Selecting Afghans for English Training
The Afghan Language Aptitude Battery (ALAB)

Objective
To develop a language aptitude test that helps NATO Training Mission personnel in Afghanistan select those students who are most likely to succeed at learning English.

Definition
CASL researchers are developing the Afghan Language Aptitude Battery (ALAB) to assist NATO Training Mission personnel in selecting Afghan students for English language learning. Due to the urgent need for ALAB, CASL researchers translated existing tests of intelligence and cognitive abilities from English to Dari and Pashto. CASL researchers will supplement those test components with newly developed Dari and Pashto measures of language aptitude.

Findings
We administered ALAB Version 1 to Afghan students at the Defense Language Institute English Language Center in San Antonio, TX, and found that, although they could perform the cognitive tasks on the test, they needed more detailed step-by-step instructions due to their unfamiliarity with standardized testing.

For ALAB Version 2, we improved the quality of the instructions with help from native speakers of Dari and Pashto and input from NATO Training Mission personnel in Afghanistan. We also implemented a new procedure for scoring the tests.

We anticipate delivering ALAB Version 3 in April 2011; this version will incorporate feedback from Version 2 and include initial tests of language learning aptitude in Dari and Pashto.

Relevance
ALAB is designed to measure the potential language learning ability and academic ability of students in Afghanistan. We are working with a research team composed of scientists from CASL, Princeton University, Rice University, Michigan State University, and Mount Holyoke College on a final version of ALAB that will include an optimal set of measures of language learning ability, intelligence, and general cognitive ability.

Eventually, what we learn in this project will help CASL to develop other language aptitude tests to predict success in English classes for students in additional countries.

Reports & Products
- ALAB usability study: Evaluating nonverbal reasoning tests in translation (March 2011)
- ALAB Version 1 (sent to Afghanistan in December 2010), Version 2 (sent to Afghanistan in February 2011)

For More Information
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