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Arabic

3rd Edition

by Amine Bouchentouf

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Arabic For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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Introduction

Arabic, the official language of more than 27 countries, is the mother tongue of more than 420 million people. It's spoken throughout the Middle East, from Morocco to Iraq. Additionally, because Arabic is the language of the Koran and Islam, more than 1.3 billion people across the world understand it.

Due to recent geopolitical events, Arabic has catapulted to the top of the list of important world languages. Even in countries where Arabic isn't the official language, people are scrambling to master this important and vital global language.

For people in North America and Europe, at first glance Arabic seems like a difficult language to master; after all, it isn't a Romance language and doesn't use the Latin alphabet. However, like any other language, Arabic is governed by a set of rules, and when you master these rules, you're able to speak Arabic like a native speaker!

Arabic For Dummies, 3rd Edition, is designed to identify and explain the rules that govern the Arabic language in the easiest and most interactive way possible. I organize each chapter in a straightforward and coherent manner and present the material in an interactive and engaging way.

About This Book

Unlike most books on the Arabic language, I have written *Arabic For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, in a way that gives you the most accurate and in-depth information available to help you develop and improve your conversational skills. The book is modular in nature, which means every chapter is organized in such a way that you don't have to read the whole book in order to understand the topic that's discussed. Feel free to jump to chapters and sections to suit your specific needs. Also, I explain every grammatical and linguistic point in plain English so that you can incorporate the concept immediately. I take great care to explain every concept clearly and succinctly.

To provide the best foundation and the widest usage for students of Arabic, *Arabic For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, focuses on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is the most widely used form of Arabic in the world. Arabic basically has three different types:

» **Koranic Arabic:** This is the Arabic used to write the Koran, the holy book for Muslims. This form of Arabic is very rigid and hasn't changed much since the Koran was written approximately 1,500 years ago. Koranic Arabic is widely used in religious circles for prayer, discussions of Islamic issues, and serious deliberations. Its usage is limited primarily to a strict religious context. It's the equivalent of Biblical English.

» **The regional dialects:** They're the most informal type of Arabic. They tend to fall into four geographical categories:

- North African dialect (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya)
- Egyptian dialect (Egypt)
- Gulf Arabic (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates)
- Levantine dialect (parts of Syria, Palestine, and Jordan)

Even though the words are pronounced differently and some of the everyday expressions differ dramatically from region to region, speakers from different regions can understand each other. The common denominator for the regional dialects is that they're all based on MSA.

» **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA):** This is the most widely used and understood form of Arabic in the world. MSA is the language that Arabic anchors use to present the news, and professionals use to discuss business and technical issues.

Throughout the book, each new Arabic word appears in Arabic script and **boldface**, followed by the transliteration system used by the Library of Congress, which is how you properly pronounce it (with the stressed syllables italicized), and its English equivalent in parentheses.

Because this is a language book, I include some sections to help you master the linguistic concepts with greater ease. Here's a description of the specialty sections you find in each chapter:

» **Talkin' the Talk dialogues:** Here's where you get to see Arabic in action. These common Arabic dialogues show you how to use important vocabulary words and terms you should be aware of.

- » **Words to Know blackboards:** An important part of mastering a new language is becoming familiar with important words and phrases. Key terms that I recommend you memorize are included in these sections, which present the transcription of the Arabic word in Arabic script, the transliteration (the pronunciation; stressed syllables are underlined), and the translation.
- » **Fun & Games activities:** The aim of *Arabic For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, is to help you master the Arabic language in an interactive and engaging way. With that in mind, each chapter ends with a Fun & Games section that lets you review the key concept covered in the chapter in a fun but effective way.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing *Arabic For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, I made the following assumptions about you:

- » You've had very little exposure (or none at all) to the Arabic language. Or maybe you've been exposed to Arabic but are interested in brushing up on your language skills.
- » You're interested in mastering Arabic for either personal or professional reasons.
- » You want to be able to speak a few words and phrases so that you can communicate basic information in Arabic.
- » You're not looking for a dry book on Arabic grammar; you want to discover Arabic in a fun and engaging manner.
- » You're looking for a practical course that will have you speaking basic Arabic in no time!

