

ARABIC GRAMMAR UNRAVELLED

Naglaa Ghali

Fun with Arabic 

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INTRODUCTION

ARABIC GRAMMAR UNRAVELLED is an introductory course covering the fundamentals of Modern Standard Arabic grammar. With so many irregularities and rules behind vocalizations, coupled with the fact that spoken Arabic does not strictly adhere to rules of grammar, Arabic grammar can be an intimidating and difficult subject to study.

In this book, you will learn the essentials of grammar without lengthy explanation of rules. The book focuses on the language as it is used by today's speakers. It only includes rules that are key to Modern Standard Arabic, and not that of classical Arabic. It does not encompass the entire Arabic grammar; some rules are beyond the scope of this book.

The book gives a brief explanation of each topic, which provides a jumpstart for new learners of the language and a quick reference guide for advanced learners of Arabic.

The exercises and drills offered in this book are excellent practice for those who like a hands-on approach for learning the language. They are designed to be interesting and stimulating to the learner, and they aim at making you love the language. Not only will you learn the rules of Arabic grammar you will also be introduced to new vocabulary, phrases and short dialogues, which are useful for day-to-day situations.

Modern Standard Arabic is the written form of the language. It is only spoken in newscasts, public speeches, and other formal settings. Spoken Arabic varies between one Arab country and another, while written Arabic is the same throughout the Arab

world. Occasionally, you will encounter different styles in writing, vocabulary, and pronunciations. Just as the English language varies between its uses of “colour” and “color” or “cookies” and “biscuits,” Arabic too has various styles of writing. The differences are not profound and are understood by the majority of speakers. This book adopts the Egyptian style of writing Modern Standard Arabic.

People study Arabic for a variety of reasons. Whether for business or leisure, to discover the culture, or travel, this book tries to cater for different learners’ needs. Unless you want to pursue advanced Arabic studies, don’t be intimidated by the irregularities of the language. Study the rule first and keep irregularities as a reference. Set your own pace and keep on studying. After you have mastered enough Arabic, you can go back to lessons that you may have found difficult in the beginning, and try to study them again. Always remember that not all Arabic speakers adhere to all of the grammatical rules you are about to study. In this book, we will often point out rules, which are generally ignored by native speakers.

Transliteration provided in this book is intended to help you imitate the pronunciation of the Arabic words. Sounds that are unique to the Arabic language are provided using a capital letter. These usually indicate an emphatic sound, not the stress on a syllable. In general, Arabic does not have stressed syllables. Arabic also has no silent letters, all letters need to be pronounced. Rules governing vocalization of arabic are tricky to study, vowel marks are generally not written in Modern Standard Arabic. Transliteration provided in this book only includes vowel sounds that are key to pronunciation or which help explain grammatical rules.

PART I

PRONOUNS

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronouns refer to specific persons or things. In English there are eight pronouns; in Arabic, there are twelve.

I	<i>anaa</i>	أَنَا
You (<i>masculine, singular</i>)	<i>anta</i>	أَنْتَ
You (<i>feminine, singular</i>)	<i>anti</i>	أَنْتِ
He	<i>huwa</i>	هُوَ
She	<i>hiya</i>	هِيَ
We	<i>naHnu</i>	نَحْنُ
You (<i>dual</i>)	<i>antumaa</i>	أَنْتُمَا
You (<i>masculine, plural</i>)	<i>antum</i>	أَنْتُمْ
You (<i>feminine, plural</i>)	<i>antunna</i>	أَنْتُنَّ
They (<i>dual</i>)	<i>humaa</i>	هُمَا
They (<i>masculine</i>)	<i>hum</i>	هُمْ
They (<i>feminine</i>)	<i>hunna</i>	هُنَّ

☺ A special characteristic of Arabic is that it has personal pronouns for duals. This refers to two persons and is the same for both masculine and feminine. Another characteristic of the language is that it has a special pronoun for the second and third person feminine plural (you & they). First person singular and plural (I & we) are the same for both masculine and feminine.

