



# ARABIC

## A PROFILE

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## ARABIC

### INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the official language of some fifteen countries, and over 200,000,000 people are estimated to speak some dialect of Arabic. The geographical centre of the language can be said to encompass the northmost part of Africa from Mauritania to Egypt, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iraq. In addition to the Arab countries, in which Arabic speakers are concentrated, large numbers of Arabic speakers live in Iran and France (600,000 speakers each), while a substantial number of speakers live in the Comoroes, Tanzania and other parts of Africa.

Arabic (اللغة العربية; *al-luġatu-l-ʿarabiyyatu*, less formally, عربي *ʿarabī*) is the largest member of the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family (classification: South Central Semitic) and is closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic. It is spoken throughout the Arab world and is widely studied and known throughout the Islamic world. Arabic has been a literary language since at least the 6th century and is the liturgical language of Islam.

Quite a few English words are ultimately derived from Arabic, often through other European languages, especially Spanish, among them every-day vocabulary like "sugar" (*sukkar*), "cotton" (*quṭūn*) or "magazine" (*maḥāzin*). More recognizable are words like "algebra", "alcohol" and "zenith".

There are over 30 different varieties of colloquial Arabic which include:

- **Egyptian** – spoken by 46 million people in Egypt and perhaps the most widely understood variety, due to the popularity of Egyptian-made films and tv shows.
- **Algerian** – spoken by about 22 million people in Algeria.
- **Moroccan/Maghrebi** – spoken in Morocco by 19.5 million people.
- **Sudenese** - spoken in Sudan by 19 million people.
- **Saidi** – spoken by 19 million people in Egypt.
- **Leventine** – spoken in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Syria by 15 million people.
- **Mesoptamin** – spoken by 14 million people in Iraq, Iran and Syria.
- **Najdi** – spoken in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria by 10 million people.
- **Modern Standard Arabic** – is the official language throughout the Arab world, its written form is relatively consistent across national boundaries. It is essentially a modern variant of Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran. Standard Arabic is not acquired as a mother tongue, but rather it is learned as a second language at school and through exposure to formal broadcast programs (such as daily news), religious practice, and print media.

Colloquial or dialectal Arabic refers to the many national or regional varieties derived from Classical Arabic. These sometimes differ enough to be mutually incomprehensible. They are often used to varying degrees in informal spoken media, such as talk shows and soap operas

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## ARABIC PHONOLOGY

Classical Arabic has 28 consonantal phonemes (including two semi-vowels), originally corresponding to the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet. Arabic has six vowel phonemes (three short vowels and three long vowels); they appear as various allophones, depending on the preceding consonant. Short vowels are not usually represented in written language, although they may be indicated with diacritics.

List of phonemes as transliterated in this article:

- 26 consonants:  $\text{p b t t}^{\text{ğ}} \text{ħ ʕ d ɗ r z s š ʂ ɗ t ʒ} \text{ ʕ ʔ f q k l m n h}$
- 2 semi-vowels: w y
- 6 vowels: a ā i ī u ū

Note that Arabic is particularly rich in uvular, pharyngeal, and pharyngealized ("emphatic") sounds. The emphatic sounds are generally considered to be  $\text{ʂ, ɗ, t}^{\text{ğ}}$ , and  $\text{ʒ}$ .

The syllable structure of Arabic is such that there may be clusters of two, but not of three consecutive consonants. A cluster of two consonants at the beginning of an utterance will be preceded by an auxiliary vowel (*alif al-waṣl*).

