
DLO DAILY MEDIA UPDATE

CURRENT NEWS 13 SEPTEMBER 2010

Exclusive: Whistleblower Claims Many U.S. Interpreters Can't Speak Afghan Languages

More than one quarter of the translators working alongside American soldiers in Afghanistan failed language proficiency exams but were sent onto the battlefield anyway, according to a former employee of the company that holds contracts worth up to \$1.4 billion to supply interpreters to the U.S. Army. "I determined that someone -- and I didn't know [who] at that time -- was changing the grades from blanks or zeros to passing grades," said Paul Funk, who used to oversee the screening of Afghan linguists for the Columbus, Ohio-based contractor, Mission Essential Personnel. "Many who failed were marked as being passed."

DOD, DHS earn failing grades in foreign language

Do you speak Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Pashto or Urdu? No? Neither do an alarmingly high percentage of troops deployed to the Middle East and southwest Asia, home to languages that local residents but few U.S. warfighters speak. Far too few, according to the Government Accountability Office, which recently released a report that underscores the woeful foreign-language capabilities of the Defense and Homeland Security departments.

How do you say "we have no idea what we're doing" in Pushtu?

A DEPRESSING tale from ABC News's investigative unit: a former employee of a contractor that provides translators for America's army in Afghanistan says that the forces are being had by fraudulently incompetent workers. The contractor, Mission Essential Personnel, strongly denies the accusations and says that the whistleblower is trying to influence an ongoing court case. The whistleblower claims that translators are hiring stand-ins to pass over-the-phone exams in Pushtu, the main language of the Taliban and Afghanistan's south. (Dari, a variety of Persian, is also spoken in Afghanistan and mentioned in the ABC report, but the real critical need is for Pushtu.) The follow-up written exams are similarly described as "bull". The motivation is money: over \$200,000 a year for a "skilled" interpreter.

California arts educators bristle over new bill

A bill that seeks to reduce dropout rates by changing high school graduation requirements statewide has arts education advocates bristling. Assembly Bill 2446 would allow students to pick from a myriad of arts and career technical education or vocational classes instead of requiring them to take yearlong classes in arts or a foreign language. "We feel it's bad educational policy as it sets one education area against another," said Joe Laddon, policy director of the California Arts Education Alliance. Approved by the Legislature, the bill is on the desk of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has until Sept. 30 to sign or veto it.

Alaska Native Language Center linguist helps document dialects

Village elders have worked with researchers for years to document the slate of native languages found across the state. Many of those languages, including Lower Tanana, are extremely endangered. Only a handful of native speakers of Lower Tanana, often referred to as Tanana, are still alive. Different dialects of the language, one of 11 in the Alaska Athabascan family, were originally spoken across the Chena River drainage, from Minto and Nenana east toward Salcha, the Goodpaster River and Big Delta.

PREVIOUS NEWS

Lost In Translation

(ABC)...Brian Ross

"World News Investigates" segment on allegations that the private contractor Mission Essential Personnel is faking the competence of some translators in Afghanistan. U.S. soldiers there rely heavily on such private translators, who can earn as much as \$210,000 a year.

Virtual high school opens 'doors' to learning

The Defense Department's newest high school is devoid of walls or windows, but yet has opened its "doors" this year to students throughout the world. The DOD Education Activity's virtual high school is an accredited distance learning program for military students, whether they're geographically separated, transitioning between schools or just dealing with a scheduling conflict. "It's a wonderful opportunity to close gaps and enhance students' educational experience in a 21st century environment," said Marilee Fitzgerald, the activity's acting director. "I think it opens up possibilities for learning that we have yet to understand, yet to explore." The virtual school offers students 48 online courses in a wide range of disciplinary areas, including foreign language, math, science, social studies, language arts and physical education, as well as 15 advanced placement courses.

Language classes shift to conversation, culture

Sioux Falls public schools are tweaking their curriculum to give students a greater understanding of the world's people and help them communicate in real-life situations. In foreign language classes, the focus is turning to conversational instruction, rather than memorizing vocabulary words. Teachers also are being asked to spend more time describing the way of life in foreign countries, not only teaching the language. "A big part of the language is understanding culture," assistant superintendent Fred Aderhold said.

Kids' Study Habit Myths Debunked

As 68.5 million students start their studies this year, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), scientists now say that the common wisdom on information-retention may not be the most successful. **MYTH: FOCUS ON ONE SKILL:** If you are studying a foreign language, for example, you may want to study vocabulary, read and speak the language, all within one sitting. Participating in multi-modal learning (reading, speaking, listening) leaves a deeper impression of the material on the brain.

Warning over university's rethink of its modern languages provision

Professor Mary Bryden, president of the Association of University Professors and Heads of French (AUPHF), said any move to cut resources would be detrimental to employers. Professor Carol Tully teaches German at Bangor University and is an active member of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML). She said: "In scaling down their provision in modern languages to the extent proposed, Swansea University will find itself at odds with the key message emerging from policy documents such as the Welsh Assembly Government's Making Languages Count. "Modern languages are an important and vital subject area which contribute in the regional, national and global context. Consequently, excellent provision of the kind provided by Swansea should be fostered, not reduced."