☺ In spoken Arabic, the feminine plural and the dual are generally ignored. The masculine plural form is used instead of the feminine plural and also replaces the masculine and feminine duals. This also applies to informal written Arabic.

☺ The personal pronoun “It” does not exist in the Arabic language. In Arabic, all nouns are either masculine or feminine, including inanimate objects and abstracts. We will cover this in more detail in the Nouns and Adjectives section.

☺ In Arabic, the gender and number of a pronoun are usually understood from the structure of a verb. That is why personal pronouns are often omitted from a sentence. You will learn more about this when you study Verbs and Tenses.

VOCABULARY

Mother	<i>umm</i>	أم
Father	<i>ab</i>	أب
Son	<i>ibn</i>	ابن
Uncle (maternal)	<i>khaal</i>	خال
Uncle (paternal)	<i>°amm</i>	عم
Brother	<i>akh</i>	أخ
Sister	<i>ukht</i>	أخت
Fiancé	<i>khaTeeb</i>	خطيب
Husband	<i>zawg</i>	زوج
Friend	<i>Sadeeq</i>	صديق
Girl (young woman)	<i>fataah</i>	فتاة

EXAMPLES

My name is <i>anaa ismee</i>	أنا اسمي
She is pretty <i>hiya gameela</i>	هي جميلة
We are friends <i>naHnu aSdiqaa'</i>	نحن أصدقاء
Where are you (f,s) from? <i>min ayna anti?</i>	من أين أنت؟
You (d) are from Australia <i>antumaa min usturaaliyaa</i>	أنتما من أستراليا
You (m,s) speak Arabic <i>anta tataHaddathu al-°arabiya</i>	أنت تتحدث العربية
They (f) are from Lebanon <i>hunna min lubnaan</i>	هن من لبنان

GENERAL EXPRESSIONS

Yes	<i>na'am</i>	نَعَمْ
No	<i>laa</i>	لَا
Hello	<i>ahlan</i>	أَهْلًا
Hello and welcome	<i>ahlan wa-sahlan</i>	أَهْلًا وَسَهْلًا
Here you are/Please come in	<i>tafaDDal</i>	تَفَضَّلْ
Please	<i>min faDlak</i>	مِنْ فَضْلِكَ
Thank you	<i>shukran</i>	شُكْرًا
You're welcome/Pardon	<i>°fwan</i>	عَفْوًا
Fine/O.K.	<i>Hasanan</i>	حَسَنًا
Where?	<i>ayna</i>	أَيْنَ
From where?	<i>min ayna</i>	مِنْ أَيْنَ
Beautiful	<i>gameel</i>	جَمِيلٌ
Big	<i>kabeer</i>	كَبِيرٌ
Small	<i>Sagheer</i>	صَغِيرٌ
Good morning	<i>SabaaH al-khayr</i>	صَبَاحَ الْخَيْرِ
Good morning (reply)	<i>SabaaH an-noor</i>	صَبَاحَ النُّورِ
Good evening	<i>masaa' al-khayr</i>	مَسَاءَ الْخَيْرِ
God willing	<i>in shaa' allah</i>	إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ
Peace be with you	<i>as-salaamu °alykum</i>	السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ
Question particle	<i>hal</i>	هَلْ
<i>(For questions that require yes or no answer)</i>		

DIALOGUE

Tarek and a group of his foreign friends meet with Mona. Follow their conversation. Take note of the exchange of greetings and the use of personal pronouns. Translation is provided in the Answers section at the end of the book.

منى: صباح الخير

Mona: Sabaah al-khayr

طارق: صباح النور. أنا طارق

Tarek: Sabaah an-noor. anaa Tarek

منى: أهلاً أنا منى. ومن هم؟

Mona: ahlaan anaa Mona. wa-man hum?

طارق: هم اصدقائي. هم لايتحدثون العربية

Tarek: hum aSdiqaa'iee hum la yataHaddathoona al-ʿarabiya

منى: من أين هم؟

Mona: min ayna hum?

