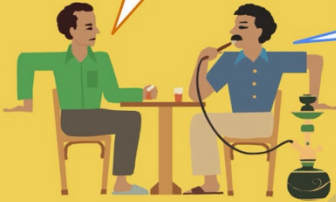


# TALK



مِش ناوي تَبْطَلْ تَدْخِين بَقِي؟  
عَمِيَّتِي يَا عَمْرُ!



واللهِ الحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَطَلْتِ  
سَجَائِرِ بَسِّ لِسَةِ الشَّيْثَةِ.  
دَعْوَاتِكَ بَقِي رَبَّنَا يَتُوبُ  
عَلَيْهَا مِنْهَا.

# LIKE AN

# EGYPTIAN



Key Idiomatic Expressions  
For Sounding Natural in  
Egyptian Arabic

by Alaa Abou El-Nour and Matthew Aldrich



# TALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Key Idiomatic Expressions for  
Sounding Natural in Egyptian Arabic

Alaa Abou El-Nour  
and  
Matthew Aldrich



**lingualism**

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The book is divided into six sections, the first being miscellaneous items. The other sections feature themes. On the pages listed in the table above, you will find detailed tables with the segments in each section, their page numbers, and corresponding audio track numbers.

# Introduction

If you're old enough, you'll remember learning to “walk like an Egyptian” back in the 1980s.\* Little did you know back then that you'd be learning to talk like an Egyptian decades later!

But that's easier said than done. One of the greatest challenges in learning any language is mastering idiomatic expressions so you can sound more natural and better understand native speakers. Most learning materials—dictionaries and even course books—may present idiomatic expressions and adverbs but usually with a simple translation and little guidance on when and how to use them.

And that's why **Talk Like an Egyptian** is a unique and powerful language learning tool for **intermediate learners**. We go into depth with each word or phrase, providing detailed explanations, both literal and figurative translations, and dialogues that show you just how native speakers use it in context. We were careful to include only natural, high-frequency expressions in current use so that you can be confident in using them to sound more fluent and impress your Egyptian friends. **يلا بينا!** Let's go!



Visit the **Talk Like an Egyptian** hub at [www.lingualism.com/tle](http://www.lingualism.com/tle), where you can find **free accompanying audio** to download or stream (at variable playback rates) and other resources.

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\* The American band ‘The Bangles’ had a number-one hit single called ‘Walk Like an Egyptian’ that popularized a dance with movements mimicking human poses depicted in Ancient Egyptian art.

# How to Use This Book

There's really no wrong way to use this book. You can study the segments in any order or work through the book systematically. You can use the tables of contents to find a topic, or you can randomly flip to any page and learn something new.

At the beginning of each segment, you can find an icon can in the top-right corner with the corresponding audio track number on which the dialogue(s) can be found.

The segment's key word or expression appears as the title, followed by a title in English, which may be a translation that shows one meaning, or it may be a literal translation or other title to pique your interest and encourage you to read more.

Next, we give you explanations, translations, tips on usage, background information, and cultural notes to help you really understand the word or expression and how it is used in natural language.

Short dialogues show you the word or expression in context.

Extra information and useful footnotes are given in gray boxes after many dialogues.

Although the book features over 100 key words and expressions, there are hundreds more throughout the dialogues—and this is where the real value and fun comes in. By being observant and comparing the Arabic to the translations, you can learn many, many more useful idiomatic expressions, structures, interjections, adverbs, and other vocabulary.

We hope you enjoy the book and learning to TALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN!



# Reading the Arabic Script

The Arabic script is written with tashkeel (diacritics) so that you always know how to pronounce what you are reading.

At first glance, it may seem that many letters are missing diacritics, but this is by design. A final consonant is assumed to take sukuun, as Egyptian Arabic does not have case endings as Modern Standard Arabic does. We write كتاب book (and not كِتَاب). Non-final consonants without diacritics are understood to take the short vowel fatha ( - ): شمس (and not شَمْس). This was done to keep the texts from being cluttered with redundancies and streamline fluent reading.

You can find a detailed online guide with printable PDFs on Egyptian Arabic pronunciation and Lingualism's system of orthography in the Resources section of this book's product page: [www.lingualism.com/tle](http://www.lingualism.com/tle).

