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Amine Bouchentouf
Author, Arabic For Dummies

Arabic
Phrases
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Amine Bouchentouf



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Amine graduated from Middlebury College and has always been interested in promoting better relations between the West and the Middle East through dialogue and mutual understanding. Amine published his first book, *Arabic: A Complete Course* (Random House), soon after graduating college in order to help Americans understand Arabic language and culture. He has written *Arabic For Dummies* and *Arabic Phrases For Dummies* in an attempt to reach an even wider audience with the aim of fostering better relations through education.

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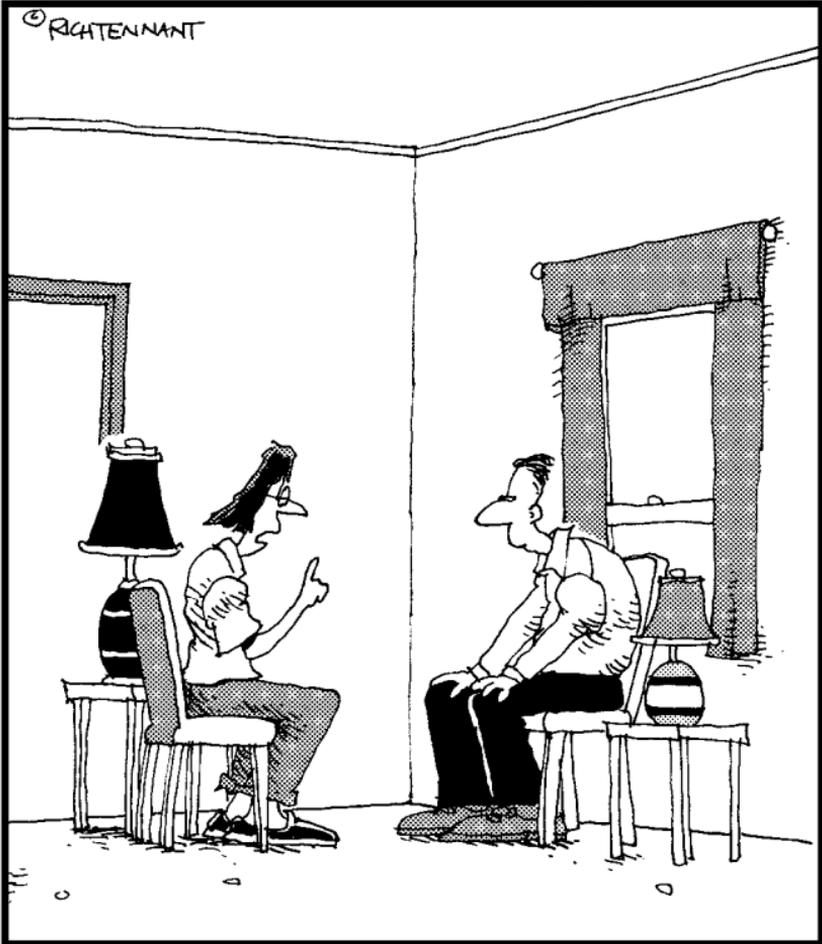
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The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I think your Arabic is coming along fine for your trip to Casablanca, with or without the Humphrey Bogart impression."

Introduction

Arabic, the official language of more than 20 countries, is the mother tongue of more than 300 million people. It's spoken throughout the Middle East, from Morocco to Iraq. Also, because Arabic is the language of the Koran and Islam, it's understood by more than 1.2 billion people across the world.

Due to recent geopolitical events, Arabic has catapulted to the top of the list of important world languages. Even in countries where Arabic isn't the official language, people are scrambling to master this vital global language.

Arabic Phrases For Dummies is designed to equip you with phrases necessary to function in many life situations, from shopping to visiting the theater. So buckle up and enjoy the journey!

About This Book

Arabic Phrases For Dummies is modular in nature; every chapter is organized in such a way that you don't have to read the whole book in order to understand the topic that's discussed. Feel free to jump through chapters and sections to suit your specific needs. Also, every grammatical and linguistic point is explained in plain English so that you can incorporate the concept immediately.