طارق: هو من كندا وهما من أمريكا

Tarek: huwa min canadaa wa-humaa min amreekaa

منى: ومن أين أنت؟

Mona: wa-min ayna anta?

طارق: أنا من القاهرة

Tarek: anaa min al-qaahira

منى: أهلاً وسهلاً. تفضلوا

Mona: ahlan wa-sahlan. tafaDDaloo

طارق: شكراً

Tarek: shukran

PART II

NOUNS
AND
ADJECTIVES

NOUNS

A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, idea or quality. Arabic nouns share some characteristics that may not be familiar in English.

1. Nouns have a gender; they are masculine or feminine. Even inanimate or abstract objects have a gender.
2. Nouns are definite or indefinite.
3. Nouns are singular, dual, or plural.
4. Nouns have three grammatical cases: nominative, accusative, and genitive.

MASCULINE AND FEMININE NOUNS

Arabic nouns are either masculine or feminine. In Arabic, there are no neutral nouns.

Most feminine nouns follow one of the following patterns:

1. The most common form is a noun ending with a *taa'* *marbooTa* (ة).

Garden	<i>Hadeeqa</i>	حديقة
Library	<i>maktaba</i>	مكتبة

2. The *alif maqSoora* (ى) (see page 7).

Music	<i>mooseeqaa</i>	موسيقى
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3. Most—not all—of the nouns ending with an *alif and a hamza* (اء).

Desert	<i>SaHaraa'</i>	صحراء
Sky	<i>samaa'</i>	سما

4. Feminine words that, by nature, are feminine.

Mother	<i>umm</i>	أمّ
Bride	<i>‘aroos</i>	عروس

5. Plus a few nouns that do not fall into any of these patterns.

Sun	<i>shams</i>	شمس
Fire	<i>naar</i>	نار

VOCABULARY

The masculine noun is followed by the feminine.

Man/Woman	<i>ragul/imra’a</i>	رجل/امرأة
Boy/Girl	<i>walad/bint</i>	ولد/بنت
Sea/Sky	<i>baHr/samaa’</i>	بحر/اسماء
River/Land	<i>nahr/arD</i>	نهر/أرض
Peace/War	<i>salaam/Harb</i>	سلام/حرب
Pen/Bag	<i>qalam /Haqeeba</i>	قلم/حقيبة
Desk (office)/Room	<i>maktab/ghurfa</i>	مكتب/غرفة
House/Garden	<i>bayt/Hadeeqa</i>	بيت/حديقة
Bull/Cow	<i>thawr/baqara</i>	ثور/بقرة
Rooster/Chicken	<i>deek/dagaaga</i>	ديك/دجاجة
Married (m)/(f)	<i>mutazawwig/mutazawwiga</i>	متزوج/متزوجة
Engineer (m)/(f)	<i>muhandis/muhandisa</i>	مهندس/مهندسة
Moroccan (m)/(f)	<i>maghribee/maghribiyya</i>	مغربي/مغربيّة



A tip to help you out: When forming the feminine, most nouns related to people, their profession, social status and nationality are formed by adding the *taa’ marbooTa* to the masculine form.

PAST TENSE

The past tense, also referred to as the perfect tense, is used to express an action completed in the past. In Arabic, the past tense is formed by adding suffixes to the root word.

Let's look at the example كَتَبَ (*kataba*) or to write.

I wrote	<i>anaa katabtu</i>	أَنَا كَتَبْتُ
You wrote (m,s)	<i>anta katabta</i>	أَنْتَ كَتَبْتَ
You wrote (f,s)	<i>anti katabti</i>	أَنْتِ كَتَبْتِ
He wrote	<i>huwa kataba</i>	هُوَ كَتَبَ
She wrote	<i>hiya katabat</i>	هِيَ كَتَبَتْ
We wrote	<i>naHnu katabnaa</i>	نَحْنُ كَتَبْنَا
You wrote (m,p)	<i>antum katabtum</i>	أَنْتُمْ كَتَبْتُمْ
You wrote (f,p)	<i>antunna katabtunna</i>	أَنْتُنَّ كَتَبْتُنَّ
They wrote (m,p)	<i>hum kataboo</i>	هُمُ كَتَبُوا
They wrote (f,p)	<i>hunaa katabna</i>	هُنَّ كَتَبْنَ
You (m & f,d)	<i>antumaa katabtumaa</i>	أَنْتُمَا كَتَبْتُمَا
They (m,d)	<i>humaa katabaa</i>	هُمَا كَتَبَا
They (f,d)	<i>humaa katabataa</i>	هُمَا كَتَبَتَا