Standard Arabic consonant phonemes											
		<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Inter-dental</u>	<u>Dental</u>		<u>Post-alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Uvular</u>	<u>Pharyngeal</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
				plain	<u>emphatic</u>						
<u>Stop</u>	<u>voiceless</u>			t	t <sup>ğ</sup>			k	q		ʔ
	<u>voiced</u>	b		d	d <sup>ğ</sup>	dʒ <sup>1</sup>					
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>voiceless</u>	f	θ	s	s <sup>ğ</sup>	ʃ		x		ħ	h
	<u>voiced</u>		ð	z	ð <sup>ğ</sup>			ʁ		ʕ	
<u>Nasal</u>		m		n							
<u>Lateral</u>				l <sup>2</sup>							
<u>Trill</u>				r							
<u>Approximant</u>		w					j				

## VOWELS

Arabic has three vowels, with their long forms, plus two diphthongs: *a* [ɛ̄] (open e as in English *bed*, but centralised), *i* [ɪ], *u* [ʊ]; *ā* [ǣ], *ī* [ī], *ū* [ū]; *ai* (*ay*) [ɛ̄ɪ], *au* (*aw*) [ɛ̄ʊ]. Allophonically, after velarized consonants (see following), the vowel *a* is pronounced [a], *ā* as [aː] (thus also after *r*), *ai* as [aɪ] and *au* as [aʊ].

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

## MODERN STANDARD ARABIC

Standard Arabic has 27 simple consonants, the 3 short vowels /a,i,u/, and the 3 long vowels /aa,ii,uu/. (Additional vowels and consonants are sometimes used in borrowings.) The consonants /t,d,s,dh/ have two variants, one normal and one "emphatic" (glottalized or pharyngealized). Emphatic consonants are usually transliterated with a dot underneath. Arabic also has a number of velar and post-velar consonants, including two pharyngeal fricatives (one voiced and one voiceless) and a voiceless uvular stop. Standard Arabic does not allow clusters of more than two consonants.

## EGYPTIAN ARABIC

Egyptian Arabic is distinguished by a larger vowel inventory than Classical Arabic, with four short vowels (plus epenthetic schwa) and six long vowels, compared to three short vowels and six long vowels in Classical Arabic. Consonantal changes have included the loss of interdental fricatives. Egyptian Arabic is also characterized by two regular phonological processes lacking in Standard Arabic. First, all long vowels become shortened in unstressed positions and before consonant clusters. And second, many instances of short *i* and *u* are dropped by a process known as high vowel deletion. For example, when the feminine suffix *-a* is added to the participle *kaatib* "having written (masc.)", the *i* is deleted, resulting in *katba*.

## MOROCCAN ARABIC

Moroccan Arabic has thirty-one consonants, including eight emphatic (pharyngealized) ones. The geminates *bb*, *ff*, and *mm* also have a labialized, emphatic variant. Emphatic consonants are usually represented with a dot underneath. In this profile they are written with a capital letter. Moroccan Arabic has lost the interdental fricatives of Classical Arabic. It has six vowels: the three "stable" vowels *i*, *a*, and *u*, and the three "variable" vowels *e*, *ā*, and *o*. A stable vowel can occur in all positions and cannot be deleted or invert its position relative to a consonant. In contrast, a variable vowel is shorter, doesn't occur in certain positions (such as word-finally), and can be subject to deletion or inversion.

## LEVANTINE ARABIC

The consonants of Damascus Arabic is similar to that of Standard Arabic, except that the interdental sounds of Standard Arabic have been lost and the voiceless uvular stop *q* is found only in borrowings from Standard or Classical Arabic. Most Standard Arabic words with *q* have a glottal stop in Levantine Arabic, such as *da'ii'a* "minute" (compared to Standard Arabic *daqiiqa(t)*). The Standard Arabic letter *jiim* is pronounced as a voiced alveolar fricative (like the *s* in English *pleasure*), but *g* exists as a separate phoneme used in borrowings, including some from other Arabic dialects. Damascus Arabic has a larger number of vowels than Classical Arabic: the five long vowels *aa*, *ee*, *ii*, *oo*, and *uu*, and the

six short vowels *a, e, i, o, u*, and *ə* (schwa). Some of the short vowels can appear only in particular environments. For example, the only two short vowels which appear in a non-final syllable are *a* and *ə*. **SYLLABLES STRUCTURE**

Arabic has two kinds of syllable: open syllables (CV) and (CVV) - and closed syllables (CVC), (and (CVCC)). Every syllable begins with a consonant - or else a consonant is borrowed from a previous word through elision – especially in the case of the definite article THE, *al* (used when starting an utterance) or *l* (when following a word), e.g. *baytu -l mudiir* “house (of) the director”, which becomes *bay-tul-mu-diir* when divided syllabically. By itself, definite *mudiir* would be pronounced /al mudiir/.

