employee in Toronto failed to categorize a work-related trip as *business* since he does not have his own business.

Activities. Respondents who are physically active tend to interpret this question literally and only give examples that involve exercise. Overall, the word is not well understood.

Trips Within Trips. Only one respondent in Toronto who travels frequently within the province on business tended to count trips within trips individually.

Conclusions

This research indicates that no guidance appears to be required for English respondents to remember their trips but the number of trips might change as respondents recount their trips one by one. In the end, they are very confident in their estimate of trips but some concession needs to be given to the interviewer in the quantitative survey to correct the initial estimate.

It might be worth considering an alternative expression of *same-day trips* since some respondents consider some trips of one night away from home a same-day trip, especially if they are away less than 24 hours. A literal translation of the French might capture this better (a trip where you go and come back on the same day), or mentioning going and returning before going to bed.

It seems important to repeat the time period (e.g., in March) throughout. Otherwise, respondents might stretch the time period and add trips outside of the time period.

Intro B (trips) captures the intent of the survey better than Intro A (travel), especially in Regina. Importantly, it is broader in scope and is likely to include more trips. Neither Intro tends to cause respondents to include commuting, regular shopping, or trips to the bathroom.

Whereas there is no consistency in the meaning of *out of town*, especially within the Regina area, it does seem that more trips are included when *out-of-town* is used. The one caveat is the farmer to whom *out of town* is meaningless. Some alternative probe is needed in this situation (normal routine? community? usual environment?). In spite of the wide interpretation of *out of town*, those who commute to Regina tend to think in terms of usual environment and therefore exclude these commutes.

Adding *80 km.* is not recommended in spite of some respondent preference. It tends to cause respondents to exclude some trips that are captured by *out of town*.

Personal reasons is not understood and causes a consistent problem among main purposes. It might be worth prompting respondents by citing examples such as funerals or going to a doctor in another town/city. Finally, if the main purposes are meant to be read to respondents in the quantitative survey, it might be worthwhile to rename *business* as *work-related*.

MEMO/FRENCH CANADA

This memo covers the key points of 8 depth interviews that comprised the French Canadian portion of Phase Two, 4 conducted in Montreal and 4 in Trois-Rivières the week of April 8, 2002.

- **Introductions.** Intro A (voyages) is recommended since it makes respondents think of both vacation and business. Just as importantly, both Options 1 and 2 used voyages throughout and respondents had no difficulty recounting both same-day and overnight trips.

In spite of the fact that respondents preferred it, Intro B (déplacements) is not recommended since it is associated mainly with mode of transport; also, one or two respondents might not think to include pleasure trips or vacations.

- **Same-day trips.** The French version, *voyages aller-retour le même jour* (trips where you go and return the same day), never has respondents including trips of one night completed within 24 hours. They only mention trips of no nights away from home.
- **Commuting, etc.** No one ever considers including commutes or regular shopping trips.

- **Which option: with (2) or without (1) à l'extérieur de la ville (out of town).** There is no clear preference here and, when the alternative is asked, no answers are ever changed. In fact, the options are very close in meaning since *à l'extérieur de la ville* is often understood in *voyages*.

However, it is recommended to use Option 2 since respondents are more likely to think in terms of both short and long distances than with *voyages* alone; to some, *un voyage* is at least 200 km. away from home. It may also help overcome any effect of linking *voyages* exclusively to vacation.

- The phrase *à l'extérieur de la ville* seems to present no problem, even in rural Québec. It means outside of the island of Montreal, or outside of my bedroom community, or outside of the city limits of Trois-Rivières by 30 km.; or 30 km. of St-Célestin; or outside of the Shawinigan region. Having said this, no French respondent lived on a farm as in English Canada.
- As in English, respondents often think of their *voyages* in terms of time (e.g., an hour and a half away) and not in kilometres or miles. Similarly, there is some confusion caused by the phrase *qui se sont terminé au mois de mars* (that ended in March).
- **Capturing distance.** Preference divides between these two phrases: *voyages à l'extérieur de la ville (out of town trips)* and *voyages d'au moins 80 kilomètres de distance de votre domicile (trips of at least 80 km. away from home)*. One advantage of citing a distance is that it is neutral. At the same time, nine trips would not have been included if 80 km. had been used, at least three of which are borderline 80k. away. And one woman would be completely baffled if 80 km. is used since she has absolutely no idea of kilometres or miles. She can think in terms of time, however.
- **Trip total estimate.** As in English, respondents have a high level of confidence in their final estimate of the number of trips they took that ended in March. They do not, however, seem to organize their trips according to any obvious pattern. No guidance therefore seems necessary (e.g., most to least recent).
- **Main purpose.** As in English, respondents' main purposes bear little resemblance to the categories used in past surveys. *Fins personnelles (personal reasons)* is again very rarely understood. For example, the hunter included this trip as personal since it is the only type of trip where his family does not accompany him.
- **Activités (activities).** This term is very clear in French.
- **Trips within trips.** No one took any trips within trips, unless one counts the woman who first drops her daughter off at her mother's place in the same city.