There are basically three different types of Arabic: Koranic Arabic, local dialects, and Modern Standard Arabic:

- ✔ **Koranic Arabic** is the Arabic used to write the Koran, the holy book for Muslims. This form of Arabic is very rigid and hasn't changed much since the Koran was written approximately

1,500 years ago. Koranic Arabic is widely used in religious circles for prayer, discussions of Islamic issues, and serious deliberations. Its usage is limited primarily within a strict religious context. It's the equivalent of Biblical English.

- ✓ **The regional dialects** are the most informal type of Arabic. They tend to fall into three geographical categories: the North African dialect (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya); the Egyptian dialect (Egypt, parts of Syria, Palestine, and Jordan); and Gulf Arabic (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). Even though the words are pronounced differently and some of the everyday expressions differ dramatically from region to region, speakers from different regions can understand each other.
- ✓ **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)** is the most widely used and understood form of Arabic in the world. While it's not the native language of any speaker of Arabic, it's used in schools, news broadcasts, and other formal settings. It's less rigid than Koranic Arabic but more formal than the local dialects.

This book focuses on MSA, but I include examples from regional dialects as well.

Conventions Used in This Book

Here are a couple key conventions I use throughout the book:

- ✓ I present Arabic phrases in *transliteration* (Arabic sounds represented with English characters). You can see the Arabic alphabet in Chapter 1.
- ✓ Throughout the book, each new Arabic word appears in **boldface**. It's followed by its pronunciation and its English translation in parentheses.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing *Arabic Phrases For Dummies*, I made the following assumptions about my readers:

- ✓ You've had little or no exposure to the Arabic language, or else you've been exposed to Arabic but need to brush up on your language skills.
- ✓ You're interested in mastering Arabic for either personal or professional reasons.
- ✓ You want to be able to speak a few words and phrases now so that you can communicate basic information in Arabic.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you get in and get out of this book easily and efficiently, I use icons that identify important pieces of information by category. The following icons appear in this book:



When you see this icon, read carefully. It points to information that will directly improve your Arabic language skills.



I use this icon to bring your attention to information that you definitely want to keep in mind when studying and practicing Arabic.



Even though this isn't a grammar book, it does include important grammar lessons you need to be aware of. This icon is attached to major grammar points that will help you learn and use the Arabic language.



This icon points out nonverbal methods of communication common in Arabic-speaking countries and among Arabic speakers. I use this icon to fill the gap between language and culture so that you know the cultural contexts in which you can use newly discovered words and phrases.

Where to Go from Here

Go ahead and start anywhere. You don't have to go in a specific order. Just choose a topic that seems appealing, find the corresponding chapter in the table of contents, and start learning Arabic!

But if you've never taken Arabic before, you may want to read Chapters 1 and 2 before tackling the later chapters. They give you some basics, such as how to pronounce the sounds.

Chapter 1

I Say It How? Speaking Arabic

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering English words that come from Arabic
 - ▶ Figuring out the Arabic alphabet
 - ▶ Practicing the sounds
-

MarHaba (*mahr-hah-bah*; welcome) to the wonderful world of Arabic! In this chapter, I ease you into the language by showing you some familiar English words that trace their roots to Arabic. You discover the Arabic alphabet and its beautiful letters, and I give you tips on how to pronounce those letters.

Part of exploring a new language is discovering a new culture and a new way of looking at things, so in this first chapter of *Arabic Phrases For Dummies*, you begin your discovery of Arabic and its unique characteristics.

Taking Stock of What's Familiar

If English is your primary language, part of grasping a new **lougha** (*loo-ghah*; language) is creating connections between the **kalimaat** (*kah-lee-maht*; words) of the **lougha**, in this case Arabic and English. You may be surprised to hear that quite a few English words trace their origins to Arabic. For example, did you know that “magazine,” “candy,” and “coffee” are

actually Arabic words? Table 1-1 lists some familiar English words with Arabic origins.