## STRESS

Although word stress is not phonemically contrastive in Standard Arabic, it does bear a strong relationship to vowel length and syllable shape, and correct word stress aids intelligibility. In general, "heavy" syllables attract stress (i.e. syllables of longer duration - a closed syllable or a syllable with a long vowel). In a word with a syllable with one long vowel, the long vowel attracts the stress (e.g. *ki-'taab* and *'kaa-tib*). In a word with two long vowels, the second long vowel attracts stress (e.g. *ma-kaa-'tiib*). In a word with a "heavy" syllable where two consonants occur together or the same consonant is doubled, the (last) heavy syllable attracts stress (e.g. *ya-ma-'niyy*, *ka-'tabt*, *ka-'tab-na*, *ma-'jal-lah*, *'mad-ra-sah*, *yur-'sil-na*). This last rule trumps the first two: *ja-zaa-ʔ-'riyy*. Otherwise, word stress typically falls on the first syllable: *'ya-man*, *'ka-ta-bat*, etc. The Cairo (Egyptian Arabic) dialect, however, has some idiosyncrasies in that a heavy syllable may not carry stress more than two syllables from the end of a word, so that *mad-'ra-sah* carries the stress on the second-to-last syllable, as does *qaa-'hi-rah*.

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## GRAMMAR- Modern Standard Arabic

### NOUNS

The noun is marked for gender (masculine and feminine), number (singular, dual, and plural), case (nominative, accusative, and genitive), and definiteness. Masculine gender is unmarked, while feminine singular nouns are usually marked with the suffix '-a(t)'. (The *t* is not pronounced in phrase-final position.) Arabic nouns are divided into those that have a "sound plural" (regular plural), and those with "broken plural" (irregular plural). Nouns that have a sound plural, form it with a special suffix, whereas the broken plurals are formed according to several different patterns or templates, e.g. *kalb* "dog" > *kilaab* "dogs", *kitaab* "book" > *kutub* "books", *baab* "door" > *'abwaab* "doors". Definiteness is indicated by the article 'al-' while indefiniteness is usually indicated by the suffix *-n*, which follows any case suffixes. Hence, *al-kitaabu* "the book (nom.)", *kitaabun* "a book (nom.)", *al-kitaaba* "the book (accus.)", *kitaaban* "a book (accus.)". The modern Arabic dialects all lack case endings and the indefinite suffix, and typically only the most competent speakers master the rules governing their use in Standard Arabic.

### VERBS

The verb is marked for perfective or imperfective aspect. The perfective aspect is used to denote completed events, while the imperfective aspect denotes uncompleted actions. In addition to aspect, the Arabic verb is marked for person, number, mood (indicative, subjunctive, jussive, and imperative) and voice (active and passive). For example, the present tense negative particle *laa* is followed by an imperfect indicative verb, as in *laa yaktubu* "he writes", while the future negative particle *lan* is followed by a subjunctive, as in *lan yaktuba* "he won't write", and the past negative particle *lam* is followed by a jussive, as in *lam yaktub* "he didn't write".

### SYNTAX

In Arabic, word order is less important than in English, and more stylistic than semantic. Verbs often start sentences and sometimes come after the subject.

1. <Verb><Subject><Object>
2. <Subject><Verb><Object>

The first one is classified as the default word order. The second one is used when putting greater attention to the subject, this usually happens when the answer to the question is the subject. However in the vernacular, the default word order is <Subject><Verb><Object> Subject Pronouns are often dropped because the conjugation already indicates which pronoun would be said (there is ambiguity though). Subject Pronouns are often included when that word is emphasized. Helper verbs always go before main verbs just like in English.

Adjectives or nouns acting as adjectives go after the nouns they modify, and carry the definite article if the noun is definite. Same for genitive pronouns. Accusative (Object) pronouns are suffixed to the verb.

