

# Introduction to the Third Edition for Students

Welcome to the third edition of the textbook *Al-Kitaab fii Ta'allum al-ʿArabiyya Part One* and its accompanying DVD and companion website ([www.alkitaabtextbook.com](http://www.alkitaabtextbook.com)). These materials aim to help you achieve intermediate-level proficiency in speaking, reading, listening, and writing, and to introduce you to aspects of Arabic culture. Like *Alif Baa*, the book combines both formal (written) and spoken registers of Arabic, with a choice between the dialects of Cairo and Damascus. Many—but not all—of the listening and speaking activities focus on spoken forms of the language, whereas reading, writing, and most grammar components introduce and activate formal Arabic. You will learn to distinguish between these two types of Arabic and use them in appropriate ways and contexts, and you will gradually develop the ability to express yourself in formal Arabic.

These materials will present you with a range of language variation that may seem challenging at times with both formal and spoken varieties included. In dealing with this material, your best strategy is to distinguish between words and concepts that you will learn for active control, such as the vocabulary of a new lesson in the variety you use in class, and those that you are only expected to recognize passively, such as a grammatical ending. Your teacher will help you determine which spoken variety to use and how to distinguish between elements intended for active control and elements that you should learn to recognize when you see and hear them.

## Learning Goals

In our experience teaching with this approach and these materials, students reach solid intermediate proficiency in all skills by the end of one year (two college semesters). This means that by the time you finish working through this book, **ان شاء الله**, you should have acquired the following skills:

- The ability to speak about yourself, your life, and your environment, to initiate and sustain conversations on daily-life topics with educated native speakers who are accustomed to conversing with learners of Arabic as a foreign language, and to paraphrase as necessary to make yourself understood.
- The ability to read simple, authentic texts on familiar topics and understand the main ideas without using the dictionary and with confidence in your ability to guess the meaning of new words from context and other clues.
- The ability to write informal notes and essays on familiar topics connected to daily life.
- The ability to comprehend and produce accurately the basic sentence structures of Arabic.
- Familiarity with the differences in sounds and basic structures between formal and spoken Arabic.
- A general understanding of aspects of Arab culture connected to everyday life, including culturally important expressions commonly used among friends and acquaintances.

## Structure of the Book

The chapters in *Al-Kitaab Part One* revolve around the basic story line of Maha and Khalid Abu El-<sup>ع</sup>Ila and their extended family, which is presented in two versions, formal and spoken Egyptian. Maha and her family are joined in this third edition by a set of Syrian characters, Nisreen and Tariq al-Nuuri and their extended family, in a new set of videos in spoken Syrian. The plot is the same but Nisreen, Tariq, and their family and friends speak to us only in Damascene Arabic (called Levantine in the book). It is a video story, which means that you will not be reading the basic texts and dialogues but watching and listening to them. This story line is supplemented with different kinds of reading exercises and many speaking and writing activities.

Each chapter contains five main sections that appear roughly in this order:

- Vocabulary, which is presented in three, color-coded varieties (Egyptian spoken, Levantine spoken, and formal/written);
- Story in spoken Arabic, where you will watch a video in your spoken variety;
- Culture, where various aspects of contemporary life and cultural background are discussed;
- Story in formal Arabic, which is the same story you heard in spoken Arabic earlier but is now in formal Arabic;
- Grammar, which focuses on formal Arabic and points out some differences between it and spoken Arabic;
- Reading, which provides authentic texts to develop your comprehension skills;
- Listening, where you will watch a video to practice listening to formal Arabic;
- Dialogue, where you will watch and listen to a video of a situation from everyday life; and
- Review exercises.

Each section is interspersed with mechanical exercises to complete at home and group activities to do in class. Some chapters contain more than one grammar or one culture section.

## Learning In and Outside of Class with These Materials

Nobody has ever become fluent in a language simply by attending class. You will reach proficiency in Arabic largely through what you teach yourself. Hence, these materials are designed to teach you how to learn a language. We assume that you have the skills necessary for independent learning and that you will devote approximately two hours outside of class for every hour of classroom instruction. We ask you to do a lot of preparation work outside of class so that you will be ready to interact and carry out tasks in Arabic during class rather than listening to explanations or lectures. This is because the mechanical aspects of language learning are best done outside of class so that everyone can work at her or his own pace. You are expected to prepare for class at home by:

- Listening to the vocabulary on the accompanying media;
- Reading grammar or other explanations carefully;
- Completing assigned homework exercises with as much effort and concentration as you can; and
- Mentally preparing for active participation in class activities.

It is helpful to use the analogy of playing sports or doing exercise: Your teacher is your coach or personal trainer. He or she shows you what to do and how to do it but the majority of the work falls to you. Homework helps you build and train your “language muscles” so that you are ready to play the game in class. After the first few days you will be able to predict what kinds of questions you will be asked and what kinds of activities you will be asked to perform. Be ready for them by guessing what they will be and practicing beforehand.