Table 1-1 Arabic Origins of English Words

<i>English</i>	<i>Arabic Origin</i>	<i>Arabic Meaning</i>
admiral	amir al-baHr	Ruler of the Sea
alcohol	al-kuHul	a mixture of powdered antimony
alcove	al-qubba	a dome or arch
algebra	al-jabr	to reduce or consolidate
almanac	al-manakh	a calendar
arsenal	daar As-SinaaH	house of manufacture
azure	al-azward	lapis lazuli
candy	qand	cane sugar
coffee	qahwa	coffee
cotton	quTun	cotton
elixir	al-iksiir	philosopher's stone
gazelle	ghazaal	gazelle
hazard	az-zahr	dice
magazine	al-makhzan	a storehouse; a place of storage
mattress	matraH	a place where things are thrown
ream	rizma	a bundle
saffron	za'fran	saffron
Sahara	SaHraa'	desert
satin	zaytuun	Arabic name for a Chinese city
sherbet	sharaba	to drink
sofa	Sofaa	a cushion
sugar	sukkar	sugar
zero	Sifr	zero

As you can see from the table, Arabic has had a major influence on the English language. Some English words such as “admiral” and “arsenal” have an indirect Arabic origin, whereas others, such as “coffee” and “cotton,” are exact matches. The influence runs the other way, too, especially when it comes to relatively contemporary terms. For example, the word **tilifizyuun** (*tee-lee-fee-zee-yoon*; television) comes straight from the word “television.”

Discovering the Arabic Alphabet

Unlike English and other Romance languages, you write and read Arabic from right to left. Like English, Arabic has both vowels and consonants, but the vowels in Arabic aren't actual letters. Rather, Arabic vowels are symbols that you place on top of or below consonants to create certain sounds. As for consonants, Arabic has 28 different consonants, and each one is represented by a letter. In order to vocalize these letters, you place a vowel above or below the particular consonant. For example, when you put a **fatHa**, a vowel representing the “ah” sound, above the consonant representing the letter “b,” you get the sound “bah.” When you take the same consonant and use a **kasra**, which represents the “ee” sound, you get the sound “bee.”

All about vowels

Arabic has three main vowels. Luckily, they're very simple to pronounce because they're similar to English vowels. However, it's important to realize that Arabic also has vowel derivatives that are as important as the main vowels. These vowel derivatives fall into three categories: *double vowels*, *long vowels*, and *diphthongs*. In this section, I walk you through all the different vowels, vowel derivatives, and vowel combinations.

Main vowels

The three main Arabic vowels are:

- ✓ **fatHa:** The first main vowel in Arabic is called a **fatHa** (*feht-hah*). A **fatHa** is the equivalent of the short “a” in “hat” or “cat.” Occasionally, a **fatHa** also sounds like the short “e” in “bet” or “set.” Much like the other vowels, the way you pronounce a **fatHa** depends on what consonants come before or after it. In Arabic script, the **fatHa** is written as a small horizontal line above a consonant. In English transcription, which I use in this book, it’s simply represented by the letter “a,” as in the words **kalb** (*kah-leb*; dog) or **walad** (*wah-lahd*; boy).
- ✓ **damma:** The second main Arabic vowel is the **damma** (*dah-mah*). A **damma** sounds like the “uh” in “foot” or “book.” In Arabic script, it’s written like a tiny backward “e” above a particular consonant. In English transcription, it’s represented by the letter “u,” as in **funduq** (*foon-dook*; hotel) or **suHub** (*soo-hoob*; clouds).
- ✓ **kasra:** The third main vowel in Arabic is the **kasra** (*kahs-rah*), which sounds like the long “e” in “feet” or “treat.” The **kasra** is written the same way as a **fatHa** — as a small horizontal line — except that it goes underneath the consonant. In English transcription, it’s written as an “i,” as in **bint** (*bee-neht*; girl) or **‘islaam** (*ees-lahm*; Islam).

Double vowels

One type of vowel derivative is the double vowel, which is known in Arabic as **tanwiin** (*tahn-ween*). The process of **tanwiin** is a fairly simple one: Basically, you take a main vowel and place the same vowel right next to it, thus creating two vowels, or a double vowel. The sound that the double vowel makes depends on the main vowel that’s doubled. Here are all possible combinations of double vowels:

- ✓ **Double fatHa:** **tanwiin** with **fatHa** creates the “an” sound, as in **‘ahlan wa sahlan** (*ahel-an wah sahel-an*; Hi).
- ✓ **Double damma:** **tanwiin** with **damma** creates the “oun” sound. For example, **kouratoun** (*koo-rah-toon*; ball) contains a double **damma**.