Basic Arabic Grammar

PART A

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Introduction

This is the first part of a series of four courses (*Basic Arabic Grammar: Parts A - D*). By the end of the fourth course students should be able to recognise almost all of the grammatical constructions in any Arabic text, and understand the text with the use of an appropriate dictionary.

This first part focuses on correctly forming basic nominal and verbal sentences.

There are ten video lessons which accompany this textbook. Students will also need the following texts to derive the maximum benefit from this course:

- Basic Arabic Grammar: Part A - Answer Key
- Vocabulary Tickets Pack

This grammar course assumes an understanding of the Arabic alphabet and vowel system, and the basic rules for reading and writing Arabic, as covered in the course *Reading and Writing the Arabic Script* (TAS001A).

It is suggested that students work through the ten chapters in this course in the following manner:

1. Read through each chapter;
2. Watch the video lesson for the chapter;
3. Re-read the chapter - you should now have a thorough understanding of the main grammar points covered;
4. Memorise the vocabulary for the chapter using the Vocabulary Tickets Pack;
5. Attempt all of the translation exercises in writing, check your answers in the Answer Key, and make sure you've understood any mistakes that you made;
6. As you work through the textbook, periodically review the translation exercises from prior chapters until you're able to complete them orally, without hesitation.

Before beginning this grammar course, students should read through the course *Introduction to Learning Arabic* (TAS003A), which explains how the vocabulary lists are organised, and gives a vocabulary memorization technique.
1 Definite and Indefinite Nouns, and the Nominal Sentence

A The Noun in Arabic

Arabic nouns are either indefinite or definite.

Indefinite nouns take a tanwīn on their final letter, and are generally translated into English using the word 'a':

- a boy: ﻭَلَدٌ
- a book: ﻏَبَّ
- a man: ﺮَﺟْلٌ

To make these nouns definite, we remove the tanwīn and fix the word ﺍَﻟْ to the beginning of the word. This is generally translated using the word 'the':

- the boy: ﻭَلْدٌ
- the book: ﻏَبْ
- the man: ﺮَﺟْلٌ

Unlike in English, adjectives in Arabic are also either definite or indefinite, just like the nouns. We'll come back to this point in the next chapter.

B The Nominal Sentence

The most basic sentence in Arabic is called the nominal sentence. This is of the form 'X is/are Y', such as 'The boy is tall', or 'The books are big.'

X is usually a definite noun, and is known as the subject. Y is usually an indefinite noun or an indefinite adjective, and is called the predicate.

This is illustrated below. Note that in Arabic we don't have a word for 'is/are' in the nominal sentence.
Consider the following nominal sentences:

- The door is big
- The man is a teacher

C The Singular Detached Pronouns

We can replace the subject of a nominal sentence with a pronoun. For example, rather than saying 'The man is tall', we might want to say, 'He is tall'. The Arabic pronouns we use for this replacement are called the detached pronouns.

Detached pronouns are fully covered in Chapter 8; only the singular forms are given here. Note there are different words for 'you' in Arabic for addressing a male and a female person. We'll differentiate in English by using $SRm$ (singular masculine) and $SRf$ (singular feminine) in subscript.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Arabic Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I         | أنا  
| you$_{SRm}$ | أنتَ |
| you$_{SRf}$ | أنتِ |
| he/it$^2$  | هوَ |
| she/it     | هيَ |

---

1 The 1 of أنا is silent, so it is pronounced as if it were: أن
2 Note that there is no separate pronoun for 'it'. Instead, we just use هو or هي depending on whether the subject being referred to is masculine or feminine respectively (see Chapter 3).
Consider the following sentences:

- You are tall
- He is short
- I am young

**D Using 'And' in the Nominal Sentence**

The word for 'and' in Arabic is و. Its use in the nominal sentence is very intuitive. Consider the following nominal sentences, each of which has more than one predicate (note that we write the و together with the following word, without a space between them):

- The door is big and beautiful
- The man is a teacher and a student
- The street is long and wide

'And' can also be used to link two nominal sentences together:

- The sea is big and the river is small
- The man is a teacher and the boy is a student
- The chair is old and the door is new
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>رجل</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boy, son</td>
<td>أَوْلَادٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>أَسْتَاَدٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student</td>
<td>طَالِبٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>river</td>
<td>نَهْرٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sea</td>
<td>بَحْرٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book</td>
<td>كِتَابٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>street</td>
<td>شَارِعٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chair</td>
<td>كَرِسٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>door; chapter</td>
<td>بَابٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Nile</td>
<td>النَّيلٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big, great</td>
<td>كَبِيرٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small, young</td>
<td>صَغِيرٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old, ancient</td>
<td>قَدَّامٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new</td>
<td>جَدَدٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long, tall</td>
<td>طَوْلٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short</td>
<td>قَصِيرٌ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beautiful, handsome</td>
<td>جَمَالٌ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 A single Arabic word may have a number of plurals. This is true of a few English words too (e.g. the plurals of *antenna* are *antennas* and *antennae*, the plurals of *fungus* are *fungi* and *funguses*), but is much more common in Arabic.