The philosophy on which these materials are based places great emphasis on learning aurally (through listening). We often hear students say that they are “visually oriented.” This is true for most of us; however, one talent does not preclude the other. We have aural and visual skills, and using both kinds of skills together is more effective than using just one set. Remember that you learned your native language aurally and orally, so you do have the skills to learn words and expressions through listening. For example, the most effective way to memorize vocabulary is to combine two or more activities: Listen and repeat, write and read, listen and write, and so forth. In this way your physical abilities and senses reinforce one another, and words stick in your mind better. In addition, aural and audiovisual input will help you build fluency by focusing on the meaning of phrases and sentences rather than individual words, and this means that you will be able to read, listen, speak, and write more quickly, with greater accuracy, and with better comprehension.

Make the most of class time by being an active learner: Listen to what is being said and how it is being said, and repeat and correct things to yourself. Listening does not have to be a passive activity. While your classmates are talking, take the opportunity to concentrate on the vocabulary or structures they are using and mentally either imitate or try to improve upon their efforts. There is no better drill for practice than to be constantly repeating to yourself correctly formed sentences, and you have to do this kind of drill yourself. If you are mentally tired by the end of class, you are taking full advantage of the opportunities it presents.

## Speaking and Writing in Arabic

Like *Alif Baa*, *Al-Kitaab Part One* introduces two varieties of spoken Arabic in addition to a formal register. Your teacher will choose one of the spoken varieties for you to learn alongside the formal register. You will notice that the overwhelming majority of words are shared among all three varieties of Arabic, and that most of the differences involves short vowel sounds—what we might call in English “local accent.”

We want you to be increasingly aware of the differences between formal and spoken Arabic but not to feel pressured to keep them separate. It is natural to feel confused sometimes and also to mix the forms. With practice and exposure you will learn to mix registers as native speakers do. Your goal at this stage is to focus on accuracy of pronunciation and basic grammatical forms like verb conjugations and gender agreement. These are the kinds

of accuracy you need in order to be understood by native speakers who will not have trouble understanding and communicating with you in mixed forms.

## Tips for Learning Vocabulary

Because Arabic has a long history and is spoken across a large geographical area, it has an expansive vocabulary. Your biggest challenge in reaching fluency in Arabic is to learn this new vocabulary, and you should devote as much effort as you can to actively acquire the vocabulary in each chapter. “Actively acquiring” means developing the ability to produce the word accurately in the appropriate context without being prompted—that is, without seeing the word in a list or word bank. Put another way, activated vocabulary is vocabulary you own, that you use in the context of your life.

It is crucial that you prepare the lesson’s vocabulary before class by listening to the audio and doing the drills designated as homework drills by “(في البيت).” An audio of each vocabulary item in a contextualized sentence in formal Arabic is provided as well. These sentences are meant to serve two purposes: (1) To contextualize the new vocabulary, and (2) to give you practice in close listening skills.

As in *Alif Baa*, vocabulary in *Al-Kitaab Part One* is introduced in three color-coded varieties: **المصري، الشامي، الفصحى**. Words shared by more than one variety appear in **black**. It is important to remember that the vocabulary list is not a glossary, and that the words given for each variety do not constitute an exhaustive list of equivalents. The vocabulary words presented here are also included because they occur in one of the video segments or reading texts in the chapter. Because most of these texts were originally composed in formal Arabic, the vocabulary lists originated in the formal register. Not all spoken words that are in use are given here. Only those words the actors use in telling the Cairene and Levantine versions of the story are included. These words are listed separately when the word or its pronunciation, as it occurs in the story, differs from the formal word. You will notice that these variants are often very close, differentiated only by a vowel sound; we have included them in the list so that you can click on them to hear the differences in pronunciation. It is important to learn and study the spoken forms aurally because some spoken Arabic sounds cannot be represented accurately in Arabic script.

Another important exercise that will help you learn the vocabulary are the “Ask Your Colleagues” exercises. These exercises are designed to be done in a combination of formal and spoken Arabic. For this activity to be effective, you must come to class having listened to the new words in the lesson and having practiced them aloud repeatedly in their various forms (such as those of verb conjugations and the singulars and plurals of nouns). The questions in the exercise are provided in English for three reasons: (1) to help reinforce the association of words with particular contexts, (2) to force you to produce the new vocabulary in context from scratch rather than reading the Arabic words on the page, and (3) to help you avoid using English, since everyone knows what the questions mean from the outset. Take advantage of that shared knowledge to work with your partners on the best way to express your thoughts in Arabic.

## Learning Grammar

Much of what we said about activating vocabulary also applies to learning grammar. As with vocabulary, it is important for the initial work to be done outside of class so that you can work at your own pace and class time can be reserved for exercises in which you interact with your classmates. Prepare for class by reading the lesson's grammar explanation and by completing the specified mechanical grammar drills that aim to help you internalize the structure. We are confident that the grammar explanations are clear enough for students to understand without lectures or lengthy presentations in class. It is natural to lack confidence in your complete grasp of grammar, but this does not mean that you need more explanation. Rather, it means you need practice in using the new structures—and this is what the class activities are designed to give you the chance to do. Using the sports analogy again, grammar can be compared to learning a new physical skill: Understanding what your muscles are supposed to do may be helpful at the outset but real results come only with practice.