Case Endings differentiate the doer of the action (u, or un), the object of the action (a, or an), the object of a preposition or genitive/possessive (i or in). For Dative there is no ending instead, there is a preposition "li" which becomes "la" when a preposition is affixed example li+hu=> "lahū" and li +al=> lil- .

"inna" is a word that often starts sentences and any word right after it takes the accusative case. It has "sisters", that act in the same way. In modern Arabic, "inna" is mostly dispensed with in translations, but in religious and older texts one translates it as "verily". E.g. "Innaka anta jamīlun." - "Verily, thou art beautiful."

In Arabic, a word is classified as either a noun (*ism*), a verb (*fiʿl*), a pronoun or a preposition (*ḥarf*). Adverbials are expressed with nominal forms. Repetitive use of the same root in verb and noun in a sentence is considered good style, especially with derived forms of the same verb. Such as the root " `alm " which in Form I is " `alama " meaning "to know" but in form II " `allama " with the middle radical(letter) doubled, changing the meaning to "to teach". Also considered good form is constructing a long sentence joined together with connectors (Adawaat al RabT) which are like conjunctions which allow for many clauses to run on and on in the same sentence.

- For example: *qara'a al-kitāba qirā'atan baṭī'atan*, literally: "he read the book a slow reading", i.e., "He read the book slowly". This type of construction is known as the "absolute accusative."
- The Masdar, verbal nouns which are irregular for Form I and regular for all other forms. It functions sometimes like an infinitive and sometimes like the noun which encompasses the concept of the verb.
- Active and Passive participles, called Ism Faʿl or Ism Mafʿūl after the pattern into which the roots are put, function sometimes like adjectives, sometimes present participles, and sometimes like nouns such as "Doer" and "Doneto". So: *kātib* is "writer" and *maktūb* is "written".

There are many types of sentences:

- the nominal sentence, consisting of a subject then a predicate (*al-bayt kabir* - "the house big" viz., "the house is big")
- the verbal sentence, which usually follows the VSO pattern (*yafhamu aiman al-muh.ad.arat* => Ayman understands the lecture);
- the amma... fa-sentence

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## USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

What is your name?

*ma ismok?* مَا اسْمُكَ

My name is

*ismy* \_\_\_\_\_ اِسْمِي

how old are you?

*kam omroka?* كَمْ عَمْرُكَ؟

Nice to meet you

*tasharrafna* تَشَرَّفْنَا

Goodbye

*ma 'assalama* مَعَ السَّلَامِ

yes

*na'am* نَعَمْ

no

*la* لَا

## QUESTIONS

**Where is/ are** --- feyn?

**What?** --- 'eyh?

**What's that?** --- 'eyh da?

**When?** --- imta?

**Why?** --- leyh?

**Why not?** --- leyh la?

**How?** --- keyf?

**Who?** --- meen?

**How many?** --- kam?

Hello!

*marhaba* مَرْحَبًا

Good Morning

*sabah al-hayri* صَبَاحَ الْخَيْرِ

How are you?

*kayfa haluk?* كَيْفَ حَالُكَ؟

fine!

*biheyr* بِخَيْرٍ

Please

*minfadlik* مِنْ فَضْلِكَ

Thank you

*shukran!* شُكْرًا

## ARABIC SCRIPT

The system used to write Arabic is called Arabic script. (The term "Naskhi script" is also sometimes used.) It is a cursive, consonantal script, written horizontally from right to left, with 28 symbols for consonants. A letter may have up to four different forms: independent (non-connecting), connecting only to the left (initial), connecting only to the right (final), and connecting to both sides (medial or internal). This is illustrated here for the letters *kaaf*, *baa'*, and *'ayn*:

Final	Medial	Initial	Independent	
سلك	سكت	كباب	سلوك	kaaf
أرنب	صبر	بنت	شرب	baa'
ربع	تعب	عنب	شجاع	'ayn

There are also several diacritics to indicate vowels, gemination (doubling of a consonant), and other devices. A text written with all the appropriate diacritics is said to be "vocalized", and one without them is "unvocalized". (Sometimes the terms "vowelled/unvowelled" and "pointed/unpointed" are also used.) Here is an example of a sentence written in vocalized and unvocalized form:

Vocalized	Unvocalized
كَتَبْتُ حَنَانَ خِطَابًا.	كتبت حنان خطابا.