# Section 1

## Key Expressions

In section 1, we'll learn a variety of common everyday expressions, adverbs, and structures that will help you talk like an Egyptian. Ready?

track 001	page 2	like this	كده
track 002	page 9	to be interested in	له في
track 003	page 13	'thing'	بتاع
track 004	page 20	to "die"	مات
track 005	page 24	Believe it or not!	قال آيه
track 006	page 25	to be welcome	نور
track 007	page 27	Very much!	أوي أوي
track 008	page 29	Go ahead!	اتفضل
track 009	page 37	outside	بره
track 010	page 40	already	خلاص
track 011	page 46	Heavenly!	نعيمًا
track 012	page 48	reasonable	معقول
track 013	page 51	hope and faith	عشم





# كده

## like this

كده is likely the most quintessentially Egyptian word there is. Not only is it very high frequency in everyday speech, but it is unique to the Egyptian dialect. كده is related to the Modern Standard Arabic word هكذا like this but takes on a range of idiomatic meanings on its own and in phrases.

Many learners make the mistake of translating like this literally, as زي ده, but this only works if you mean such as this/him. If you mean to say this way or in that manner, you should use كده.

أ: أطلع القميص بره ولا أخليه زي ما هو جوه  
البنطلون؟

ب: لا سيبه جوه البنطلون. كده شكله أحلى.

A: Should I untuck the shirt or leave it tucked into the pants?

B: No, leave it [tucked] inside. It looks better this way.

أ: هِيَ الشَّجَرَةُ بِتَرَسِمِ كَدِهْ؟  
ب: أَيُّوَهْ يَا حَبِيبِي، كَدِهْ مَظْبُوط.

A: Is a tree drawn like this?  
B: Yes, dear. That's correct.

مِش كَدِهْ functions as a question tag at the end of a sentence:  
'... right?', '... isn't that so?'

أ: أَنَا بِقَوْلِ نَعْدِي عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ بِاللَّيْلِ بَعْدَ الْغَدَا أَحْسَنَ،  
مِش كَدِهْ؟  
ب: آه يَكُونُ أَحْسَنَ بَرُضَه.

A: I assume it would be better if we go by Mohamed's in the evening after lunch, wouldn't it?  
B: Yes, that'd be better.

Sometimes, كَدِهْ doesn't really translate but serves to soften the sentence as a kind of filler.

أ: هَا هَنَنْزِلِ وَلَا أَيَّهْ؟  
ب: خَلِينَا نَسْتَنِي كَدِهْ شُويَّةً وَ بَعْدِينِ نَنْزِلِ.

A: So, are we going out or what?  
B: Let's just wait a bit, then go out.

أ: عَلَى فِكْرَةَ، دِي آخِرِ مَرَّةٍ هَشْتِرِي مِنْكُمْ!  
ب: لِيَهْ بَسْ كَدِهْ يَا مَدَامْ؟

A: By the way, this is the last time I'll ever buy anything from you.  
B: But why, ma'am?

كده can refer back to something just mentioned: so, thus

أ: لازم حد ينصح محمود إنه يرجع الشغل تاني.  
ب: حسين قاله كده، بس المشكلة إنه مسافر كمان  
أسبوع.

A: Someone has to advise Mahmoud to go back to work again.

B: Hussein did [told him so]... but the problem is that he's going away in a week.

أ: أنا مش قلتك لازم تروح لدكتور قلب؟  
ب: ما أنا عملت كده فعلاً!

A: Didn't I tell you that you should go see a cardiologist?

B: I did [so already]!

An enthusiastic كده, often accompanied by a thumbs-up, describes someone or something as great, super, perfect.

أ: و البوفيه إمبراح كان عامل إزاي في الفرح؟  
ب: لأ مقولكش... كان كده!

A: And how was the buffet at the wedding yesterday?

B: Just wow! It was awesome!

مقولكش [lit. I won't tell you!]

أ: الميكانيكي اللي قُلتك عليه عرف يصلح عربيتك؟  
ب: مش عايزة أقولك! ده طلع ميكانيكي أيه! كده!

A: Did the mechanic I told you about manage to fix the car for you?

B: You won't believe it! What a mechanic he turned out to be! Perfect!

كده كده **means** anyway, in any case.

أ: تحب تَظفر دِلوقتي وَلَا لما كله يصحى؟  
ب: لا متعملوش حسابي. أنا كده كده صايم.

A: Would you like to have your breakfast now or when everyone is up?

