

INTRODUCTION

There already exist a number of manuals of Arabic for English-speaking students, and it might well be thought that an addition to their number was hardly necessary. Teaching experience over some years, however, has suggested to me that there is a large and growing class of would-be students of Arabic for whom none of the existing works is well adapted: namely, those who aspire to a simple reading knowledge of present-day Arabic, as a tool for utilizing recent Arabic writings on their own particular discipline, whether this may be e.g. sociology, history, economics etc. It is not the primary purpose of such students to acquire an ability to write Arabic themselves, nor to read and appreciate a work of purely literary merit; yet at the same time they do need to comprehend what the Arabic writer is saying in as precise a manner as possible.

At the moment, these students are confronted with a choice between two types of Arabic grammar. First, there is the traditionalist type, following the lines of European grammars of Arabic of the nineteenth century, which were themselves modelled on the approach to the language adopted by the Arab grammarians of the eighth century. The latter were, however, not concerned with teaching the basic structures of Arabic to those wholly ignorant of it, but with instilling an understanding of 'correct' usage into those who already knew the language as a mother tongue. The task of acquiring Arabic from a manual of this sort is an extremely burdensome one; the student is required to master an enormous mass of grammatical detail before he can construe even two lines of the sort of text which the class of students I have described above aim at reading, and many abandon the attempt in despair, either through boredom at this painful initial stage, or simply through lack of time to devote to it. By this approach, moreover, the student has forced upon him a mass of knowledge which will in the end turn out to be irrelevant and useless to him for his own particular purposes, however essential it may be for one who aims at becoming an Arabic scholar capable of writing the language and reading the literary monuments of the past.

A second type of available Arabic grammar does indeed concentrate on the modern written language, often by a 'direct' approach, but tends to be slanted exclusively towards newspaper style. Such grammars omit a great deal of information which is required for the precise and scientific comprehension of serious and reflective writing on abstract subjects.

In attempting to steer a middle course between these two extremes, I have tried to elicit the basic principles which govern Arabic sentence structure, and to make them intelligible to the English speaker, and to add to this a sufficiency of grammatical detail, at the same time eliminating, or only slightly alluding to, features irrelevant to the main object of the users I have in mind. Nevertheless, I hope it may be possible for those with more extended objectives also to use this work as a first introduction to the language; for it is manifest that the earlier a student gains some basic reading ability, the easier it will be for him afterwards to acquire the finer points. It must be clearly understood that anyone aiming eventually at writing the language and reading the great works of the Arab literary past, will need to supplement this work by the use of other, more conventional manuals.

One result of this economy, and the most revolutionary of them, is the scant attention paid to the variable terminations of words (the so-called *i'rāb*). In existing grammars of all types, this has normally been presented as a fundamental feature of the language, described in the very earliest chapters. It is much to be doubted whether this is in fact the case. Many Arabic speakers are able to comprehend the language as usually written, and yet would have difficulty in giving the text its correct *i'rāb* throughout; evidently therefore their comprehension is achieved without much reliance on the *i'rāb*; and whatever may have been the case in the sixth and seventh centuries, it is probable that since the end of the eighth century this has been a linguistic phenomenon of which the application depends on a previous comprehension of the text and not the other way round. In any case, since a large part of the *i'rāb* phenomena consist of short vowels, which are not shown in the written form of the language as customarily printed, a full and exact knowledge of these phenomena is virtually useless for the student who merely wishes to read ordinary printed material. Moreover, the student who begins by learning to recognize the function of a word in the sentence by means of its *i'rāb*, as is suggested in the available manuals, will find himself encountering an almost insuperable barrier when he tries to make the transition from the fully vowelled specimens of the language in the grammar books to the unwoulded texts of everyday life.

It is for this reason that the policy has been adopted here of employing vowelless as little as possible, in principle only at the first occurrence of a word, or where it is necessary to distinguish between two words with identical consonantal shape when quoted in isolation from a context which would show which one is meant; and no attention is paid to the variable short vowel terminations which occur in nouns, adjectives

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

3

and imperfect verbs, throughout chapters 1 to 12. At the same time, this policy has not been adhered to with pedantic rigidity, and some short vowels are described even when irrelevant to the main purpose of the book: either because such a description is inextricably linked with the description of features which do appear in the ordinarily written shape of the word (for instance, it is necessary to give an account of the functional principles which govern the use of the forms *abū*, *abī* and *abā*, and it would consequently be of little advantage to omit reference to the fact that similar vocalic variations occur in the short vowels at the end of other nouns); or in certain small details, the omission of which would not appreciably lighten the learner's task (for example, it would be absurd to leave the reader under the impression that the final syllables of *lahum* and *bihim* were pronounced identically, even though he will nowhere see the difference marked in ordinary texts).

