

Arabic Voices



Authentic Listening
and Reading Practice in
Modern Standard Arabic
and Colloquial Dialects



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1

*Authentic Listening and Reading
Practice in Modern Standard Arabic
and Colloquial Dialects*

Matthew Aldrich



lingualism

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Sample

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Sample


All segments from *Arabic Voices 1* and *Arabic Voices 2*


Segments spoken in dialect are marked with an asterisk (*).


Alaa Egypt

[1.12*](#) Introduction
[1.23](#) University Life
[1.26](#) Revolution
2.3* Arabic
2.15 Transportation


Engy Egypt

[1.11](#) Introduction
[1.14](#) Arabic
[1.21*](#) Marriage
2.8 Curse of the Pharaoh
2.18* Technology


Lilia Tunisia

[1.5*](#) Introduction
[1.24](#) Dating
2.4 Childhood Memory
2.22 Arabic
2.27* Clothing

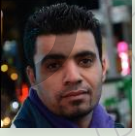
Abdelhak Morocco

[1.2](#) Introduction
[1.13](#) Marriage
[1.20*](#) Childhood Memory
2.9 Traffic Accidents
2.17 Clothing


Hend Egypt

[1.7*](#) Introduction
[1.16](#) Clothing
2.1* Daily Routine
2.19 Cats and Dogs


Islam Egypt

[1.6](#) Introduction
[1.15*](#) Childhood Memory
[1.19](#) Health
2.21 University Life
2.29* Education


Wasem Israel

[1.9*](#) Introduction
[1.27](#) Computers
2.5* Arabs in Israel
2.6* Daily Routine

Walid Lebanon

[1.10*](#) Introduction
[1.25](#) Religion
2.2 Lebanese Identity
2.12 University
2.25* Childhood Memory

Atheer Iraq

[1.4](#) Introduction
[1.28*](#) University
2.16* Childhood Memory
2.26 Transportation

Luma Jordan

[1.3*](#) Introduction
[1.18](#) The Royal Family
2.11* Childhood Memory
2.20* Religion
2.24 Smoking

Razanne Syria

[1.1](#) Introduction
[1.17*](#) Transportation
2.7 Marriage
2.13 Hijab
2.23* Technology

Abdulkarem Yemen

[1.8*](#) Introduction
[1.22](#) Qat
2.10 Childhood Memory
2.14* Poverty in Yemen
2.28 Daily Routines

Introduction

Who is an Arab?

An Arab is someone who speaks Arabic as his or her native language. This Arabic may be any one of the many varieties of Arabic which exist today across northern Africa and the Middle East. One thing that all Arabs have in common is that they all speak a local dialect, and **not** Modern Standard Arabic as their native language.

What is Modern Standard Arabic?

MSA is taught in schools. It is used primarily as the *written* language. Arabs will then speak their local dialect for the most part, but will turn to MSA any time they put something in writing. This “bilingualism”, the usage of two distinct forms of the language in everyday life is known as *diglossia*. MSA is also used in television and radio news reports and in public speeches, as the Arabic is generally read aloud from a prepared text.

How well do Arabs speak Modern Standard Arabic?

Again, it is important to remember that no Arab is a native speaker of MSA. It is somewhat refreshing for the learner to realize that Arabs themselves do not speak, or even write, MSA *perfectly*. Although most educated Arabs are, to varying degrees, *fluent* in MSA, some of the same complex grammatical rules that trip up learners also pose difficulties for Arabs. Because MSA is primarily used for written communication, people have a noticeably lower level of proficiency when it comes to speaking it, especially when speaking off the cuff, without reading from a text. For example, individuals may be able to write MSA without mixing in elements from their native dialect. However, when speaking spontaneously, colloquial idiosyncrasies—idioms, vocabulary, pronunciations, even grammatical structures—will inevitably creep in. These “mistakes” are often a result of automation, that is, the speaker being accustomed to saying things a certain way, so that words come out before he or she has a chance to consider how it *should* be stated in MSA. At other times, the speaker may not realize a certain word or phrase belongs to his or her dialect and is not a part of MSA.

How do Arabs view their dialects?