Icons Used in This Book

In order to help you get in and get out of this book easily and efficiently, I use icons (little pictures) that identify important pieces of information by category. The following icons appear in this book:



TIP

When you see this icon, make sure you read carefully. It points to information that will directly improve your Arabic language skills.



REMEMBER

I use this icon to bring to your attention information that you definitely want to keep in mind when studying and practicing Arabic.



WARNING

Discovering a new language can be a wonderful experience. However, there are always potential pitfalls to avoid, whether grammatical, linguistic, or cultural. This icon points out important notions about Arabic that may trip you up.



GRAMMATICALLY
SPEAKING

Grammar is the glue that binds a language together. Even though this isn't a grammar book, it does include important grammar lessons you need to be aware of. This icon is attached to major grammar points that will help you master the Arabic language.



CULTURAL
WISDOM

This icon points out nonverbal methods of communication common in Arabic-speaking countries and among Arabic speakers. I use this icon to fill the gap between language and culture so that you know the cultural contexts in which you can use newly discovered words and phrases.

Beyond the Book

This book is full of useful information, but you can find even more online! Check out this book's Cheat Sheet, which contains useful questions, common greetings and expressions, days of the week, and a guide to numbers all in a handy portable format. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for "Arabic For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

You can also hear all the Talkin' the Talk dialogues provided in the book to get a better handle on correct pronunciation. Just go to www.dummies.com/go/arabicfd to access the online audio tracks.

Where to Go from Here

This book is organized so that you can jump around from topic to topic. You don't have to read the whole thing. Want to know how to ask for directions in Arabic? Jump to Chapter 8. Need to exchange money in an Arabic country? Check out Chapter 15. Want to figure out how to greet friends and family? Check out Chapter 4. Peruse the table of contents or index, find a topic that interests you, and start reading.

1

Getting Started with Arabic

IN THIS PART . . .

Get the lowdown on the basics of Arabic.

Familiarize yourself with Arabic script and the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet.

Get an overview of Arabic grammatical and linguistic constructs and find out how nouns verbs, and adjectives interact with each other to create phrases and sentences.

Try out basic greetings and expressions.

Work on numbers, dates, and measurements.

Practice some useful Arabic at the office and around the house.

- » Recognizing what you may already know
- » Introducing the Arabic alphabet
- » Talking Arabic like the locals
- » Getting acquainted with everyday Arabic

Chapter 1

The Arabic You Already Know

Let me مرحبا (*mar.hah.ba*) (*welcome*) you to the wonderful world of Arabic! Arabic is the official language of 27 countries and is spoken by more than 420 million people across the globe. It's the language in which the Quran, the Holy Book in Islam, was revealed and written, and a large majority of the more than 1.3 billion Muslims across the world study Arabic in order to read the Quran and to fulfill their religious duties. By speaking Arabic, you get access to people and places from Morocco to Indonesia.

In this chapter, I ease you into Arabic by showing you some familiar English words that trace their roots to Arabic. You discover the Arabic alphabet and its beautiful letters, and I give you tips on how to pronounce those letters so that you can sound like a native speaker. Part of exploring a new language is discovering a new culture and a new way of looking at things, so in this first chapter of the third edition of *Arabic For Dummies*, you begin your discovery of Arabic and its unique characteristics, including the fact that it's written from right to left!

Taking Stock of What's Familiar

If English is your primary language, part of grasping a new لغة (*lu.ghah*) (*language*) is creating connections between the كلمات (*ka.li.māt*) (*words*) of the language, in

this case Arabic and English. You may be surprised to hear that quite a few English words trace their origins to Arabic. For example, did you know that “magazine,” “candy,” and “coffee” are actually Arabic words? Table 1-1 lists some familiar English words with Arabic origins.

TABLE 1-1

Arabic Origins of English Words

English	Arabic Origin	Arabic Meaning
admiral	أمير البحر (<i>a.mīr al-baḥr</i>)	ruler of the sea
alcohol	الكحل (<i>al.kuḥul</i>)	a mixture of powdered antimony
alcove	القبة (<i>al.qub.bah</i>)	a dome or arch
algebra	الجبر (<i>al.jabr</i>)	to reduce or consolidate
almanac	المناخ (<i>al.ma.nākh</i>)	a calendar
arsenal	دار السلاح (<i>dār as.si.lāḥ</i>)	house of weapons
azure	اللازورد (<i>al.lā.za.ward</i>)	lapis lazuli
candy	سكر القصب (<i>suk.kar al.qa.ṣab</i>)	cane sugar
coffee	قهوة (<i>qah.wah</i>)	coffee
cotton	قطن (<i>quṭn</i>)	cotton
elixir	إكسير (<i>ik.sīr</i>)	philosopher’s stone
gazelle	غزال (<i>gha.zāl</i>)	gazelle
hazard	زهر (<i>zahr</i>)	dice
magazine	المخزن (<i>al.makh.zan</i>)	a storehouse
saffron	زعفران (<i>za’.fa.rān</i>)	saffron
Sahara	الصحراء (<i>aṣ.ṣaḥ.rā’</i>)	Sahara (desert)
sherbet	شربات (<i>shar.bāt</i>)	dessert
sofa	صوفا (<i>ṣū.fā</i>)	a cushion
sugar	سكر (<i>suk.kar</i>)	sugar
zero	صفر (<i>ṣifr</i>)	zero

As you can see from the table, Arabic has had a major influence on the English language. Some English words such as “admiral” and “arsenal” have an indirect Arabic origin, whereas others, such as “coffee” and “cotton,” are exact matches. The influence runs the other way, too, especially when it comes to relatively contemporary terms. For example, the word تلفزيون (ti.li.fiz.yōn) (*television*) comes straight from the word “television.” As is often the case with languages, Arabic and English tend to influence each other, which is what makes studying them so much fun.

Discovering the Arabic Alphabet

Unlike English and other Romance languages, you write and read Arabic from right to left. Like English, Arabic has both vowels and consonants, but the main vowels in Arabic aren’t actual letters. Rather, Arabic vowels are symbols that you place on top of or below consonants to create certain sounds. As for consonants, Arabic has 28 different consonants, and each one is represented by a letter. In order to vocalize these letters, you place a vowel above or below the particular consonant. For example, when you put a فتحة (*fat.ḥah*), a vowel representing the “ah” sound, above the consonant representing the letter “b,” you get the sound “bah” as in “ball.” When you take the same consonant and use a كسرة (*kas.rah*), which represents the short “i” sound, you get the sound “bih” as in “big.”

To help you get a better grasp of the different letters in the alphabet, I explain vowels and consonants in the following sections.

All about vowels

Arabic has three main vowels. Luckily, they’re very simple to pronounce because they’re similar to English vowels. However, you need to realize that Arabic also has vowel derivatives that are as important as the main vowels. These vowel derivatives fall into three categories: *double vowels*, *long vowels*, and *diphthongs*. In this section, I walk you through all the different vowels, vowel derivatives, and vowel combinations.

Main vowels

The three main Arabic vowels are

- » فتحة (**fat.ḥah**): The first main vowel in Arabic is called a فتحة (*fat.ḥah*). A فتحة is the equivalent of the short “a” in “apple.” Occasionally, a فتحة also sounds like the short “e” in “bet” or “set.” Much like the other vowels, the way you pronounce a فتحة depends on what consonants come before or after it. In Arabic script, the فتحة is written as a small horizontal line above a consonant.

In English transcription, which I use in this book, it's simply represented by the letter "a," as in the words كلب (kalb) (*dog*) and ولد (wa.lad) (*boy*).

- » **ضمة (dam.mah):** The second main Arabic vowel is the ضمة (dam.mah). This vowel sounds like the "uh" in "foot" or "book." In Arabic script, it's written like a tiny backward "e" above a particular consonant. In English transcription, it's represented by the letter "u," as in فندق (fun.duq) (*hotel*) or سحب (su.ḥub) (*clouds*).
- » **كسرة (kas.rah):** The third main vowel in Arabic is the كسرة (kas.rah), which sounds like the long "e" in "feet" or "treat." This vowel is written the same way as a فتحة — as a small horizontal line — except that it goes underneath the consonant. In English transcription, it's written as an "i," as in بنت (bint) (*girl*) or إسلام (is.lām) (*Islam*).

Double vowels

One type of vowel derivative is the double vowel, which is known in Arabic as تنوين (tan.wīn). The process of تنوين is a fairly simple one; basically, you take a main vowel and place the same vowel right next to it, thus creating two vowels, or a double vowel. The sound that the double vowel makes depends on the main vowel that's doubled. Here are all possible combinations of double vowels:

- » **Double fat.hah:** تنوين with فتحة creates the "an" sound, as in أهلاً وسهلاً (ah.lan wa.sah.lan) (*Hi*).
- » **Double dam.mah:** تنوين with ضمة creates the "un" sound. For example, كرة (ku.ra.tun) (*ball*) contains a double ضمة.
- » **Double kas.rah:** تنوين with كسرة makes the "in" sound, as in صفحة (saf.ḥa.tin) (*page*).

Long vowels

Long vowels are derivatives that elongate the main vowels. Arabic is a very poetic and musical language, so a musical metaphor is appropriate. Think of the difference between long vowels and short (main) vowels in terms of a musical beat, and you should be able to differentiate between them much easier. If a main vowel lasts for one beat, then its long vowel equivalent lasts for two beats. Whereas you create double vowels by writing two main vowels next to each other, you create long vowels by adding a letter to one of the main vowels. Each main vowel has a corresponding consonant that elongates it. Here are a few examples to help you get your head around this long vowel process:

- » To create a long vowel form of a فتحة, you attach an ألف (a.lif) to the consonant that the فتحة is associated with. In English transcription, the long فتحة form is written as "ā," such as in كتاب (ki.tāb) (*book*) or باب (bāb) (*door*). The "ā" means that you hold the vowel sound for two beats as opposed to one.

- » The long vowel form of ضمة is obtained by attaching a واو (*wāw*) to the consonant with the ضمة. This addition elongates the vowel “uh” into a more pronounced “ū,” such as in نور (*nūr*) (*light*) or غول (*ghūl*) (*ghoul*). Make sure you hold the “ū” vowel for two beats and not one.
- » To create a long vowel form of a كسرة, you attach a ياء (*yā'*) to the consonant with the كسرة. Just as the ألف elongates فتح and the واو elongates the ضمة, the ياء elongates the كسرة. Some examples include the “ī” in words like كبير (*ka.bīr*) (*big*) and صغير (*ṣa.ghīr*) (*small*).

Table 1-2 shows the Arabic characters for the long vowels.

TABLE 1-2

Arabic Vowel Characters

Arabic Character	Character's Name	Explanation
<i>fat.ḥah</i>	ألف ('alif)	To create a long vowel form of a فتحة
<i>ḍam.mah</i>	واو (<i>wāw</i>)	To create a long vowel form of a ضمة
<i>kas.rah</i>	ياء (<i>yaa'</i>)	To create a long vowel form of a كسرة

Diphthongs

Diphthongs in Arabic are a special category of vowels because, in essence, they're monosyllabic sounds that begin with one vowel and “glide” into another vowel. A common example in English is the sound at the end of the word “toy.” Fortunately, Arabic has only two diphthong sounds used to distinguish between the ياء (*yā'*) and the واو (*wāw*) forms of long vowels. In a nutshell, diphthongs in Arabic are used to elongate a vowel, which helps differentiate between certain words.



REMEMBER

When you come across either of these two letters, one of the first questions to ask yourself is: “Is this a long vowel or a diphthong?” Making this determination is easy: When either the ياء or the واو is a diphthong, you see a سكون (*su.kūn*) above the consonant. A سكون is similar to the main vowels in that it's a little symbol (a small circle) that you place above the consonant. However, unlike the vowels, you don't vocalize the سكون — it's almost like a silent vowel. So when a واو or ياء has a سكون over it, you know that the sound is a diphthong. Here are some examples:

- » **واو diphthongs:** يوم (*yawm*) (*day*); نوم (*nawm*) (*sleep*); صوت (*ṣawt*) (*noise*)
- » **ياء diphthongs:** بيت (*bayt*) (*house*); عين (*'ayn*) (*eye*); ليل (*layl*) (*night*)

All about consonants

Arabic uses 28 different consonants, and each consonant is represented by a different letter. Because the Arabic alphabet is written in cursive, most of the letters connect with each other. For this reason, every single letter that represents a consonant actually can be written four different ways depending on its position in a word — whether it's in the initial, medial, or final positions, or whether it stands alone. In English transcription of the Arabic script, all letters are case-sensitive.

The good news: Most of the consonants in Arabic have English equivalents. However, a few Arabic consonants are quite foreign to nonnative speakers. Table 1-3 shows all 28 Arabic consonants, how they're written in Arabic, how they're transcribed in English, and how they sound. This table can help you pronounce the letters so that you sound like a native speaker.

TABLE 1-3 **Arabic Consonants**

Arabic Character	Letter Name	Pronunciation	Sounds Like	Example
ا (a)	a-lif	Sounds like the “a” in “apple”	أب (ab)	father
ب (b)	baʾ	Sounds like the “b” in “baby”	باب (bāb)	door
ت (t)	taʾ	Sounds like the “t” in “table”	تلميذ (til.mīdh)	student
ث (th)	thaʾ	Sounds like the “th” in “think”	ثلاثة (tha.ā.thah)	three
ج (j)	jīm	Sounds like the “j” in “measure”	جميل (ja.mīl)	pretty
ح (h)	ḥaʾ	No equivalent in English; imagine the sound you make when you want to blow on your reading glasses (the soft, raspy noise)	حار (ḥar)	hot
خ (kh)	khaʾ	Sounds a lot like “Bach” in German or “Baruch” in Hebrew	خوخ (khawkh)	peach
د (d)	dāl	Sounds like the “d” in “dog”	دار (dār)	house
ذ (dh)	dhāl	Sounds like the “th” in “those”	ذهب (dha.hab)	gold
ر (r)	rāʾ	Like the Spanish “r,” rolled fast	رجل (ra.jul)	man
ز (zaʾ)	zāy	Sounds like the “z” in “zebra”	زوجة (zaw.jah)	wife
س (s)	sīn	Sounds like the “s” in “snake”	سمك (sa.mak)	fish

Arabic Character	Letter Name	Pronunciation	Sounds Like	Example
ش (sh)	shin	Sounds like “sh” in “ship”	شمس (shams)	sun
ص (ṣ)	ṣād	A very deep “s” sound you can make if you open your mouth really wide and lower your jaw	صديق (ṣa.dīq)	friend
ض (ḍ)	ḍād	A very deep “d” sound; the exact sound as a dād except that you use a “D” instead of an “d”	ضباب (ḍa.bāb)	fog
ط (ṭ)	ṭā’	A deep “t” sound; start off by saying a regular “t” and then lower your mouth to round with your tongue on your teeth	طبيب (ṭa.bīb)	doctor
ظ (ẓ)	ẓā’	Take the “th” as in “those” and draw it to the back of your throat	ظهر (ẓahr)	back
ع (‘)	‘āyn	No equivalent; breathe heavily and consistently through your esophagus and then intermittently choke off the airflow to create staccato sound	عراق (‘i.rāq)	Iraq
غ (gh)	ghāyn	Sounds like the French “r” in “rendezvous”	غريب (gha.rīb)	strange
ل (l)	Lām	Sounds like the “L” in “Larry”	لبنان (lub-nān)	Lebanon
ق (q)	qāf	Similar to “k,” but produced farther at the back of the throat; you should feel airflow being constricted	قهوة (qah.wah)	coffee
ك (k)	kāf	Sounds like the “k” in “keeper”	كتب (ku.tub)	books
ف (f)	fā’	Sounds like the “f” in “father”	فهمْتُ (fa-ham-tu)	understood
م (m)	mīm	Sounds like the “m” in “Mary”	مخزن (makh.zan)	storehouse
ن (n)	nūn	Sounds like the “n” in “no”	نظيف (na.zīf)	clean
ه (h)	hā’	Create by exhaling deeply; think of yourself as a marathoner who just finished a race and is breathing heavily	هو (hu.wa)	he
و (w)	wāw	Sounds like the “w” in “winner”	وزير (wa.zīr)	minister
ي (y)	yā’	Sounds like the “y” in “yes”	يمين (ya.mīn)	right

To sound as fluent as possible, memorize as many of the letters as you can and try to associate each letter with the Arabic words in which it appears. The trick to getting the pronunciation of some of these more exotic Arabic sounds is repetition, repetition, and even more repetition! That old saying, “Practice makes perfect” certainly applies to Arabic.

Speaking Arabic like a Native

In this section, I share a couple of tricks to help you focus on pronunciation of difficult letters that, if you can master, are sure to make you sound like a native speaker. Here are some difficult letters and some related words you should familiarize yourself with:

- » أحمر (*aḥ.mar*) (*red*); حسن (*ḥa.san*) (*a man's name*); حوار (*ḥi.wār*) (*conversation*); حزين (*ḥa.zīn*) (*sad*)
- » عجيب (*'a.ġīb*) (*amazing*); عزيمة (*'a.zī.mah*) (*determination*); عريض (*'a.rīḍ*) (*wide*)
- » قف (*qif*) (*stop*); قرد (*qird*) (*monkey*); قوس (*qaws*) (*bow*)
- » غضبان (*ghaḍ.bān*) (*angry*); غرفة (*ghur.fah*) (*room*); غداً (*gha.dan*) (*tomorrow*)



TIP

The difference between native Arabic speakers and nonnatives is enunciation. If you can enunciate your letters clearly — particularly the more difficult ones — you’ll sound like you’re fluent. Practice these words over and over until you feel comfortable repeating them really quickly and very distinctly. With practice, you can sound more like a native and less like someone who’s just trying to pick up the language. Plus, memorizing these words not only helps with your pronunciation but also helps build your vocabulary.

- » Understanding abjad
- » Deciphering the transliteration
- » Getting more comfortable with the Arabic script

Chapter 2

Taking a Closer Look at the Arabic Alphabet

As you start studying Arabic and increasing your knowledge of vocabulary words, the obvious difference between Arabic and English is noticeable. It's the script. Unlike English and many of the western European languages that use Romanized letters (think a, b, c, d, and so on), Arabic uses script. To someone who doesn't have any understanding of the language, Arabic may look like a secret code of squiggles, lines, and dots.

Because you're reading this book and are making an effort to improve your Arabic-speaking skills, you know that they're actually individual letters that make the words and sentences of the poetic Arabic language.

Chapter 1 introduces the Arabic alphabet to you, what each of the 28 letters looks like, and how they correspond to the English letters. This chapter examines the alphabet a tad closer. I explain what abjad is, which is the specific writing system used in this book. I explain the Library of Congress transliteration system, so you can figure out how to pronounce the Arabic script. I also delve into the script more closely and provide you several Arabic words as examples that start with the different Arabic letters. When you finish this chapter, you should have a stronger knowledge of the Arabic alphabet and the script.

Getting a Grasp on أبجد

The term أبجد (*ab.jad*) refers to a specific writing system whereby the letters are used exclusively to denote the consonants while the vowels are excluded from the writing system entirely. Abjad is the writing system used in this book, and it's also the writing system used throughout the Arabic world. For instance, most newspapers you pick up in the Middle East use the abjad writing system, whereby the consonants are included but not the vowels. Even if you're watching Arabic TV, the Arabic subtitles are in abjad.

Does abjad help Arabic speakers or does it offer more difficulty? The fact of the matter is abjad is the most common writing system used in Arabic. There's unfortunately no way around this conventional system, so it's up to you, a student of Arabic, to fully dedicate yourself to become a good user of abjad.

Figuring Out the Transcription

This book uses the Library of Congress transcription system, which is a widely used and approved transcription and transliteration system. Officially known as the *ALA-LC Romanization Scheme*, this system was jointly developed and approved by the American Library Association (ALA) and the Library of Congress (LC).

THE ORIGINS OF ABJAD

The term *abjad* actually gets its origin from the pronunciation of the first letters in the Arabic alphabet: ا, ب, ج, د. The Phoenicians were the first to use an abjad writing system prominently, and it has been used in Semitic languages ever since its first use around 1000 B.C. In addition to Arabic, abjad's ancestral use was applied in such languages as Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew. This writing form is rich with history, especially considering that it gets its origins from the Phoenicians, who sought to simplify an earlier writing system that was common at the time: Egyptian hieroglyphs. When you're looking at the Arabic script and abjad, don't forget that you're looking at a complex and elegant writing system that dates back to man's first recorded attempt at creating a uniform writing system that everyone can access.

Both the Library of Congress and the American Library Association have a vested interest in having an accurate and widely recognized transcription system for their users. The Library of Congress houses many foreign language texts that need to be archived, shelved, circulated, and used as references by thousands if not millions of users. The transcription essentially allows English speakers access to millions of texts without actually learning the original language script.

In the transliteration in this book, you see letters in the transliteration text that are italicized. The italicized portion of the text should be emphasized during pronunciation; in other words, you have to stress this syllable when speaking the word.

Another common symbol that you see is a small horizontal line over certain vowels, such as the vowel *a* or the vowel *i*. In this case, you have to extend the pronunciation of the vowel so that it's longer than the other vowels. Here's an example of a word where you would extend the pronunciation: *mī.lād* (*birth*). In this case, you have to extend both the vowel *i* and the vowel *a*.

Finally, whenever you come across an apostrophe, that means you have to make the 'ayn sound. The transliteration system is straightforward, and you can pick it up very quickly with a little practice.

The Library of Congress system uses Arabic script for the following languages: Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi Persian, Urdu, and even Pashto. As such, the script that I use in this book can also be applied to several different languages as well. In addition to Arabic, the Library of Congress also uses Romanization for Cyrillic languages such as Russian and Serbian, Hebrew, and even Classical Greek languages and dialects.

Because this system is so widespread and covers a wide range of languages, you can rest assured that you're getting exposed to the most widely accepted transliteration scheme out there. In mastering this system, you can easily apply it to other languages as well.

Getting Better Acquainted with the Script

You may be surprised to find out that the Arabic script isn't used exclusively for the Arabic language. Rather, the Arabic script is used to depict other important world languages, such as Urdu and Farsi.

Urdu is the official language of Pakistan and is also widely used in parts of India. In total, there are approximately 100 million Urdu speakers worldwide. Farsi, on the other hand, is the official language of Iran, but it's also widely spoken in Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and even Tajikistan — more than 110 million people

speak Farsi worldwide. So when you unlock the Arabic script, you get access to other key world languages.

Many folks are daunted by the Arabic script because the letters seem unfamiliar. A common phrase I often hear from students is that the script isn't relatable to the traditional Roman script used in English and other Romance languages. However, Arabic and Roman scripts share a common history. In many parts of Spain, the Arabic script was used alongside Roman script for centuries. In fact, Arabic script is the second most widely used in the world right after Latin.



Another key difference is that Arabic is written from right to left, which is challenging at first. However, with a little patience and practice you can get used to it very quickly and won't even realize that you're reading from right to left! In Chapter 1, I include a word that is associated with each consonant in Arabic. In this section, I expand on that discussion so you can familiarize yourself with the script. Table 2-1 can help you to develop a faster understanding of the script, the words, and their usage in a sentence.

TABLE 2-1

Examples of Arabic Script in Action

Arabic Letter English Equivalent	Arabic Script	Transliteration	English
ا a			
	أسرة	<i>us.rah</i>	family
	أسنان	<i>as.nān</i>	teeth
	أذنين	<i>u.dhu.nayn</i>	two ears
	أكل	<i>a.ka.la</i>	he ate
	أين	<i>ay.na</i>	where
ب b			
	باب	<i>bāb</i>	door
	بعد	<i>ba'd</i>	after
	بنت	<i>bint</i>	girl
	بيت	<i>bayt</i>	house
	بطاطا	<i>ba.ṭā.ṭā</i>	potato