B: No, don't count me in. I'm fasting anyway.

أ: تحبي أعدي عليكي آخديك بعد ما تخلصي؟  
ب: لا كده كده مروة راجعة معايا، هتوصلني.

A: Would you like me to pick you up after you're done?

B: No, Marwa is coming back with me in any case, so she'll drive me.

The expression كده و كده is used as an adverb to show that something is done as a ruse (pretending, deceiving).

أ: أنا لو رديت عليه حيقعد يرغي ساعتين. أعمل أيه  
دِلوقتي؟  
ب: رد عليه و شوف لو عايز حاجة مهمة. و لو حبيت  
تقفل شاورلي، أرن جرس الباب كده و كده.

A: If I pick up [answer his call], he'll talk for two hours. What should I do now?

B: Pick up and see if he needs something important. If you want to end the call, just give me a signal, and I can pretend the doorbell is ringing.

**In a question, كده وَلَا كده means 'this way or that way?', 'like this or like that?'**

أ: أَلْفِ الطَّرْحَةِ كَدِهْ وَلَا كَدِهْ؟  
ب: لَا كَدِهْ أَحْلَى.

A: Should I wrap the headscarf like this or like this?

B: This way is better.

**But in a statement, كده وَلَا كده means either way (is fine; it doesn't make a difference).**

أ: تَفْتَكِرِي أَعَزِّي سَلِيمَانَ بِمَكَالِمَةٍ وَلَا زِيَارَةَ أَحْسَنَ؟  
ب: كَدِهْ وَلَا كَدِهْ، مَلْهَاش لَازِمَةٌ. الْوَفَاةُ عَدَى عَلَيْهَا  
كَتِيرَ، بَلَّاش تَقَلَّبَ عَلَيْهِ الْمَوَاجِعُ.

A: Do you think I can express my condolences to Soliman over the phone, or is it better if I pay him a visit?

B: Either way. There's no need to. It's been a while since the death, so don't awaken his mourning.

على كده means in that case, if so.

أ: الْخَمِيسَ الْجَايِي ٦ أَكْتُوبِرَ.  
ب: بِجِدِّ؟ عَلَى كَدِهْ مُمَكِّنْ نَطْلَعُ يَوْمِينَ نَغِيرَ جَوْ فِي أَيِّ  
حَتَّةَ.

A: Next Thursday is the 6<sup>th</sup> of October [an official holiday].

B: Really? In that case, we can go away somewhere [over the long weekend] for a couple of days for a change of pace.

**The exclamations** **هي بقت كده؟** and **بقي كده؟** mean 'Oh, is that the way it is?'

أ: بقولك أيه، إنت خلاص، مبقاش ليك لازمة. أنا  
هخرج أنا و سامح بس و نسيبك بقي لوحدك.  
ب: بقي كده! ماشي، بكرة تندم يا جميل!

A: You know what? You're a lost cause. I'll go hang out just with Sameh and leave you to yourself.

B: Hmm, so that's the way it is? Fine... 'Tomorrow you shall regret it, darling!'

**بكرة تندم يا جميل** is a famous line from an old movie often said to make someone feel that they're going to regret it later.

**When كده follows a number (or two consecutive numbers), it gives the meaning of approximation.**

أ: كام واحد من صحابك هيسافروا معاك؟  
ب: أربعة خمسة كده. لسه ماكدناش.

A: How many of your friends are traveling with you?

B: Around four or five. We haven't confirmed yet.

أ: كام واحد هيجي الحفلة؟  
ب: يجي ثلاث أربع بنات و ولدين ثلاثة كده.

A: How many [people] are coming to the party?

B: Around three or four girls and about two or three boys.

ييجي also shows approximation and is interchangeable with حَوالِي and بِتاع here.

أ: نَتَقَابِلِ بَكْرَه كَام؟

ب: (عَلَى) سَبْعَة كَدَه.

A: When shall we meet tomorrow?

B: Around seven o'clock.

على, before hours, also shows approximation.



# معلش

## Never mind!

معلش is used to downplay a situation, whether to console, sympathize, or apologize. The word originally comes from the Modern Standard Arabic phrase ما عليه شيء, which literally means nothing against it.

معلش can express sympathy.

أ: تخيل بعد كل الشغل ده رقدوني.

ب: معلش هون على نفسك. إن شاء الله ربنا يعوضك  
بشغل أحسن.