The widespread sentiment among Arabs is that local dialects (colloquial Arabic) are a natural means of everyday spoken communication. However, it is felt that the dialects are not correct, pure Arabic and are not worthy of being written. Arabs will often refer to their dialects as “*slang*” when speaking English, and may have a hard time understanding why a foreigner would want to learn a dialect, instead of focusing on MSA exclusively. The bias against local dialects in favor of MSA is partially due to a sense of pan-Arab identity, but religion is undoubtedly an influential factor toward this attitude, as well. *Classical Arabic* is the language of the Quran, and MSA is the modern incarnation of the Classical language, adapted only as much as necessary to meet the demands of the modern world.

How is colloquial Arabic written?

Because the dialects are not officially meant to be written, there is no consensus on orthography. Although some popular spellings have developed over the years*, you may see variations in the spelling of certain words; some individuals tend to keep close to the MSA spelling even when it does not accurately depict the pronunciation of a word in their dialect, while others prefer to alter spelling to reflect actual pronunciation. In this book, the former approach has been taken, for the most part. This is meant to help you, the reader, recognize words you know from MSA, but this also means you will have to listen carefully to notice regional differences in pronunciation.

How can this book help me?

You will hear the speakers in the *Arabic Voices* books occasionally make what you are sure are mistakes; you're likely right. Words may be mispronounced or misused; grammatical rules may not always be followed; sentences may be left unfinished if the speaker decides to rephrase what he or she is saying. This poses an extra challenge for listening. However, it is also very insightful to hear natural, spoken Arabic at various speeds, in all its varieties, and by a range of native speakers. This is something, unfortunately, most course books lack, in favor of carefully prepared, unnaturally slow and perfect listenings. **It is hoped that the *Arabic Voices* series fills that gap and provides some refreshingly natural, challenging opportunities for improving listening skills.**

Can I benefit from this book at my level of Arabic?

This book is best suited for intermediate and more advanced learners. However, even lower-level students can reap some benefits from listening to and studying the segments. Just keep in mind that the goal is **not** to understand 100%. The first time you listen, depending on your level, you may understand, say, 1%, 10%, 50%, or 90% of what you hear in a segment. If, after going through the exercises and studying the text while relistening several times, you are able to increase the percentage you can understand, you've made progress and are successfully developing your skills and pushing your level up. Taking this approach, the material in *Arabic Voices* can be useful to learners at a wide range of levels.

* The relative pronoun الّلي *illi* is commonly written with two *laam* (ل) even though MSA orthography would require a single *laam* with *shadda* (ّ): الّلي.

How to Use This Book

To get the most out of this book, you need to exercise a bit of **discipline**—discipline to resist reading the texts and their translations before you have thoroughly studied the listenings. This cannot be emphasized enough. Once you have read the texts and translations, the dynamics of what you can obtain from listening to the segments changes fundamentally. You should first listen to the segment *several* times while working your way through the exercises in the book. These have been designed to help you first understand the gist and gradually discover details as you relisten. Only once you have come to understand as much as you can through the exercises should you move on to study the text and translation that follow. This approach will result in maximum efficiency in improving your listening skills. A step-by-step guideline follows.

