

Arabic 101

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Sections 1-4

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the study of Arabic at Brigham Young University. Arabic is the theological language for many millions of Muslims throughout the world and the language of daily communication in the Arabic World, which consists, more or less, of 22 nations of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as of the Arab diaspora. Because it is used in so many different places, Arabic includes a number of regional as well as stylistic varieties. The most basic division is between what might be called Standard Written Arabic, used in books, newspapers, news broadcasts and formal speeches, and informal Spoken Arabic, often called dialect, colloquial or vernacular Arabic, used at home and in daily life. The Written Arabic variety is much the same across the Arab World, while the vernacular varieties vary from one place to another, often quite dramatically. The written and spoken forms, although quite different from each other, are still closely related, and much of what you learn in one form can be transferred to the other.

This class is designed to give you a good introduction to Arabic as it is actually used, resulting in practical speaking and reading ability. The goal of the core BYU Arabic program as a whole (Arabic 101, 102, 201, 202, followed by a semester-length intensive study abroad experience) is to bring you to basic functional fluency in both speaking a dialect and reading the daily press. You will thus be exposed to both varieties from the beginning. We recognize that this can be a little confusing at first, but we have found that this method produces the best outcome in the end. Don't worry too much if you mix up the two varieties in the beginning (most Arabs do so regularly), but do work toward knowing the difference so you can keep them separate or mix, as appropriate.

In this class, you will learn to speak the Cairene dialect of Egyptian Arabic. There are many reasons for this choice, including that it is the most widely spoken and understood dialect in the Arab World. Even if your ultimate aim is to learn a different dialect, learning Cairene now will help you along the way to your goal. We have found that once students learn one dialect, transferring those skills to a second dialect is much easier than starting over and learning it from scratch, and this will come naturally as you live in an environment where the new dialect is spoken. Your knowledge of Egyptian will help you communicate with people as you make the transition.

Arabic is a relatively challenging language to learn. Research indicates that it takes longer for native speakers of English to learn it than to learn a language like Spanish or German. However, Arabic is a human language like any other, and children learn it with

the same ease they learn any other language. Arabic 101 at BYU is designed to be an introductory experience for all. The pace is brisk but reasonable for nearly all students willing to devote two hours of focused study for every hour of class. We assume in subsequent courses, particularly 201 and beyond, that students are committed to achieving high levels of proficiency in Arabic. Students sometimes complain that four credit hours is too few, given the amount of work required to do well in a course like 201 (some feel similarly about 101 and 102). Such an attitude will not serve you well. Learning a language is acquiring a skill, not an academic discipline. A more useful approach to take is to think of Arabic as being similar to dance or art classes: the credit hours are typically low compared to the time needed to develop proficiency in the desired skill. It will also not help you to make comparisons with other languages taught at BYU or elsewhere. Keep your eye on your goal of learning Arabic and count yourself fortunate to be at one of the relatively few institutions in the world where you will be pushed to achieve your goal. If you cannot devote the necessary time and energy to succeed and do well, we *strongly* encourage you to either drop this class now or make necessary adjustments in your schedule.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Arabic 101 is designed to help you acquire proficiency to *use* Arabic, to speak, listen, read, write, and to behave in culturally appropriate ways. Class time will therefore be largely devoted to using the language, so don't expect much explanation in class. You will find the facts in your textbooks and other materials; classroom is the time to act, to learn through doing, to practice. You are expected to prepare well before class so that classroom time can be maximally beneficial. If you fail to prepare and fall behind, you may be asked to sit in the back of the class—becoming, in essence, an auditor until you are prepared to be a full participant. We do not expect perfection. We simply ask that you do your best to be prepared to participate. Almost everyone on occasion (= rarely) has unforeseen circumstances and is not able to fully prepare so please **do not skip class** if you are not fully prepared. The classroom experience is the one assignment you cannot make up later. After you've prepared but you still have a question, please write your questions down. Feel free to ask during class, unless it's a question that is likely to distract the class (that's not relevant to the group), in which case you should ask before or after class, or in an email message.