A: Imagine! After all this work, they fired me.

B: It's okay. Take it easy. God willing, our Lord will compensate you with a better job.

أ: أنا تعبانة أوي، مش عارفة أركز في المذاكرة.

ب: معلش يا حبييتي، ادخلي ريجي ساعة و قومي  
كملي.





# حبيبتى and حبيبي

You can address a child (stranger or known) with حبيبي (for boys) and حبيبتى (for girls) dear, darling, sweetie, honey.

*(seeing an unattended child on the street)*

أ: حبيبي، إنت فيه حد معاك؟

ب: آه، ماما جوّه المحل.

A: Honey, is there someone [older] with you?

B: Yes, my mom is inside the store.

*(to a girl who's tripped and fallen on the street)*

أ: خلي بالك يا حبيبتى و إنتي ماشية!

ب: حاضر.

A: Sweetie, watch out while you're walking!

B: Okay.

Although it can be freely used with small children, حبيبي and حبيبتى should only be used with adult strangers of the same sex. That is, it would be inappropriate and ill-received for a man to address a female adult stranger as حبيبتى.



## طنط and عمو

عمو uncle and طنط auntie are polite but informal forms of address for adults who are a generation older than you—neighbors, family friends, your friends' parents, or even strangers (especially by children).

سامحني يا عمو، مش هقدر آجي... تعبان أوي.

Forgive me, uncle. I won't be able to make it. I'm not feeling well.

أ: إزيك يا طنط؟ و إزي صحتك؟

ب: الحمد لله حبيبتي. طمنيني عليكم إنتو.

A: How are you, auntie? How's your health?

B: Thank God, my dear. And tell me how you all are doing.

In rural communities, you may hear خالتي instead of طنط.

Now, let's take a look at how to address our actual aunts and uncles in the family. In Arabic, a distinction is made between paternal and maternal aunts and uncles. You call your father's brother عمو, your father's sister عمّو, your mother's brother خالو, and your mother's sister خالّتو. In English, we would also consider their spouses our uncles and aunts, but as there are no special terms in Arabic for these people, we would address

## Section 4

# Numbers in Idioms

There are numerous idioms in Egyptian Arabic that contain numbers. Some are straightforward and logical. Others seem as if there must be a story behind them, but Egyptians usually have little idea why this or that number is used in a particular idiom; they just use them without questioning them too much. In English, why do we say 'on cloud nine,' 'in seventh heaven,' 'at sixes and sevens'? The point is, don't worry too much about the history and logic behind such idioms. Just learn them and their meanings. A third kind of idiom with numbers is the hyperbole, where any large number would do, but Egyptians have some favorites, as you'll see in this section.

track 045	page 124	Slow down!	واحدة واحدة
track 046	page 125	one, two, three...	الله واحد...
track 047	page 126	What's the third of three?	تلت التلاتة كام؟
track 048	page 127	a third tripled-up	تالت و متلت
track 049	page 128	the third is final	التالته تآبته
track 050	page 130	five minutes	خمسة
track 051	page 131	Knock on wood!	خمسة و خميسة

track 052	page 132	to be beside oneself	ضرب أحماس في أسداس
track 053	page 133	'donuts'	خمسات
track 054	page 134	to search and search	لف سبع لفات
track 055	page 135	with seven lives	يسبع ترواح
track 056	page 136	in a deep sleep	في سابح نومة
track 057	page 137	we're all equal	كلنا وِلاد تسعة
track 058	page 138	'full moon'	قمر أربعتاشر
track 059	page 139	It's useless!	ملهاش تلاتين لازمة
track 060	page 140	centipede	أم أربعة و أربعين
track 061	page 141	Go to hell!	في ستين داهية
track 062	page 143	Son of a ... !	إبن ستين في سبعين
track 063	page 144	110 jasmine flowers	مئة فل و عشرة
track 064	page 145	300 welcomes!	يا تلتمية مرحبا
track 065	page 146	a zillion times	عشرومية مرة
track 066	page 148	A thousand congratulations!	ألف مبروك
track 067	page 149	A thousand thanks!	ألف شكر
track 068	page 150	Welcome back!	ألف حمد لله ع السلامة



# خَمْسَة و خَمِيسَة

## Knock on wood!

While most Egyptians believe in the evil eye (since it's a Quranic concept), belief in the power of the digit '5' to protect against the evil eye is folk superstition. Those who do believe in this may use the expression **خَمْسَة و خَمِيسَة** sincerely to ward off the evil eye. However, many people use it sarcastically or playfully, much as English speakers might use 'knock on wood.' **خَمِيسَة** is a (usually blue) amulet of an open hand with an eye in the palm.

