

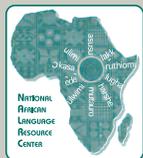


ARABIC

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Arabic is a Semitic language spoken and understood in various forms by millions of people throughout the Middle East and beyond. Examining any etymological dictionary will reveal that English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Russian, Persian, Aryan, Sanskrit, Hindi, Chinese, and Latin have borrowed many words from Arabic. Words such as magazine, cat, cover, Alcohol, Algebra, hallucinate, cable, and as many as 1000 other English words passed from Arabic to European languages. Modern Arabic varies a good deal from country to country, differing as much as Spanish and Portuguese at times. However, the classical written Arabic has changed little over the centuries. Classical Arabic, the language of the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, is used only in writing and rarely in speech. A modern standardized Arabic is used for newspapers, television and education, with local variations, for conversation.

One interesting aspect of Arabic culture that is directly connected to Arabic language is Arabic Calligraphy. The Arabic alphabet is derived from the Aramaic Nabataean alphabet. It is a script of 28 letters. The letters are derived from 17 distinct forms, distinguished from one another by a dot or dots placed above or below the letter. Short vowels are indicated by diagonal strokes written above or below the letters. The early Arabs felt an immense appreciation for the beauty of the spoken word and later for the written word. Among the most famous Arabic scripts is the Kufi script (the script of Kufa, a city in Iraq). Arab artists decorate the walls of the mosques and homes with verses from the Qur'an written in the Kufi script which is a distinguishing characteristic of Islamic architecture.



NATIONAL AFRICAN
LANGUAGE RESOURCE
CENTER (NALRC)

701 Eigenmann Hall, 1900 East 10th Street
Bloomington, IN 47406 USA
Telephone: (812) 856-4199, Fax: 8128564189
Email: nalrc@indiana.edu
Website: <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>

STUDYING ARABIC IN THE U.S.

Because Arabic is the medium of a great civilization and the language of a large number of speakers in the US and outside, more and more American universities offer Arabic as one of their major foreign languages through their African language programs, Near-/Middle-Eastern studies, or other instructional units. Moreover, Arabic has become an important asset for doing advanced research in various disciplines such as political science, religious studies, and economics. The following is a list of some universities in the United States that currently offer Arabic.

California State University, Los Angeles, CA
Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
City University of NY—Queens College, Flushing, NY
Duke University, Durham, NC
Indiana University in Bloomington
Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN
Johns Hopkins University/SAIS, Washington, D.C.
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL
Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Rutgers University, Piscatawa, NJ
Saint Cloud State University, Saint Cloud, MN
Stanford University, Stanford, CA
University of California at Berkeley
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
University of Kansas, Lawrence, KN
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI

For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>.



DOMES OF THE ROCK AT RAMADAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHY STUDY ARABIC?

Arabic is a Semitic language spoken in twenty-two Middle-Eastern countries with a population of about 250 million extending from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean. It is also used in many non-Arab Muslim countries with a population of about a billion. Arabic is the language of Islam, a rich literary tradition, and a civilization that had a great impact on the world. Because it is one of the fastest growing languages, with an alphabet that comes second in use only to the Roman alphabet, the United Nations adopted Arabic as one of its six official languages in 1974. Arabic has become indispensable for anyone interested in Islamic studies, comparative theology, Middle-Eastern studies, international law, political sciences, or international business.

The Arab world has become the focus of international attention because of the production of oil and large-scale economic investment and development. Also, Arabic has recently received an international status, as it is the language of world-class modern literature such as the works of the Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, an Egyptian novelist; Jubran Khalil Jubran, a Lebanese poet; and Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet. Events in the Middle East affect our everyday lives as well as world policies and economies; hence the importance of studying of Arabic, which provides access to a better understanding of the cultural, ideological, and political forces of that vital region of the world.

The Middle East is the cradle of civilization and the birthplace of the world's three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is also home to some of the world's greatest archaeological and religious sites, and it is rich with diverse cultures. Ancient archaeology and monuments such as the pyramids, sphinx and other sites in Egypt and other Arab countries add to the significance of Arabic studies. Arabic is the gateway to an interesting and self-rewarding scholarly or business career.

WHO SPEAKS ARABIC?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY



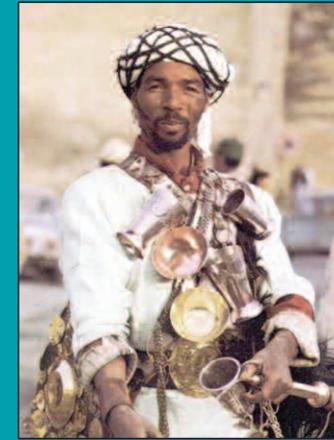
Newly wedded Arab couple.

In Pre-Islamic times Arabic was spoken mainly in the Arabian Peninsula, where it was the medium of a great tradition of poetry, and gradually developed a form of speech that was used only for epic poetry and elevated discourse.

Although writing was

known in Arabia, poetry was preserved and transmitted only orally until the 4th century where Arabic was written in the Aramaic script. Arabic gained a special importance with the advent of Islam, and as Islam spread, so did Arabic. Today, millions of people in the Arab countries in North Africa and South West Asia speak Arabic as a mother tongue: Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Yemen and others. Even more people speak Arabic as a second language as in Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, among others.

Every Arab country has its unique regional dialects that differ from Standard Arabic in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. However, all speakers of Arabic use Modern Standard Arabic for purposes of written communication, and it can be used for spoken communication, as it is understood in all Arabic speaking regions. Some regional dialects such as Egyptian Arabic have gained a special status, as they have become widely understood outside their geographic domains.



A Moroccan dressed for a special occasion.



Yemeni women in traditional dress.



Students learning Arabic.