The first few weeks of class will be devoted to learning to converse in basic Egyptian Arabic and to read and write the Arabic script. Thereafter we will begin our study of formal Written Arabic, in addition to continuing to push on with Egyptian. The lesson is listed on the day we will begin to study it in class. AB refers to *Alif Baa'* (the textbook for learning the Arabic script), EA to the Egyptian Arabic packet, and AK to *Al-Kitaab*, the regular textbook.

A weekly assignment sheet will be provided that will detail exactly what we expect you to accomplish every day. Carefully following that sheet will help you keep up with the class, and be aware of what you are supposed to have mastered at any particular point.

BOOKS

The texts for this class are:

- Kristen Brustad, et al., *Alif Baa* (2nd edition)
- Kristen Brustad, et al., *Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-^cArabiyya I* (2nd edition)
- Arabic 101 Packet (Egyptian Arabic)
- Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A guide for Westerners* (you can buy this or check out one of the copies that are on reserve in the HBLL Reserve Library, DS 36.77 .N93 1987)

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

In addition to the DVDs that come with *Alif Baa* and *Al-Kitaab*, we have developed courseware to assist you in learning Arabic. Two types are available: drills using a computer program called Revolution and web-based drills. They may both be used on either Macs or PCs, although the Revolution-based drills look somewhat better on Macs for the present. The Revolution based drills require you to download a “front end” to use them anywhere other than the Humanities Learning Resource Center. The web-based courseware can be found at: <http://arabic.byu.edu> (password: cedar).

CLASS EXPECTATIONS AND GRADES

This class will have two midterms, the script midterm on Feb. 13th and the second on March 13th; combined they're worth 20% of your grade. The final exam counts for 30% and will be administered only at the regularly scheduled time. The Egyptian Arabic portion of the class will be weighted about equally with the Written Arabic portion on these exams. The remaining 50% of your grade will be based on homework assignments and quizzes. You may retake any quiz, re-do any assignment (except unscheduled quizzes). The midterm and final, however, cannot be redone or made up. Because the final measures your ability to use Arabic (the goal of this course), no one will receive a grade lower than his or her final exam score. You cannot “cram” for such a Final so be wise. Experience and statistical analysis show that students rarely perform well on the final if they have not conscientiously done their homework. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can prepare later. On the other hand, if you work hard and don't do well on the midterm, consider it diagnostic, figure out what you need to do different and you still could do well. We cannot state strongly enough the wisdom of a good start and faithful preparation. It may be that nothing but farming teaches the law of the harvest better than language learning.

Attendance in this class is required. Attendance will be taken daily. If you come to class later than five minutes after it starts you will be marked tardy, and three tardies will count as an absence. Five absences will cause your final grade to be dropped by ½ grade. Ten absences will cause a full grade drop. Fifteen absences will cause an automatic failing grade in the class, no matter what other results you have obtained. If you feel that you can learn Arabic just as well on your own, and that the class is more of a burden than a help, you are entitled to go forward with that belief and try to learn it any way you can. Just drop this class first. We have found that this class works best when the participants are team players.

Homework and take-home quizzes may be turned in one day late for half credit; please do not turn work in later than this (if you do get behind and want feedback on your work that is too late to turn in we are happy to go over such things with you during office hours). Try to keep up. If, for some reason (illness, for example), you do fall behind do the best you can to complete the current assignments, while trying to catch up with learning vocabulary and whatever else you missed. A little thought will convince you that **consistency is key**. No one grade on a quiz or assignment will hurt you or help you much but your pattern of effort will add up quickly. Consistently preparing well (“practice makes permanent”) will give you the skills you want, the skills that will enable you to use Arabic (and therefore do well on the Final). Remember, learning a language happens through diligently and regularly working on it. Daily assignments are all constructed to help you stay focused but they can be subverted and turned into busy work that results in minimal real learning. We hope you understand that the homework, quizzes, and tests are there for a purpose: so that you can learn Arabic. These activities may sometimes seem like busywork, but they are there for a purpose. You can defeat that purpose rather easily so be careful.