Just 1 in 10 Brits attempt foreign language whilst on holiday

A new poll by the UK's fastest growing online independent travel agent has revealed that just 11% of holidaymakers from Britain attempt to speak the foreign language when they are on holiday abroad.

Language Tables

Each semester, the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures holds language tables in specific rooms in Sharples dining hall for each of the seven languages taught in our department. Students who speak a foreign language are encouraged to attend whether enrolled in a language course or not and

have lunch/dinner with faculty members and other students. The language tables start the week of September 6, 2010.

Lend Me Your Ears: US Military Turns to Contractor Linguists

The US military has come to rely more and more on contractors to provide linguist services to function effectively in non-English speaking regions. The need for these services is particularly acute in the Middle East and Central Asia where US troops are actively engaged.

FAU wins \$200,000 grant to expand Asian studies, language training

Florida Atlantic University recently received an Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language grant from the U.S. Department of Education to enhance the university's Asian studies curriculum. The grant, consisting of \$200,000 over two years, will strengthen FAU's Asian studies certificate program and increase faculty in Asian studies. FAU's Asian studies program encompasses East, South and West Asia, and the Middle East.

Foreign Language Courses, Brushing Up or Immersion

These days, online programs and CDs like [Rosetta Stone](#) and [Pimsleur](#) are grabbing the interest of people attracted by their convenience and relatively low cost. But more schools are offering their own online-only language courses as part of extension programs. At the [University of California, Los Angeles](#), traditional, three-month language classes cost \$480, and online classes cost \$550. The online courses include video lectures, readings, exercises and assignments, which the instructors can correct and return to the student via e-mail. Students can practice with one another via chatrooms, and instructors and students can also talk on the phone to work on pronunciation, said Krista K. Loretto, program manager for [U.C.L.A. Extension](#).

Two Language and Culture Centers Receive \$3 Million in Federal Grants

The [Center for European Studies](#) (CES) and the [Texas Language Technology Center](#) (TLTC) at The University of Texas at Austin have been awarded federal grants totaling more than \$3 million to establish new language and culture centers that will allow them to strengthen their role as national leaders in their fields. The Center for European Studies received a more than \$1.6 million Title VI Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education for 2010-2014 and has been designated a National Resource Center. CES works to promote studies of Europe across disciplines through courses on culture, history, economics, politics and foreign languages. Douglas Biow, CES director and professor of Italian in the Department of French and Italian, said the funding will help the center broaden its connections with schools and colleges throughout the university, as well as international academic institutions.

Spanish Language Company Launches New Online Media Room

Visual Link Languages(R), the world's number one most effective way to learn Spanish, has launched a new resource for journalists as well as government and corporate outreach departments. The Media Room is constantly updated with press releases and interesting articles about how to learn Spanish and several other languages Visual Link offers.

NUT: OECD REPORT- Education at a Glance

General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers union said; ""The report shows England has a relatively low proportion of time allocated to modern foreign languages compared with other OECD countries. This was reflected in this year's GCSE and A level results. I urge the Government to come up with a coherent policy to ensure that all young people acquire at least one modern foreign language."

Listening In Tongues

After nearly a decade of fighting in Afghanistan and [the Middle East](#), the U.S. Army still can't find enough linguists (interpreters to help troops dealing with locals and translators to handle documents and recordings). Even before September 11, 2001, the army was having problems finding enough linguists. During the 1990s, there was a big need for Albanian and Slavic language linguists to support American peacekeeping operations there. Currently, the army is spending over \$250 million a year for contract linguists. The big demand now is for those who can speak Pashto and Dari, the two major languages in

Afghanistan. The [U.S. military](#) has had some success in finding American troops who speak foreign languages well enough to operate as battlefield translators. This was a major boost for intelligence gathering, since a lot of what you want to know can be found in what the locals are saying.

Arabic, Farsi Fluency Considered 'Critical' to US National Security

Summer vacation is ending and students at American schools and colleges are getting ready to head back to class. In previous years, many of them would have been taking French or Spanish as a second language. Knowledge of Arabic or Farsi is now considered "critical" to U.S. national security and more Americans are learning these languages today than ever before.

PARENTS LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO EXPOSE CHILDREN TO LANGUAGES

Forward thinking parents are now looking for new ways to encourage their offspring to learn a second language including hiring foreign language speaking nannies, enrolling in language classes and using bilingual educational materials at home. In contrast to the recent news of a drop in the number of students taking GCSE in languages, many parents are looking for ways to encourage their children to learn a second language at an early age. It is not uncommon for a first or even a second nanny to be hired by working parents, who can speak another language. Parents ask the nanny to speak to the child in that language in the hope that it will give them a good start on the road to fluency.