Since this work is addressed to mature students, who will wish to pursue their own rhythms of learning rather than to be tied down to a fixed timetable, I have made no attempt to divide the material equally into 'lessons' designed to occupy a stated amount of learning time; the user should spend as much or as little time on each chapter as he needs. Some explanation is called for, however, of the method adopted in the arrangement of the material. The phenomena of Arabic grammar interlock to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to devise a wholly scientific arrangement of watertight compartments; whatever grammatical topic one broaches, one almost always finds that it cannot be fully illustrated without reference to some other topic, and it therefore becomes a matter of arbitrary choice which topic is dealt with first. My overall principle has been to devote chapters to the main phenomena of sentence structure (such as verbs, qualifying clauses, conditionals etc.), and to insert the less significant features wherever seems most convenient, mitigating the effects of this rather arbitrary arrangement by fairly liberal cross-referencing.

No exercise material is included, for two reasons. Firstly, there is the vocabulary problem. Arabic has a fundamental vocabulary of somewhere around a thousand words which will be essential for all users of the language; but above that level one begins to enter into a sphere where the choice of requisite vocabulary is governed by the discipline in which the student is interested: many words which are basic for an economist will be useless for the historian, and vice versa. To insert exercise material adapted to any one discipline would vitiate the usefulness of the book to those concerned with another discipline. Ideally, what is needed is not one body of exercise material, but a set of parallel texts dealing with

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various subjects. The preparation of such a set, however, is hampered by the present lack of adequate word-counts for Arabic. The only attempt available up to now which is of any use at all is J. M. Landau's *Word count of modern Arabic prose* (New York, 1959), and even this is only useful in eliciting the very commonest words in Arabic, and cannot be used for the construction of a specialist vocabulary of any kind. Computer techniques are required for this purpose, and although several experts are engaged on the study of the application of these to Arabic, the problems involved are still far from solved.

A second reason is that it is highly desirable that the student should at the earliest possible moment move on to work on the actual texts which he desires to read. While therefore a certain amount of 'illustrative' material additional to what is actually included here would no doubt be desirable, if the vocabulary difficulty mentioned above could be overcome, this should only be used to ensure *comprehension* of the principles enunciated in the book*; the actual *training* in the application of those principles is preferably done by analysis of a chosen original Arabic work on the selected discipline, with constant reference back to this book, and with constant practice in the use of a dictionary. It needs hardly to be said that the latter practice should begin at the earliest possible moment; the sole dictionary of any use in this connection is Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, in the English version by J. M. Cowan.

Naturally, no description of a language can avoid the use of a grammatical terminology. This is always a difficult problem, and particularly so when one is dealing with a non-European language, for which the conventional European terminology is usually quite unsuitable. So far as Arabic is concerned, almost all its linguistic phenomena fall into categories which do not correspond happily to European grammatical categories, and the use of conventional European terminology is consequently liable to mislead. There is indeed a set of Arabic grammatical terms which have been evolved by the Arab grammarians for the exact description of their language; but one hesitates to burden the beginner's memory with a set of strange sounding words which will be useful only in the context of grammatical description, at a time when he is necessarily striving to memorize the basic general vocabulary. With some reluctance, therefore, I have felt obliged to devise a set of terms specially for this book. My aim in this has been purely pragmatic: to keep them to a minimum required by the nature of the book, and to make them as nearly as possible self-explanatory in the sense of being easily remembered once

*The booklet of historical phraseology issued concurrently with this work is a preliminary tentative in this direction.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

5

the initial definition has been read. Neither the terms themselves, nor the definitions, are intended to have a wider relevance outside the immediate purposes of the book.

The conventions of Arabic script are so intimately bound up with Arabic grammatical structure that it is not possible to omit from a grammatical sketch some account of the script. At the same time, the learning of a script is a task of a different kind from that of learning linguistic structure. The section here devoted to the script has to be regarded more in the light of preliminary notes, and of a background sketch to which reference can be made in the grammatical part, than as an autonomous learning tool: for since I suppose hardly any European would be prepared to undertake the learning of Arabic script by an exclusively visual approach (such as could be appropriate to the learning of Chinese ideograms), this part of the learner's task inevitably involves either contact with a native speaker or the use of tape recordings.*

*A Harvard research team has recently investigated the application of methods of 'programmed' learning to Arabic script (J. B. Carroll and G. Leonard, *The effectiveness of programmed 'Grafdrills' in teaching the Arabic writing system*, Laboratory for research in instruction, Graduate School of Education, Harvard, 1963). The report explicitly describes itself as a 'tentative' final version; but the only criticism of it that suggests itself is that the order of the presentation of the Arabic letters is not correlated with the similarities in their written shapes; and any student who can obtain access to this programme together with its accompanying tape recordings would probably find it most helpful.

