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978-0-521-64832-5 - Using Arabic: A Guide to Contemporary Usage
Mahdi Alosh
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Using Arabic

This is a guide to Arabic usage for students who have already acquired the basics of the language and wish to extend their knowledge. Focusing mainly on Modern Standard Arabic, it is divided into three clear sections on varieties of Arabic, grammar, and vocabulary. 'Varieties of Arabic' describes the linguistic situation in the Arab world, showing students variations in register through the use of authentic texts. The vocabulary section is designed not only to expand students' knowledge of Arabic words, but also to show them which words are most current, and which are appropriate to different registers. The final chapter provides an overview of Arabic grammar, giving many modern-day examples, and highlighting common errors. Clear, readable and easy to consult, *Using Arabic* will prove an invaluable reference for students seeking to improve their fluency and confidence in Arabic.

Mahdi Alosh is Associate Professor of Arabic in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Ohio State University. His previous publications include *Speak and Read Essential Arabic I (1991), Learner, Text and Context in Foreign Language Acquisition: An Arabic Perspective (1997)*, and *An Introduction to Modern Standard Arabic (2000)*.

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Foreword

One of the goals of this book is to provide students of Arabic with knowledge about the components of the language and how they are actually used by Arabic speakers. It also provides information to advanced students and teachers on proper Arabic usage. This book has an unusual design. It is neither a reference grammar, nor a vocabulary list, nor is it a textbook. It is rather a practical guide to help students work their way through aspects of Arabic which pose the greatest difficulty for them.

It differs from textbooks in its scope. Instead of a focus on grammar solely, or on vocabulary, this book approaches Arabic as a complete whole, though with a focus on Modern Standard Arabic. It explains the linguistic situation in the target culture and describes the varieties of Arabic, showing through examples which variety is appropriate for which situation. It also presents a model representing levels of

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register. The focus, of the book however, is mainly on three important aspects of Arabic: (1) the sociolinguistic variables which determine the most appropriate ways of using the linguistic elements in order to understand and make oneself understood, (2) the building blocks of the language, or its vocabulary, and (3) the structure that holds the words together, or its grammar.

In addition, this book contains both the normative rules of use and a description of how Arabic is actually used by Arabs. This is a radical departure from the vast majority of conventional grammars and textbooks. The section on usage deals with common errors made by learners of Arabic and even by native speakers. The study of errors helps learners of Arabic who wish to approximate Register level 3 (see the section on Register) to gain access to a good selection of these items usually scattered in different books and articles.

This book is written with the assumption that the user has already acquired the basics of Arabic, including the writing system, the sound system, and the essentials of Arabic grammar along with a decent repertoire of high frequency lexical items. The material included herein will only add to what the users have and help them to ascertain the accuracy of their learning.

In the section on Arabic varieties, I have tried to provide a lucid description of the diglossic situation and stayed away from complicated linguistic terminology. The point is to lay out the linguistic situation in a clear, straightforward fashion and let the students make up their minds about the issues and which kind of language they wish to use.

This book contains material rarely found in textbooks, and if found, it would be scattered around. Categories such as names of people; towns; countries; organizations; geographical regions; historical eras; social, national, and religious events; technical terms; loan

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words; terms of address, brand names; currencies; distance; and weight are hard to find in a single source. Furthermore, idioms and proverbs are also included. Grammatical categories are laid out in the form of flow charts, tables, and graphs to help students grasp the total picture and make it easy for them to understand the details and locate the information they wish to check.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

adj.	adjective
n.	noun
v.	verb
prep.	preposition
part.	particle
m.	masculine
f.	feminine
adv.	adverb
CA	Classical Arabic
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
C	Colloquial Arabic
dem.	demonstrative
rel.	relative
p.	perfect, past
pr.	imperfect, present
ap.	active participle (اسم الفاعِل)
pp.	passive participle (اسم المفعول)
s.o.	someone
s.t.	something

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Transliteration system

Vowels

ا	ā	as in *dad* and *bar*
و	ū	as in *boot*
و	ō	as in French *beau*
ي	ī	as in *beet*
ـَ	a	as in *but*
ـُ	u	as in *put*
ـِ	i	as in *bit*
ـَ	e	as in *bet*
و	o	as in *beau*, but half as long
ـَ	a	typically pronounced as a neutral vowel, between *schwa* and [e]

Consonants

ث	th	voiceless interdental, as in *thin*
ح	ḥ	voiceless, pharyngeal fricative
خ	ḵ	voiceless velar fricative, as in Scottish *loch*
ذ	ḏ	voiced interdental, as in *this*
ش	š	as in *ship*
ص	ṣ	emphatic, or pharyngealized /s/, as *sod*
ض	ḍ	emphatic, or pharyngealized /d/, as in *dull*
ط	ṭ	emphatic, or pharyngealized /t/, as in *Todd*

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ظ	D̲	emphatic, or pharyngealized, interdental /d̲/
ظ	ẓ	emphatic, or pharyngealized form of /z/
ع	ᶜ	voiced, pharyngeal fricative
غ	ġ	roughly similar to the Parisian /r/
ر	r	similar to the Spanish trilled /r/
ج	j	as in *measure*
ج	dj	as in *judge*
ق	q	uvular stop, similar to /k/, but further back, as in *cut*
ء	’	glottal stop (not indicated in initial position when it is followed by a vowel)

Stress

	`	placed right after the stressed syllable (e.g. *mad`rasa* versus *madrasa`* ‘school’)

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