SECOND IRREGULARITY: The plural of inanimates is given in the third person feminine singular (she).

EXAMPLES

The plane landed <i>habaTat aT-Ta'ira</i>	هَبَطَتِ الطَّائِرَةُ
The planes landed <i>habaTat aT-Ta'iraat</i>	هَبَطَتِ الطَّائِرَاتُ
The sparrow escaped from the cage <i>haraba al-^uSfoor min al-qafaS</i>	هَرَبَ الْعَصْفُورُ مِنَ الْقَفْصِ
The sparrows escaped from the cage <i>harabaT al-^aSaafeer min al-qafaS</i>	هَرَبَتِ الْعَصَافِيرُ مِنَ الْقَفْصِ

In the above examples, note that the noun العصفور “the sparrow” is masculine. The verb given with its plural is in the third person feminine singular (she).

One point to remember if you want to dive into the intricacies of the Arabic grammar: The subject of the sentence is always in the nominative case. That is, it takes a

PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word used to express a noun's or pronoun's relation to other words in a sentence. A preposition generally defines location, direction, or duration of its noun. In Arabic, prepositions are known as *huruf al-garr* (genitive letters) since a word following a preposition is always in the genitive. Arabic prepositions are either separate or attached. A separate preposition is a word that comes before a noun. An attached preposition is a letter connected to the noun.

SEPARATE PREPOSITIONS

In, at	<i>fee</i>	فِي
From	<i>min</i>	مِنْ
On	<i>‘alaa</i>	عَلَى
To	<i>ilaa</i>	إِلَى
About, away from	<i>‘an</i>	عَنْ
With	<i>ma‘a</i>	مَعَ


ATTACHED PREPOSITIONS

For, to	<i>li</i>	لِ
By, with, at, in	<i>bi</i>	بِ
Like, as	<i>ka</i>	كَ
By (of oath)*	<i>wa</i>	وَ

* Very rarely used, do not confuse it with the conjunction letter *waaw* (و) which translates to “and”.

EXAMPLES

I live in Australia <i>ʿeeshu fee usturaaliyaa</i>	أعيش في أستراليا
I am from Canada <i>anaa min canadaa</i>	أنا من كندا
I travelled from Beirut to Cairo <i>saafartu min bayroot ilaa al-qaahira</i>	سافرتُ من بيروت إلى القاهرة
He travelled by train <i>saafara bi-al-qiTaari</i>	سافرَ بالقطارِ
The book is on the shelf <i>al-kitaab ʿalaa ar-raffi</i>	الكتاب على الرفِّ
We met at the university <i>taqaabalnaa fee al-gaamiʿati</i>	تَقَابَلْنَا فِي الجامعةِ
Successful like his father <i>naaqiH ka-abeehi</i>	ناجح كأبيه
By God, I won't let you go <i>wa-allahi lan atrukak</i>	والله لن أتركك

 Most of the following words are referred to in English as prepositions but are known in Arabic as adverbs of place.

In front of	<i>amaama</i>	أَمَامَ
Behind	<i>khalfa</i>	خَلْفَ
Above	<i>fawqa</i>	فَوْقَ
Under	<i>taHta</i>	تَحْتَ
After	<i>baʿda</i>	بَعْدَ
Towards	<i>naHwa</i>	نَحْوَ
Between	<i>bayna</i>	بَيْنَ
Right	<i>yameen</i>	يَمِينِ
Left	<i>yasaar</i>	يَسَارِ
At, near	<i>ʿinda</i>	عِنْدَ

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