أ: **بِسْ أَيَّهِ الشَّقَّةُ الْجِلْوَةُ دِي بَسْ!**

ب: **خَمْسَة و خَمِيسَة يَاخْتِي! مَا تَصَلِّي عَ النَّبِيِّ.**

A: What a fancy apartment!

B: Five, girl! Pray for the Prophet!

See p. 167 to find out what the speaker above should have said to avoid her friend's reaction.



# قمر أربعتاشر

## 'full moon'

قمر moon is an epithet for a beautiful woman. In the Islamic (Hijri) lunar calendar, months begin with a new moon, meaning the full moon is halfway—on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month, so قمر moon of the 14<sup>th</sup> emphasizes that she is incredibly beautiful.

أ: و آيه رأيك فيها يا ماما؟

ب: قمر أربعتاشر. ربنا يسعدكم يا حبيبي.

A: And what do you think about her, Mom?

B: She's absolutely gorgeous. May God grant you happiness, dear.

## Section 5

# الله

## God

الله Allah is the Arabic name for God. It's important to note that it's used to refer to God not only by Muslims but also by Christians and Jews. The word originally comes from إله god and, with the addition of the definite article ال, has taken on the unique form الله: the [one and only] God

Unlike most other Arabs, however, Egyptians almost always refer to God as ربنا our Lord and rarely say الله except in set expressions and proverbs or when swearing. Note that, while some Christians in the West might take issue with “using the Lord’s name in vain”—even in expressions such as “Oh my God!”—it is not offensive to do so for Arabs. In fact, the word الله is, on its own, a common interjection in Egyptian Arabic and has acquired a variety of meanings to express different feelings as in the first expression presented in this section.

track 069	page 153	God!	الله!
track 070	page 157	By God!	والله
track 071	page 162	God Willing!	إن شاء الله
track 072	page 167	... and the Evil Eye	ما شاء الله
track 073	page 170	Praise be to God!	الحمد لله
track 074	page 176	Reliance on God	التوكل على الله
track 075	page 179	May God make it easy!	ربنا يسهل
track 076	page 181	Damn you!	ربنا ياخذك
track 077	page 182	May God be generous with you!	ربنا يكرمك





# والله

## By God!

By adding **و** to **الله**, we have an oath that essentially means (I swear) by God. Notice that **والله** is pronounced with a **kasra (-)** at the end.

The basic and most common usage of **والله** is to emphasize the truthfulness of a statement and is not meant to be taken literally as an oath.

أ: بجد هتقدري بكره تيجي معايا للدكتور؟  
 ب: والله فاضية يا حبيبتي. لو مشغولة كنت هقولك.

A: Can you really come with me to the doctor tomorrow?

B: I swear, I'm free, honey. If I were busy, I would have told you.

أ: بجد والله ده كثير! مش معقول كل الشغل ده عليا  
 لوحدتي.



# إِيْدُهُ طَرُشَا

## deaf-handed

إِيْدُهُ طَرُشَا [lit. one's hand is deaf] is used to describe someone who can hit with force.

أ: إِمْبَارِحِ مَاجِدِ مَسِكِ صَاحِبُهُ عَدْمُهُ الْعَاقِيَةَ.

ب: فَظِيْعِ مَاجِدِ! دِهْ إِيْدُهُ طَرُشَا!

A: Yesterday, Maged grabbed his friend and beat him up.

B: Maged is horrible! He can really pack a punch!



# إِيْدُهُ طَوِيْلَةٌ

## long-handed

إِيْدُهُ طَوِيْلَةٌ [lit. one's hand is long] describes someone who is prone to theft.

أ: أَنَا مَشَيْتُ الصَّنَائِعِي الَّذِي كَانَ يَبِيضُ الشَّقَّةَ.

ب: لِيْهِ؟

أ: إِيْدُهُ طَوِيْلَةٌ. كُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَلَاقِي حَاجَةً نَاقِصَةً.

A: I let go of the worker who was painting my apartment.

B: Why?

A: He had sticky fingers. Every now and then, I would find something missing.