Many of us find it easier to understand concrete examples than abstract explanations, so the grammar explanations in this book take as their starting point sentences and phrases you already know that contain the grammar point. In other words, the grammar sections do not introduce things you have not seen before, but, rather, they guide you to think about sentences you have already seen or heard and understood, and help you see patterns in them. Your ability to recognize and learn patterns is key to developing your grammar skills in Arabic.

## Reading for Comprehension

Reading for comprehension is quite different from reading aloud, and, in fact, it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to do both at the same time. The reading comprehension activities in this book aim to develop skills such as guessing the meaning from context, using background knowledge to help set expectations about what will be in a text, and using grammatical knowledge to construct meaning. All reading comprehension activities involve authentic texts that are written for adult native speakers by adult native speakers. These texts are meant to be skimmed, scanned, and explored, since their main purpose is to help you develop good strategies and skills necessary for fluent reading. Do not expect to understand everything in these texts, and always focus on what you *do* understand rather than on what you do not. We want you to approach these texts with a sense of discovery. What kind of text is it, and what clues does it give you as to what kinds of information it gives? Can you guess the meaning of any new words from context? Every piece of information you can recognize or extract from authentic texts represents an important step forward in building your Arabic language skills.

## Tips for Active Learning

People who seem like gifted language learners have learned to approach language learning actively rather than passively. They think about how to say things in Arabic for fun, they talk to themselves out loud, and they own the vocabulary and grammar they encounter by using it to say and write things that are relevant to their own lives.

Another part of being an active learner is asking questions about what you are learning. Having questions means that you are thinking about the way that Arabic functions, and this



is the first step in learning to produce it. In other words, critical thinking skills play a key role in language learning. Critical thinkers have questions and try to reason an educated guess or hypothesis before asking someone else.

Active learning also means learning to work without a safety net. When you are reading, whether in class or at home, whether it is a text or drill, do not write out the meaning of words in English on or near the Arabic. It is very important that you trust your ability to recall meaning with the help of a familiar context—this is how you learned vocabulary in your native language. Keep in mind that you will probably forget and relearn a word several times before you retain it, so go ahead and forget. Forgetting is part of the learning process! You can look it up again if you need to.

The activities that you do in class are designed to provide you with ideas and models for activities you can do with others for further practice. Study in pairs or groups, if that works well for you, and agree to speak Arabic together as much as you can. This is a good way to prepare for class and to review. You can do activities together, such as ask each other questions, brainstorm about assignments, and practice conjugating verbs.

## Repetition Is Key

One of the ways you will become fluent in Arabic is by paying attention to and imitating the way ideas are expressed. In order to do this successfully, you must listen, read, and pronounce words and sentences aloud several times. For example, you will notice that the reading and listening exercises in this book instruct you to read or listen not once but several times. The time and effort you put into reading and listening several times will pay off many times over in increased language skills. Not only will you understand more each time you repeat the activity, but you also need to move through several stages of comprehension from general comprehension to more detailed reading. Perhaps the most important reading or listening pass is the one that you do after you have understood as much as possible. This final time, concentrate not on what is being said but on how it is being said. This focus will help you remember the things you have learned about Arabic while reading or listening to the text, and it will give you an opportunity to choose some words and expressions that you want to incorporate into your own speaking and writing.

## Memorization

Memorization is central to learning any language. The more you memorize, the more quickly you will learn. If you do not know how to memorize well, ask others how they do it or ask your teachers for help. Experiment with different techniques, and remember that a combination of approaches that use different senses usually works best. Some strategies include:

- Listen to the words and sentences and repeat out loud;
- Write words, phrases, and sentences out by hand and repeat vocabulary over and over;
- Make up your own meaningful sentences with the words so that you own them; and
- Use word-association techniques, such as remembering particular sounds of a word together like the singular and plural forms of a noun or a verb and matching preposition.

Flashcards can be helpful if you use them actively: Rather than just looking at the words, use them in a sentence of your own—a new one each time. Another way to activate vocabulary and help you memorize is to use different forms of the words in different sentences—singular, plural, masculine, and feminine nouns and adjectives, and different verb persons (I, you, she, he, we, and they). Memorize prepositions with their verbs, too, and memorize phrases in addition to single words. Learning language in chunks helps you remember both grammar and vocabulary, so memorize sentences that you like, too. These will serve as good models for your own sentences.

Finally, *Al-Kitaab Part One* is designed to challenge you but not to frustrate you. If you find yourself becoming frustrated—especially if you are having trouble with particular kinds of exercises or with memorizing vocabulary—see your teacher for help. We hope that this new edition of the book will serve as a useful learning and teaching tool for Arabic. We wish you a successful, enjoyable, and rewarding experience learning Arabic!

وبالتوفيق إن شاء الله!