Except in the Quran and in children's books, Arabic is normally written in unvocalized form, with diacritics written only in the few cases where a serious ambiguity arises. Long vowels are normally indicated by the presence of a letter, while short vowels are represented solely by diacritics. Therefore, in unvocalized form, the reader must ascertain which short vowels occur in the word using his own knowledge of the language. The same is true for certain other features, such as gemination and the indefinite suffix *-n*.

Arabic script (Naskhī) derives from Nabatean script, which in turn derives from Aramaic. Aramaic script goes back to Phoenician, the script from which the Greek script has also developed. The earliest Nabatean inscriptions date back to the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. Naskhī first appeared in the 11th century AD, and has been used ever since. The earliest texts of Quran were written in Kufic script, which also belongs to the Nabatean group of scripts.

Several other, unrelated languages use Arabic script including Persian, Pushto, and Urdu. Additionally, several Turkic and African languages used Arabic script in the past, before the adoption of Latin or Cyrillic scripts. These include Turkish, Swahili, and Hausa.

[www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)

## Sample Arabic text

يولد جميع الناس أحراراً متساوين في الكرامة والحقوق. وقد وهبوا  
عقلاً وضميراً وعليهم ان يعامل بعضهم بعضاً بروح الإخاء.

## Translation

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

## Arabic numerals and numbers

٠	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩	١٠
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
صفر	واحد	إثنان	ثلاثة	أربعة	خمسة	ستة	سبعة	ثمانية	تسعة	عشرة
ṣifr	wāḥid	itnān	talāṭah	'arba'ah	ḥamsah	sittah	sab'ah	ṭamāniyyah	tis'ah	'ašarah
صفر	واحد	جوج	تلاتة	ربعة	خمسة	ستة	سبعة	ثمانية	تسعود	عشرة
ṣifr	wahed	žuž	tlata	reb'a	ḥemsa	setta	seb'a	tmenya	tes'ūd	'ašara

## **ISLAM**

The word Islam has roots in ancient words meaning 'peace', 'security', and 'allegiance to God'. The faith of Islam was introduced into the world by the prophet Muhammed. Muhammed was dissatisfied with the nature of the religions he encountered on his travels as a young man. He spent long periods in isolation, praying and meditating. In 610 Christian Era (CE) the will of Allah (God) was revealed to him by the angel Gabriel in what is now the holy city of Mecca. These revelations are recorded in the verses of the Quran. In 622 CE, following increasing persecution by unbelievers, he travelled to the Arab city of Medina. Through a combination of negotiation and military success Muhammed became the most powerful leader in the Arab world. Within 100 years of Muhammad's death in 632 CE, the message of Islam had spread from the Atlantic coast in the west to borders of China in the east.

There are five basic principles of Islam:

- There is no God but Allah, and his prophet Muhammed.
- Prayers must be said five times a day, while facing towards Mecca.
- A Muslim must give generously to the needy.
- Believers must fast during Ramadan, the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic year.
- Believers must try at least one pilgrimage to Mecca.

Besides the Quran, Islamic law and custom are contained in a body of tradition called the 'hadith' and in the legal code of 'Shar'ia'. Abraham, Moses and Jesus are generally regarded as earlier prophets in a line that ends with Muhammad. Islamic law forbids gambling, alcohol, the use of illegal substances, and eating pork. Modesty in the style of clothes, particularly for women, is also important in Islamic tradition.

## **MAULID AL NABI**

This is the prophet Muhammed's birthday. Many Muslims celebrate all through the third month of our year.

## **EID UL-ADHA**

Muslims who are not Hajj celebrate the 'Feats of Sacrifice'. It remembers the moment when Allah asked Ibrahim to sacrifice his son. Some Muslims sacrifice a goat or sheep on the morning of this festival.

## **EID UL-FITR**

The end of the period of fasting (Ramadan) is marked by the rising of the new moon, which shows that the new month is starting. Muslims go to the mosque for special prayers. There are parties and feasts, and gifts are exchanged.

[www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

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