1. **CHOOSE A SEGMENT TO STUDY:** The segments can be studied in any order; however, there is somewhat of a gradual progression from shorter and slower segments to longer and faster segments through each book. The box to the right of the segment's title shows the speaker's name and country of origin, variety of Arabic (MSA or dialect), number of words in the segment, and the rate of speech the speaker uses (words per minute). The MP3s that accompany *Arabic Voices* are available as free downloads at www.lingualism.com/avaudio, where you can also stream the audio directly. The audio is also available on Lingualism's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/lingualism.
2. **TITLE AND KEY WORDS:** *Before you listen the first time, be sure to read the title of the segment and study the key words.* Going into a listening “blind”—without having any context, without even knowing the topic—makes listening comprehension in a foreign language extremely difficult. Just by knowing the general topic, we are able to improve the amount we can understand, as we are able to draw on knowledge from our past experiences, anticipate what might be said, recognize known words, and guess new words and phrases.
3. **MAIN IDEA:** *Now, determine the “Main Idea” from among the four choices.* If you are not fairly confident you know the main idea, listen one more time to narrow down your choices by a process of elimination. Once you are confident you have determined the main idea of the segment, check your answer. (Answers for the exercises precede the text and translation on the following page.) If you were incorrect, listen one more time with the main idea in mind.
4. **TRUE OR FALSE:** *Answer the “True or False” questions.* (Do not read ahead to the multiple choice questions as some of these questions themselves may answer the true false questions.) If you feel unsure of any of your answers, listen to the segment again before checking your answers. You will notice that a small number follows most answers in the answer key. These numbers correspond to the line number in the text and translation that reveals the answer. If you do not understand why you got an answer wrong, quickly look at the text and/or translation for that line number. (Here's where you have to use your self-discipline *not* to read beyond the specified line number!) Listen again and place a check next to each *true or false* question as you hear the answer.
5. **MULTIPLE CHOICE:** *Answer the “Multiple Choice” questions.* Follow the same guidelines as for the *true or false* questions. Note that both the *true or false* and *multiple choice* questions are based on information found in the segment, according to the information provided by the speaker, regardless of the accuracy of the information. You can think of each question as being preceded by “According to the speaker, ...” or “The speaker mentions that ...”.
6. **MATCHING:** *Match the Arabic words and phrases to their English translations.* You will see two styles of matching exercises, depending on whether the segment is in MSA or a dialect. For MSA

segments, the vocabulary focuses mostly on high-frequency adverbs, connectors, and phrases. (Nouns, verbs, and adjectives are usually not included here because which words a learner knows and which he or she needs to learn will vary greatly from person to person. Later, when you study the text and translation, you can look up the words you are curious about and wish to learn.) For dialect segments, there are three columns. The middle column lists words mentioned in the segment which differ significantly from MSA. Of course, you're likely less familiar with various dialects, so just make your best guesses. Match these up to their English and MSA translations. You'll learn by spending time playing with the words, so don't look up the answers too quickly. After you've matched the words and checked your answers, listen again while you check off the words as you hear them.

7. **TEXT AND TRANSLATION:** Now that you've worked your way through the exercises and have managed to pick up more of what has been said, you can feel free to move on to study the text and translation for the segment. This part is more *free-style*. Depending on your level of Arabic and level of comfort with the text, you can approach it in several ways. For instance, you can cover the Arabic side and first read the translation; then try to translate the English back into Arabic based on what you remember. Also, you can simply try to brainstorm some possible Arabic equivalents for the words or phrases in the English translation; then check the Arabic side and see how it was actually said. Conversely, you can cover the English side first and relisten while you read along with the Arabic, perhaps pausing the audio to repeat each line aloud. In any case, the side-by-side arrangement of the Arabic text and its English translation allows you to cover one side and test yourself in various ways. You should be able to match up most words and phrases with their equivalents in English. You may want to highlight useful and interesting vocabulary and phrases you want to learn.
8. **FOCUS:** Selected segments feature a *Focus* section which offers a brief review of grammar points for which examples can be found in the segment. When you study the texts of other segments, try to notice grammar in the same way.
9. **LISTEN AGAIN:** Try listening to the segments you've already studied again later. You will find that you can understand more and with more ease the following day. (Studies have shown that material learned is consolidated and organized in the brain during sleep.)

How do I study the dialect segments?

The dialect segments offer a unique opportunity to study the varieties that exist from region to region in native speakers' natural speech. Although each dialect has its own idiosyncrasies, you will come to see that they are not all that dissimilar. Of course, there are differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.

