

Introduction to Sudanese Arabic

Course Introduction

With almost thirty major dialects, Arabic is a language with immense variation. While Arabic speakers from Morocco to Iraq use the same written language, the spoken dialects that differ from country to country can be so dissimilar that oftentimes their speakers cannot understand each other. Sudan has its own unique dialect and has developed a considerable amount of variation in the types of Arabic spoken within the country. This is in part because of the influence of local indigenous languages, such as Nubian in the north, and can also be attributed to the sometimes vast distances between settlements. As in other parts of the Arabic speaking world though, Arabic in Sudan is characterized by both diversity and unity. Because of trade between regions, migrations of nomadic tribes and other groups, and modern advents of media, varieties of Arabic within Sudan have retained certain essential features.

As many as 134 languages are spoken in Sudan, but with a project of Arabization in progress, many are dying. Arabic is the country's official language and as the languages of many ethnic groups are being replaced with Arabic, the country's portion of native Arabic speakers is on the rise. It is spoken as a first language by the majority of people living in the northern half of the country and it is a second or third language to many others. Several variants of Arabic are spoken in Sudan, but the dominant one is spoken by people in Khartoum, known as Omdurman Arabic by many Sudanese. The other major variant that is spoken in the south of the country is called Juba Arabic. Deriving its name from the southern capital Juba, it is a lingua franca in southern Sudan spoken mainly in the Equatoria region. Despite its name, Juba Arabic is not actually a dialect of Arabic, but a pidgin language with simplified grammar and a considerable amount of vocabulary from local languages. It developed in the 19th century, among descendants of Sudanese soldiers, many of who were forcibly recruited from southern Sudan. After the dialect spoken in Khartoum and Juba Arabic, other major variations include Western Sudanese Arabic, which is close to the dialect spoken in Chad, North Kordofan Arabic, Ja'ali, and Shukri Arabic.

About this course

This course deals mainly with the dialect spoken in the capital, as it is the mostly widely used and understood throughout Sudan. It is designed to be a primer in the Sudanese dialect of Arabic for students who have an intermediate to high level of proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This is not an elementary level course. This course is in no way comprehensive, but it will provide students with an opportunity to begin familiarizing themselves with the sounds, vocabulary, and grammar of Sudanese Arabic (SA).

This course is organized into topical lessons. The lessons are not arranged in order of difficulty—they are constructed around natural conversations with five different Sudanese people. Students should proceed through the text in the videos in the order they appear, as vocabulary and grammatical constructs that are introduced in one lesson will not be raised again in following lessons. By proceeding through the course as it is arranged, students will build upon the grammar and vocabulary that they

learn in each lesson, as many of the words that are particular to Sudanese dialect appear quite frequently. Students will find that the grammar lessons are concentrated in the beginning of this course. This is to provide students with a basic grammatical foundation they can use to comprehend the conversations throughout the course.

Before watching the videos, students should study and memorize the vocabulary at the beginning of each lesson. Then, they should view the video without reading the text as many times as needed to comprehend at least the general themes and topics of discussion. Then, students should watch the videos while reading the text, aiming for full comprehension. Note that reading the text without the video may be confusing and difficult to understand. Since the text is simply a transcription of the video, it isn't always grammatically correct. As in any language, the speakers make incomplete sentences, change their minds mid-sentence, and stutter. Watching the videos while reading along will clarify the text, as the viewer will pick up the inflections, pauses, and tone of the speaker.

This course has adapted many of the descriptions of Sudanese grammar raised by Elizabeth M. Bergman in Spoken Sudanese Arabic: Grammar, Dialogues, and Glossary. Her work is a seminal tool for the Arabic student wishing to learn this dialect.

The resources for students of Sudanese Arabic are limited. The following is a list of some resources for those wishing to go beyond this simple course.

Bergman, Elizabeth M. Spoken Sudanese Arabic: Grammar, Dialogues, and Glossary. Springfield: Dunwoody, 2002. Kayye, Alan S. Chadian and Sudanese Arabic in the Light of Comparative Arabic Dialectology. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.

Persson, Andrew and Janet. Sudanese Colloquial Arabic for Beginners. Horsleys Green, England: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1980.

Smith, Ian and Morris T. Ama. Juba Arabic English Dictionary: Kamuus ta Arabi Juba wa Ingliizi. Uganda: Fountain, 2005.

Pronunciation

Some of the letters in Sudanese Arabic (SA) are pronounced differently than they are in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The following is an outline of these differences.

The Arabic letter ج is not pronounced like the English letter “j” as it is in MSA. In SA, ج is a much softer sound, pronounced further back in the mouth with the back of the tongue touching the area behind the roof of the mouth.

The letter ق is most commonly pronounced like the English letter “g,” but is sometimes pronounced like the Arabic letter غ and less commonly like the Arabic letter ك or the English “k.” For example, the MSA word *qadara* (قَدَرَ) becomes *gidir* in SA, while *qur'an* (قُرْآن) becomes *ghur'an* and *waqt* (وَقْتُ) becomes *wakit*.

The letter **ظ** is pronounced like an emphatic English “z,” with the root of the tongue drawn back towards the position for a “9”. For example, the MSA word *nīẓaam* (نظام) becomes *nīzaam*.

The letter **ث** is often pronounced just as it is in MSA, but depending on the placement in a word, it can also be pronounced like an English “t” or “s.” For example, the MSA word *thaabit* (ثابت) is pronounced exactly the same way in SA, while the MSA word *thalaatha* (ثلاثة) is pronounced *talaata* in SA. The MSA word *thowra* (ثورة) is pronounced *sawra* in SA.

The letter **ذ** is often pronounced like the English letter “d” in SA. For example, the MSA word *dhaaba* (ذاب) is pronounced *daab* in SA. In other cases it is pronounced like the English “z.” The MSA word *dhikrayyaat* (ذكريات) becomes *zikraayaat* in SA.

Grammar and Vocabulary

The main grammar point will be outlined in the lessons, but following are a couple of points and words to start with.

The particle *an* -- أن

Unlike in MSA, the particle **أن** is not used in SA. MSA requires that **أن** be used in between verbs, but in SA, like other Arabic dialects, no particle is needed. So the MSA sentence

“أفضّل أمشي بهذا الطريق” “I prefer to go this way,” would be “أفضل أمشي بهذا الطريق”.

Pronouns

The following chart lists the pronouns used in MSA.

You (masculine singular)	إنت or إبت
You (feminine singular)	إنتي or إتي
You (masculine plural)	إنتو or إتو
You (feminine plural)	إنتن or إتن
He	هو
She	هي
They (masculine, 3 or more)	همن or هن
They (feminine, 3 or more)	هن
I	أنا
We	نحننا

Interrogatives

The following chart lists the interrogatives use in MSA

What?	شَنو؟
How many? How much?	كَم؟
How?	كَيْف؟
Why?	لِيَه؟
When?	بَتَيْن؟ or مَتَيْن؟
Who?	مَنو؟ or مَن؟
Where?	وَيْن؟
Which?	يَاتَكْن or يَاتو, يَاتَا + suffixed pronoun, for example: