Introduction

This book integrates an Arabic colloquial dialect with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in a way which reflects the use of Arabic by native speakers. Arabs communicate in the colloquial in everyday situations, and they use MSA for reading, writing, and formal speaking. For example, when an Arab talks to a waiter in a restaurant, he uses the dialect, but when he reads the menu he reads MSA.

Arabs from different parts of the Arab world speak different dialects, but MSA is the same everywhere. This is why the majority of Arabic programs prefer to teach MSA. However, students who learn to speak only MSA will not be able to use it in conversation; not only will they sound funny, but they will also find it very difficult, if not impossible, to understand what is being said to them.

I believe that teaching a spoken dialect for everyday conversation and MSA for reading, writing, and formal speaking is the most effective way to prepare students to function in Arabic. I also believe that if a student masters any Arabic dialect well enough, he/she will be able to function in other dialects, just as native speakers from different areas of the Arab world do.

The colloquial Arabic dialect used in this course is Levantine (Syrian) Arabic. It is one of the major Arabic dialects.

Suggestions for Using the Textbook

This book includes reading selections, vocabulary lists, and questions on the listening selections, the dialogues, and the reading selections. It also includes grammar notes, different types of exercises, and a comprehensive Arabic-English glossary. All listening selections and dialogues and most reading selections are recorded on tape and copies of the tapes accompany the book.

The book can be divided into two parts: lessons 1 through 8 and lessons 9 through 53. The goal of the first part is to introduce the Arabic writing system, the numbers, and about 150 high-frequency words related to personal identification, school, time, weather, home, family, and work, which are then used as a basis for further vocabulary (and other skill) building.

In the second part, the focus is shifted toward developing the skill to listen and read for comprehension without deliberately introducing the words at the beginning of each lesson and without expecting full mastery of new words. The lessons in this part generally have a similar format and consist of listening, speaking, reading, grammar, and exercises. Most of these activities can be worked on outside class with the help of the book and the cassette tapes--at home, in the library, or in a park, where you have more time and where you are more relaxed and rested. Each of these activities will be discussed briefly.

Listen

The purpose of the listening selections is to help you develop the ability to listen to Arabic and to understand the gist of what you listen to. All selections include language material that has not been fully covered in the class and you are not expected to understand the details of every selection, but you are encouraged to guess meaning from context. The focus is on developing the skill of listening for comprehension. Words are repeated in subsequent lessons and in varying contexts, and you will gradually start recognizing and then internalizing these words, to
varying degrees, of course, with more language input. The questions on each selection focus on the main points, and if you can answer these questions, then the goal is achieved. Listen to the selection as a whole as many times as needed with minimal help from the vocabulary lists, which should be used only to aid comprehension and not for memorization.

Dialogue حوار

The dialogues are intended for oral comprehension and production. Listen to a dialogue as many times as needed until you can answer the questions and are able to act out the dialogue. I am not suggesting memorization of the dialogue, but rather understanding it and using it as a basis for a dialogue dealing with a similar situation, using as many words from the dialogue as you wish as well as words and expressions you have acquired previously. Your teacher may choose to give you the texts of the dialogues as a reference, particularly if needed in acting out the dialogue, but these texts should not be used as reading exercises.

Read اقرأ

The reading selections have been prepared with the goal of developing the skill of silent reading comprehension. Thorough comprehension should not be the goal of such selections, nor should the skill to read aloud or the skill to translate Arabic into English. Questions that aid comprehension are provided, and they can be used as part of a homework assignment and/or as a basis for an informal discussion of the selection.

Write اكتب

Of the four language skills, writing receives the least emphasis at this stage, because it is my view that the time available to the college student in a first-year Arabic course is better utilized in developing the more useful skills of listening, speaking, and reading. However, writing can be helpful in reinforcing the other skills, and this is the main reason for including writing exercises in the book. This is an activity that you can do outside of class for the most part.

Grammar قواعد

Emphasis in the course is on intelligibility rather than on grammatical accuracy. As long as you understand what you hear or read and can make yourself understood when communicating a message, then discussion of grammatical structures should be avoided and class time used to work on the other language skills.

However, an explanation of grammatical structures may be necessary, especially when you need it to help your understanding of spoken or written materials. This is why brief grammatical notes are included at various points in the book. They are intended for you to read on your own, not as grammatical drills to be used during class. If you have trouble understanding a point or a concept, your teacher can help you in the class or during office hours.