Vocabulary: Words unique to the colloquial language are presented in each dialect segment's *Matching* exercise. You will come to see that the majority of words are the same (or *nearly* the same) as those used in MSA. The main difference in terms of vocabulary between MSA and dialects lies in the most common words, such as pronouns (*we, you...*), prepositions (*from, with...*), demonstratives (*this, that...*), conjunctions (*but, because...*), adverbs (*now, only*), as well as everyday verbs and nouns (*do, go, want, can, week, father, woman, car...*). **Pronunciation:** As you study the text while listening, look for vowelings which differs from MSA, such as MSA يَكْتُبُ *he writes*, which in ECA (Egyptian Colloquial Arabic) would be يَكْتَب. Also, listen carefully for the regional pronunciations of certain consonants, namely ج, ب, ذ, ز, ط, ق, and ض, which may be pronounced differently or replaced by other sounds in some dialects. **Grammar:** Some of the more common, interesting grammatical idiosyncrasies are pointed out in the notes the *first* time they appear in a segment. Try to spot more examples in the text. Being aware of these differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar will greatly help you understand *more* of what native speakers are saying in their dialects. Note that

LCA (Levantine Colloquial Arabic) is the label used for the continuum of dialects spoken in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. You may notice some minor differences between these dialects.

The Texts and Translations

Lines

The text and translation for each segment has been divided into numbered “lines”, which are not necessarily complete sentences or even clauses, but are manageable chunks which can be studied.

Voweling

A “minimalist approach” has been taken in voweling the Arabic text. That is, although the text contains *taškīl*, the diacritic marks that show short vowels (◌َ, ◌ِ, ◌ُ), no vowel (◌◌), and a double consonant (◌◌), they are not written when predictable.

1. *Fatha* (◌َ) has been made the “default” vowel; as it is the most common vowel, it is normally not written in the texts. A consonant without a diacritic can be assumed to take *fatha*, except as noted below.
2. A final consonant is assumed to take *sukūn* (◌◌) if unvoiced: سکن *sakan*. If it pronounced with a final vowel, this will be written: سکن *sakana*.
3. A consonant followed by a long vowel is unmarked: با *bā*, بي *bī*, بو *bū*. However, diphthongs are clearly marked: بَيّ *bay*, بَوّ *baw*. In dialects, these may represent ē and ō: بَيّ *bē*, بَوّ *bō*.
4. A final ية is assumed to be يّة.
5. The definite article ال is not marked with *sukūn* (◌◌); however, when assimilated a *šadda* (◌◌) is written above the following consonant: الشمس *aššams*. The vowel of the definite article is not written, although it may be pronounced ال in some dialects.
6. The prefixed word و *wa* in MSA, is pronounced in a variety of ways in dialects, such as *wi*, or *u*. Still, these are generally unmarked. Listen carefully to dialect segments to how the speaker pronounces this word.

Every attempt has been made to reflect the pronunciation used by the speaker in the *taškīl*, regardless of whether the speaker has used the correct case suffix in MSA, or used voweling in a word considered non-standard.

Uh...

Fillers, which are used to signal that the speaker is thinking of what to say next, are a common and natural part of spoken language. The pronunciation of fillers used vary from speaker and region, but to keep them easily identifiable, they have been transcribed as either ...الله or ...اممم throughout the texts. يغني is also a common filler in Arabic and could translate as *that is* or *you know*. Another trait of spoken discourse is that the speaker may misspeak, then back up to correct himself or herself. Also, a speaker may decide to rephrase a sentence, or simply not finish it. These are all marked with ellipses (...) so that you can easily see that the *word* you didn't catch is in fact not a complete word at all. These ellipses are meant to aid you in deciphering the listening. However, when you are reading for meaning, anything before an ellipsis can be ignored.

The Translations

Good style has been sacrificed in favor of direct translations so that Arabic words and phrases can easily be matched up to their translations. You are encouraged to think of alternative ways lines could be translated in to English.

Notes

Notes follow the texts and are referenced within the text by the * and ① symbols next to the line numbers. The asterisk (*) refers to a linguistic or cultural note, while ① indicates an Internet link to a relevant article or video which you may find interesting. (The Wikipedia articles often contain links to an Arabic version that could provide further reading practice.)

ECA	Egyptian Colloquial Arabic	MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
ICA	Iraqi Colloquial Arabic	TCA	Tunisian Colloquial Arabic
LCA	Levantine Colloquial Arabic*	YCA	Yemeni Colloquial Arabic
MCA	Moroccan Colloquial Arabic		

Sample

* including the Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Jordan dialects

Razanne

Razanne (Syria)

MSA 239 words (80 wpm)



Key Words

دراسة studies شهادة degree, diploma جامعة university, college



Main Idea

- Razanne is a Syrian woman who wants to immigrate to the United States.
- Razanne was born in the United States, but grew up in Syria, where she now lives.
- Razanne is a Syrian woman who now lives in the United States.
- Razanne is a Syrian woman who used to live in the United States.