GRAMMATICAL TERMINOLOGY

SENTENCE. A word or group of words constituting a complete and satisfactory communication.

PHRASE. A group of words having its own internal structure and autonomy but not constituting a sentence.

CLAUSE. A word or group of words which in itself would be capable of being a sentence, but is used in a context where it functions only as one element in a larger sentence.

ENTITY TERM. A word or phrase which presents an object of thought to the hearer but without making any statement about it: 'John', 'John's house' and 'the revolutionary policies which the present government is bent on pursuing' are all entity-terms.

PREDICATE. A statement made about an entity-term.

THEME. An entity-term about which a predicate is stated.

NOUN. One type of entity-term consisting of a single word which overtly describes what is intended, such as 'table' or 'centralization'.

NOUN OF SINGLE APPLICATION. A noun which, as between speaker and hearer, is assumed to be applicable only to one precisely identifiable individual entity, such as 'John', 'London'.

NOUN OF MULTIPLE APPLICATION. A noun which in itself is applicable to a variety of individuals within a category of similarly named entities, such as 'house', 'departure'; the hearer's ability to appreciate the individual reference of a noun of multiple application may be the result of its contextual placing, or it may be irrelevant to the nature of the communication [§1 : 2].

PRONOUN. A surrogate or 'shorthand' for an entity-term, of such a nature that the overt entity-term to which it refers is assumed to be detectable by the hearer: 'I' will be understood to refer to the speaker, 'you' to the person addressed, while 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they' assume that the user is capable, if challenged, of pointing to the overt entity-term for which they stand. The same applies to the associated forms 'me', 'my' etc.

DEMONSTRATIVE. An entity-term which is a surrogate for the gesture of pointing, as in 'give me *that*', '*these* laughed and *those* frowned'. However, a demonstrative is normally capable of being explained by an

overt entity-term, and its function therefore differs only marginally from that of a pronoun.

QUALIFIER. A word or phrase attached to a noun, with the function of giving a more ample description of the entity envisaged than the noun itself, without qualifier, would have been capable of conveying; it can be another noun, or an adjective, or a qualifying clause, or a prepositional phrase (see below).

ADJECTIVE. A single word which functions either as a qualifier to a noun (English examples are '*black* book', '*rolling* stone'), or as a predicate. It is not, however, possible to give a linguistically adequate definition of the Arabic adjective in purely functional terms; all that can be said is that some qualifiers behave structurally in the manner described in §1 : 13 and are then classed as nouns, while others behave in a different manner, as described in §1 : 11, and are then termed adjectives.

VERB. A single word, being one of a set of distinctive patterns of word formation, and combining within itself the functions of a predicate and a pronoun theme. This set is subdivided into two parallel sub-sets termed **PERFECT** and **IMPERFECT**, but these sub-sets are not 'tenses' in the European sense, since their functions are much wider than that of simply conveying distinctions of time (as is the case with the English differentiation between 'he works' and 'he worked'); see §3 : 19.

VERBAL ABSTRACT. A special type of noun which expresses the underlying concept of a verb, abstracted from all the ideas of time, theme etc. which are implicit in the verb; as in English the verbal abstract in '*love* knows no frontiers' contrasts with the verb in '*we love* Mary'.

PARTICIPLE. A single word, being one of a set of distinctive patterns of word formation, functioning either as a noun or as an adjective, and having a sense which bears a stable relationship to a verb, as described in §8 : 6.

AGENT. The immediate theme of a verb predicate, not necessarily identical with the theme of the whole sentence.

FUNCTIONAL. A word which, being neither an entity-term nor an adjective nor a verb, signifies relationships between the entity-terms and verbs of the sentence.

PREPOSITION. A single functional word placed immediately before an entity-term, together with which it constitutes a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**, and having the basic function of indicating relationships between the entity-term and a predicate (as in English 'he arrived *in* London', 'he arrived *from* London'). Prepositional phrases can, however, serve as

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[More information](#)

qualifiers of nouns provided that the latter subsume a predicate (as in 'his arrival from London'), and in certain other situations dealt with in chapter 15.

