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Development of the Verbal Memory Arabic Test (VMAT).

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Background: Verbal memory assessment requires the memorization of words across several trials and recalling these words with and without aid across time. This testing type is integral to neuropsychological assessment and is widely used in clinical and research settings. However, verbal memory tests are often translated from existing Western tools a process that poses serious cultural and psychometric problems when interpreting the finding. Our study aimed to develop a test that is culturally and psychometrically robust to memory impairment among Arabic-speaking people.

Methods: In order to identify 15 Arabic words that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, we recruited 77 normal adults from across Lebanon and asked them to generate words for seven semantic categories.

Results: We collected approximately 133 Arabic words per category, selected those with low to medium frequency, and further selected words based on 11 conceptual criteria. The most appropriate words constructed the primary memory list of 15 words (List A), and two lists served as interference (List B) and recognition items. The final version of the Verbal Memory Arabic Test (VMAT) comprised five trials of List A, followed by interference list, then immediate recall of List A with and without semantic cues, then delayed recall after 15 minutes, and finally a recognition trial.

Conclusion: The VMAT is the first neuropsychological tool developed intentionally as a culturally and linguistically valid verbal memory test in Arabic. The next step is to provide normative data and evidence of its validity and reliability on 184 normal adults (older than 16 years), 50 patients with multiple sclerosis, and other special populations.