Language learning is an indirect, rather than a direct, result of the kinds of activities, drills, class participation, etc. that you do. You will often not see a discrete jump in your knowledge based on your having done a particular assignment. However, you must keep involved in the language for anything to happen at all. It is possible to turn any assignment (or a whole semester’s worth of them) into busy work. Please pay attention to why you are doing the drills, attend to the meaning of the sentences you are working with, and don’t ever allow yourself to do a drill just to “get it done.”

KEYS TO LEARNING ARABIC

Arabic is a challenging language. Grammatically it has nothing on Finnish or Russian, but the vocabulary is rather rich and most of it is not cognate with English (there are quite a few borrowings from Western European languages, especially in Spoken Arabic). The bottom line: learning all of Arabic may not be possible but learning to function comfortably in Arabic in the modern world is quite doable—and well worth the effort. If you work hard and *smart* the rewards will come. Your success in making good progress is critically dependent on your knowing and feeling in your bones that **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEING TO IT THAT YOU LEARN ARABIC**. No one can do it for you (consider your teachers temporary consultants). There are no magic pills. It will only happen if you assume full responsibility and **do** what **you** need to do to make it happen (what you will need to do differs somewhat from person to person). You can do it, but you should be well aware of the fact that learning a language can pose a threat to one’s ego or self-concept (or whatever term you prefer). It is tempting in the face of this “threat” to duck the responsibility (and the attendant threat) and to make excuses. As you experience difficulties in learning Arabic (most students do), you will likely be tempted to blame the language, the class, the textbook, your schedule, your instructor, and even God. Assume full responsibility for each new vocabulary item, each verb conjugation, each reading or listening passage (but be careful, especially those who have perfectionistic tendencies, that you don’t spend too much time where you shouldn’t). Be wise. Get in the habit of taking time to **think** about the purpose of each homework

assignment, then make sure that its purpose is efficiently accomplished. You'll do far better if you take a few minutes and plan how you will succeed each day, if you set short-term goals and time limits.

The classroom is a place to **use** Arabic. Come to class prepared to do just that. Prepare well. Expect a daily immersion experience. Do not expect explanations in class and try to avoid asking for them during communicative activities, but do feel free to ask comprehension questions. Try to do so in Arabic first (learn the very valuable skill of getting by with what you know and finding out later how to be more native-like!). If you must use English **and** the question will contribute to class, ask for permission to use English. Usually, you and others will be far better served if you write down questions you have as you are preparing before class or as questions arise during class. If you cannot find an answer to your question, ask your instructor before or after class, or during classroom time designated for such questions.

Students vary considerably in their language learning abilities and preferred learning styles. We will strive to provide a rich learning environment, but it is up to you to make the most of it and to do whatever you need to do to succeed. The communicative approach that we employ works best for those who learn to strike a good balance between paying attention to detail and not becoming obsessed with knowing every detail. You should learn and learn very well the core vocabulary and structures that are introduced. Equally important is to learn to deal with not knowing everything. Even advanced learners of Arabic regularly encounter words and expressions that they have never seen or heard before. Start now to learn how to make the best of what you do know and learn how to make the most of context and linguistic structure to help you successfully negotiate what you don't. Class will give you a lot of practice in acquiring this very valuable skill. Be patient. Enjoy the journey. Eat well, get enough sleep, and get some exercise. Pace yourself.

HONOR CODE AND AIMS OF A BYU EDUCATION

We expect your whole-hearted adherence to the spirit and letter of the Honor Code, including the dress and grooming standards. Opportunities for cheating abound in this class, but we trust you. We assume you are here to learn. You will not be able to cheat on the Midterm and Final. In other words, the day of judgment will come soon enough for those who compromise their integrity. We invite you to lift your vision to a higher plane and contribute to and benefit from an educational experience that will significantly enrich your life and bless the lives of many others for years to come. This course is very much about every aspect of the "Aims of a BYU Education" (if you have not read this inspired document recently, please take time to do so at <http://unicomm.byu.edu/about/aims/>).