OBJECT. An element in the sentence having the same relationship to a verb as a qualifier does to a noun, namely that of giving a more ample description of what is intended than the verb alone could: 'drinks wine', 'drinks water', 'sits on a chair', 'sits on the floor' are predicates with a greater degree of precision than 'drinks', 'sits', in the same way that 'black book', 'John's house' are more precise than the nouns 'book', 'house'. Objects are termed **INDIRECT** when they consist of a prepositional phrase, i.e. when the relationship between the entity-term and the verb is indicated by a preposition; or **DIRECT** when they consist of an entity-term alone without the intervention of a preposition. Both these types of object involve the participation of some entity-term extraneous to the agent of the verb.

INTERNAL OBJECT. A word or phrase which amplifies the idea conveyed by the verb, but without involving the participation of any entity extraneous to the agent, other than the verbal abstract of that verb: in 'John smiled a bitter smile', no entity is involved extraneous to 'John' and the fact of his smiling.

VERBAL SENTENCE STRUCTURE. One in which nothing other than a functional precedes the verb.

THEMATIC SENTENCE STRUCTURE. One in which, in principle, the theme of the statement occupies the initial position after any introductory functional; in some cases, however, this position may be occupied by some other element in the sentence (such as a prepositional phrase) provided that this is not a verb.

NOUN CLAUSE. A clause which functions in the sentence in the same way as a verbal abstract: 'that he will depart' functions in the sentence 'I anticipate that he will depart' in the same way as the verbal abstract 'his departure' in the sentence 'I anticipate his departure'.

CONDITIONAL SENTENCE. One consisting of two clauses, which stand to each other in such a relationship that the validity of the proposition stated in the principal clause is conditioned by the validity or otherwise of the conditioning clause. In 'If you do that, I shall despise you', the statement 'I shall despise you' is a conditioned one which will only be effectively valid provided that the proposition stated in the conditioning clause 'you do that' is effectively realized, and failing this, the statement made in the principal clause will *not* be valid.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

GRAMMATICAL TERMINOLOGY

9

HYPOTHETICAL SENTENCE. One of the same structural nature as a conditional sentence, differing from it only in that the probability of the effective realization of the two propositions is presented as remoter and more speculative.

ANTI-CONDITIONAL CLAUSE. One embodying a proposition of which the effective realization does *not* condition the validity of the principal proposition, as in 'even if you do this, I shall despise you', which implies that the statement 'I shall despise you' is a valid one irrespective of whether the proposition 'you do this' is realized or not.

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[More information](#)

THE ARABIC SCRIPT

§§ : 1. Arabic is written from right to left.

§§ : 2. The alphabet consists (apart from its first letter, *alif*, on which see below) of letters which are all consonants; but two of them, *w* and *y*, serve a double purpose, being sometimes consonants and sometimes used to denote long vowels *ū* and *ī*.

§§ : 3. Short vowels, if indicated at all, are indicated by marks placed above or below the consonant which precedes them in pronunciation. There is a further mark for a 'zero vowel', that is to say, to indicate the situation where the consonant is not followed by any vowel*. In ordinary usage, these marks are rarely written, and the reader is left to guess from such 'unvocalized' script what the actual pronunciation of the word is.

§§ : 4. The script is a cursive one, in which normally the letters of a single word are linked together by 'ligatures' as in English handwriting. For this purpose, the functionals *li*, *bi*, *ka*, *wa*, *fa* and *la* are treated as if they were part of the following word; so too is the 'article' [§1 : 1].

§§ : 5. There are nevertheless six letters [§§ : 11] which are not ligatured to the following letter in the word; consequently a word made up wholly of these letters will appear (as in the case of the printed form of European languages) with each letter written separately.

§§ : 6. The alphabet contains a number of pairs and groups of letters which, although they originally had distinctive forms, have come in the evolution of the script to have identical linear shapes. These are distinguished by dots above or below the basic linear form of the letter. Such dots are an integral part of the letter.

§§ : 7. A doubled letter is not written twice: doubled pronunciation of a consonant is marked by a special sign placed over it. Many typographers, however, will omit the doubling mark just as one normally omits the short-vowel signs.

§§ : 8. The Arabic phonetic system includes a sound (the glottal stop, German 'Vokalanstoss') called *hamz*, which is from the point of view of the structure of the language a fully functioning consonant; and it was this sound that the letter *alif* (the first letter of the Arabic alphabet) originally denoted. But for historical reasons, *alif* has ceased to have that

*The exigencies of typography have, however, led in recent years to a tendency towards placing these marks slightly to the left of the position immediately above or below the consonant.