True or False

- Razanne is originally from Damascus.
- Razanne came to the United States in order to study.
- Razanne intends to do a master's degree in the U.S.
- Razanne is 26 years old.
- Razanne is single.

Multiple Choice

- Razanne studied ____ at the University of Damascus.
 - Arabic literature
 - teaching Arabic to non-native speakers
 - Arabic-English translation
 - American studies
- Razanne finished about ____ percent of her university coursework before she left Syria.
 - 60
 - 70
 - 80
 - 90
- Razanne wants to finish her studies before ____.
 - she gets married
 - she goes back to Syria
 - she turns thirty
 - she starts teaching
- Razanne's goal is to ____.
 - teach children
 - teach in college
 - do voice-over work
 - live in Illinois
- Most of the students that she teaches Arabic are ____.
 - of Arab descent
 - eleven years old
 - college students
 - able to speak but not read Arabic well

Matching

في الأصل من
أطمح أيضًا إلى أن
ومن ثم
أنوي أن أدرس
اللغة العربية لغير الناطقين بها
أتمنى أن
قبل أن أبلغ الثلاثين من العمر
والعكس أيضًا
من أصل عربي
في البداية
بشكل جيد
ما يزال

and then
and vice-versa
Arabic for non-native speakers
at first
before I turn thirty
I also aspire to
I hope to
I intend to study
of Arab descent
originally from
still
well

Answers

Main Idea: c **True or False:** 1. T² 2. F⁴ 3. T⁸ 4. T¹⁰ 5. F³ **Multiple Choice:** 1. a⁵ 2. d⁶ 3. c¹¹ 4. b⁹ 5. a¹⁵ **Matching:** في اللغة / أنوي أن أدرس / I intend to study / ومن ثم / أطمح أيضًا إلى أن / originally from / الأصل من / قبل أن أبلغ الثلاثين من العمر / I hope to / أتمنى أن / Arabic for non-native speakers / لغير الناطقين بها / والعكس أيضًا / and vice-versa / من أصل عربي / of Arab descent / في البداية / at first / بشكل جيد / well / ما يزال / still

Text

مرحبًا ااه... أنا اسمي رزان.	1	Hello. Uh... my name's Razanne.
أنا في الأصل من دمشق سوريا.	2	I'm originally from Damascus, Syria.
أعيش في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية في ولاية إلينوي مع زوجي.	3	I live in the United States of America, in Illinois, with my husband.
جئت إلى أميركا بسبب امم... الأوضاع والأحداث التي تجري في سوريا الآن.	4*①	I came America because of um... the situation and events that are taking place in Syria now.

درست الأدب العربي في جامعة دمشق ولكنني لم أستطع إنهاء دراستي والحصول على الشهادة... يعنى الشهادة الجامعية.	5	I studied Arab literature at the University of Damascus, but I wasn't able to finish my studies and get a college degree.
كنت قد أنهيت حوالي تسعين بالمئة من الدراسة الجامعية.	6	I had finished about ninety percent of my university work.
أطمح أيضا إلى أن أنهى دراستي هنا في أميركا لأحصل على الشهادة.	7*	I also aspire to finish my studies here in America and get my degree.
اممم... ومن ثم أنوي أن أدرس للحصول على شهادة الماجستير في تعليم اللغة العربية لغير الناطقين بها	8	Um... And then I intend to study for a master's degree in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers,
كي أستطيع أن أدرس في الجامعة وأصبح أستاذة اممم... في جامعات أمريكية.	9	so that I can teach in college and become an instructor um... in American universities.
عُمري الآن ست وعشرون سنة	10	I'm twenty-six years old now,
وأتمنى أن أحقق هدفي وأن أحصل ااه... أو... أنهى دراستي قبل أن أبلغ الثلاثين من العمر.	11	and I hope to achieve my goal to get um... or... to finish my studies before I turn thirty.
اه... أما الآن فأنا أعمل في ترجمة النصوص من اللغة العربية إلى الإنكليزية والعكس أيضا،	12	As for now, I translate texts from Arabic to English and vice-versa,
إضافة إلى عمل التسجيل... التسجيلات الصوتية في اللغة العربية والإنكليزية أو ما يُدعى بـ voice-over.	13	in addition to voice recording work, or what's called "voice-overs".
اممم... أقوم بإعطاء الدروس الخصوصية للطلاب الراغبين في تعلم اللغة العربية هنا في إلينوي.	14	Um... I give private lessons to students who want to learn Arabic here in Illinois.
غالبًا هؤلاء الطلاب هم من أصل عربي ولكن لا يستطيعون تكلم العربية.	15	Mostly, these students are of Arab descent but can't speak Arabic.
اه... واحد من هؤلاء الطلاب لدي اسمه يوسف وهو بالغ من العمر أحد عشر سنة	16	Uh... One of these students I have, whose name is Yusuf and is eleven years old,