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students

as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor, contact the Equal Opportunity Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24 hrs), or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the Center. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Opportunity Office at 422-5895 (D-282 ASB).

WORKING HARD BUT IT'S NOT WORKING FOR YOU?

If you are looking to improve your study habits we suggest you take a look at *Language learning: Insights for learners, teachers, and researchers* by Andrew Cohen (HBL Reserve Library, P 51 .C58 1990). Please come talk to us if you find that you are truly working hard and smart but you don't seem to be getting anywhere. Sometimes just talking about it helps you to find ways to learn better; occasionally, we can even help with a suggestion or two. If you are struggling, the single most important thing that you can do is to get the required vocabulary down. This may require that you start learning it earlier than the syllabus suggests. Keep sharp on vocabulary from previous lessons through regular review. Reading and listening to past material are excellent ways to review vocabulary. You can't do much without vocabulary. Time spent learning the required vocabulary well, and regularly reviewing it, will actually save you a lot of time. You'll be able to do drills much faster, you'll be a better reader. Make yourself into a vocabulary master (even if memorizing is not your forte). **Find out what works for you.** The solution is probably not long sessions in which you try to force a vocabulary list into your resistant brain. You'll probably do far better if you start two days before a quiz (this takes planning!), and spend a half hour familiarizing yourself with the new vocabulary by writing it out in a pocket notebook or on flash cards. Then, over the next days (before and *after* the quiz), review that vocabulary until you have it down. Continue to regularly review vocabulary from past lessons as you walk to class, stand in line, ride the bus....

ONE LAST WORD

We care about you and hope that you will succeed in your studies, as well as other aspects of your life. We will all invest a good deal of time and energy in this class. It should be a fun, stretching experience. A former student (a financial analyst) told us that studying Arabic taught him more about succeeding in his field than any other class he took. Mostly, it taught him time management. Make the most of this opportunity. That doesn't mean superhuman surges, it means consistent, regular, every day work—work! Not work for work's sake, but work focused on specific results. It is amazing what a person can accomplish with an hour or two a day of consistent, focused effort.

Summary of Joan Rubin's
“What the ‘good language learner’ can teach us”
(*TESOL Quarterly*, 9,1:41-51, 1975)

Joan Rubin's classic paper discusses some characteristics of highly successful language learners. Few people possess all of these traits natively. Further, there is no one and only best way to learn a language. We encourage you to seriously examine your habits and give these a try. Let go of your inhibitions and fears of making a fool of yourself and dive in. As you can see, learning Arabic may mean learning a great deal about yourself, things you might never have known otherwise. We hope that you will enjoy the experience.

1. Willing and accurate guesser.

Comfortable with uncertainty and willing to guess (doesn't have to understand every word, tolerates a little vagueness).

2. Has a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from communication.

Willing to do many things to get message across (uses gestures, circumlocutions when she is stuck).

3. Is often not inhibited

Willing to appear foolish or to make mistakes in attempting to learn and to communicate. Willing to risk a little to learn.

4. In addition to focusing on communication, focuses on form.

Constantly looking for patterns in the language (how are language elements structured; what are relevant, recurring items).

5. Practices.

Practices pronouncing words or making up sentences. Seeks out opportunities to use the language. Initiates conversation.

6. Pays attention to his/her own speech and the speech of others.

Listens carefully, even when not spoken to, and learns from mistakes. Active participant.

7. Attends to meaning.

Focuses on meaning. Uses contextual clues to help her understand language which would otherwise be incomprehensible. Pays attention to context of speech, how speakers interact.

*Individual learning styles differ considerably. Importance of various strategies may differ according to learning stage and context.