و... هُوَ ولد ذكي ويستطيع التعلّم بسرعة.	17	is clever boy who can learn fast.
في البداية لم يكن يستطيع أن يقرأ الأحرف بشكل جيد،	18	In the beginning, he wasn't able to read letters well.
ومنذ شهرين بدأنا بالدروس الخصوصية	19	We started the private lessons two months ago,
وهو الآن يستطيع أن يقرأ جملاً كاملة في اللغة العربية.	20	and now he can read complete sentences in Arabic.
يقوم ببعض الأخطاء ولكن ما يزال ااا... جيد بالنسبة للكثير من الطلاب غيره.	21	He makes some mistakes, but he's still uh... good compared to most of the other students.

Notes

*4 Although *America* is most commonly rendered أمريكا in MSA, it is often pronounced أميريكا in dialects, which sounds similar to the English word. Because Razanne lives in the U.S. and speaks English on a daily basis, she is probably more used to this pronunciation. Notice, however, that she still pronounces the adjective form as أمريكي.

①4 wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_civil_war

*7 Razanne says أحصل instead of the more standard MSA pronunciation أُحصل, no doubt influenced by her dialect.

Focus

Certain verbs, such as استطاع *be able*, تمنى *hope*, طمح *aspire*, and نوى *intend*, can either be followed by أن and a subjunctive verb **or** by a *masdar* (also known as a *gerund* or *verbal noun*). The *masdar* must be definite, either taking the definite article or a personal suffix, **or** as part of an *idafa* construction (*compound noun*).

	masdar	or	subjunctive	
<i>I can run quickly.</i>	بسرعة.	الجرى	أن أجري	أستطيع
<i>I hope to see you again.</i>	مرة ثانية.	رؤيتك	أن أراك	أتمنى
<i>I aspire to speak Arabic fluently.</i>	بطلاقة.	تكلم العربية	أن أتكلّم العربية	أطمح إلى
<i>I intend to go to Paris.</i>	إلى باريس.	الذهاب	أن أذهب	أنوي

Find and write out the occurrences of constructions with these verbs in this segment. Transform the grammar from subjunctive to *masdar* or vice versa. Then check below.

Answers: أطمح أيضاً إلى / لم أستطع أن أنهى دراستي وأن أحصل على الشهادة = لم أستطع إنهاء دراستي والحصول على الشهادة
 أتمنى / أستطيع التدريس = أستطيع أن أدرس / أنوي الدروس = أنوي أن أدرس / أطمح أيضاً إلى إنهاء دراستي = أن أنهى دراستي
 = يستطيع التعلّم بسرعة / لا يستطيعون أن يتكلموا العربية = لا يستطيعون تكلم العربية / وأتمنى تحقيق هدفي = أن أحقق هدفي
 يستطيع = يستطيع أن يقرأ جملاً كاملة / لم يكن يستطيع قراءة الأحرف = لم يكن يستطيع أن يقرأ الأحرف / يستطيع أن يتعلّم بسرعة
 قراءة جمل كاملة

notes

Sample