4 Notice that unlike most of the other words here, شوارع doesn't have a tanwin ending. Such words are called diptotes, and will be covered in *Basic Arabic Grammar: Part B*. For now, treat such words like any other, except that they must never have a tanwin ending. You will also encounter other odd-looking plurals in the vocabulary lists (e.g. أراضي in Chapter 3 and فْرُوج in Chapter 10); these words should of course be learnt, but will be dealt with in *Basic Arabic Grammar: Part B*.

5 Many Arabic adjectives have plurals. This is needed for agreement between nouns and adjectives (see Chapter 7).
Translation Exercises

Exercise 1A

1. رجل وولد.
   أَلْسَنَّاءُ وَالْطَّالِبُ.

2. أَلْسَنَّاءُ جَدِيدٌ.
   أَنَا طَوِيلٌ.

3. أَنَّكُلُ قَديمٌ.
   أَنَّكُلُ نَهْرٌ.

4. أَنَّكُلُ نَهْرٌ.
   أَلْبَحْرٌ كَبِيرٌ.

5. أَلْبَابُ قَديمٌ وَمَكْسُورٌ.
   أَنَّكُلُبُ صَغَيرٌ.

6. أَلْبَابُ صَغَيرٌ. هُوَ فَصِيرٌ.
   أَلْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَواسِعٌ وَجَميِّلٌ.

7. أَلْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَواسِعٌ وَجَميِّلٌ.
   أَنَّكُلُ نَهْرٌ وَأَنَا وَلْدٌ.

8. أَلْبَابُ قَديمٌ وَمَكْسُورٌ.
   أَنَّكُلُبُ صَغَيرٌ.

9. أَلْبَابُ قَديمٌ وَجَميِّلٌ.
   أَلْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَواسِعٌ وَجَميِّلٌ.

10. أَلْبَابُ كَبِيرٌ وَواسِعٌ وَجَميِّلٌ.

Exercise 1B

1. The river and the sea.
3. The street is long.
4. He is a boy.
5. The Nile is ancient.
6. I am a student and you_{SRm} are a teacher.
7. The door is tall.
8. The sea is small and beautiful.
9. The door is beautiful. It is big.
10. The boy is young and short.
11. The man is big and the boy is tall.
12. You_{SRm} are tall and he is short.
13. The chair is big, old and broken.\textsuperscript{6}
14. The teacher is tall and the student is short.
15. The book is small and new, and the chapter is short and beautiful.

\textsuperscript{6} This should be translated as if it were: 'The chair is big \textbf{and} old \textbf{and} broken.' As a general rule, in Arabic we use \textendash\ to separate items in a list like the three predicates in this example, where in English we would use commas.
2 Adjectives and Definiteness Agreement

A Adjectival Agreement

There are two things we must remember about adjectives in Arabic:

Firstly, they come after the nouns that they describe, unlike in English, where they occur before the nouns. So, whereas in English we would say 'a narrow sword', in Arabic we say 'a sword narrow': 

\[ قٌ1 .ǐÝبَيْسَفُ ضَيِّقٌ1 \]

Secondly, the adjective must agree with the noun it describes in four ways:

1. **Definiteness**
   
   If the noun is definite, its adjective must also be definite; if the noun is indefinite, its adjective must also be indefinite.

2. **Gender**
   
   [See Chapter 3]

3. **Case**
   
   [See Chapter 4]

4. **Number**
   
   [See Chapters 6 and 7]

This chapter will focus on definiteness agreement. Consider the following phrases, in which the adjectives agree with their nouns in being definite or indefinite:

- a narrow sword
- the narrow sword
- a clean cup
- the clean cup
- a narrow, ugly, dirty house
the narrow, ugly, dirty house

Note that when there is a series of adjectives, as in the last two examples, each one must agree with its noun in the four ways described above.

B Adjectives in the Nominal Sentence

We can now make our nominal sentences more sophisticated, by giving the subject and/or the predicate their own adjectives. This is illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Nominal Sentence (with adj)</th>
<th>PREDICATE + ADJ.</th>
<th>is/are</th>
<th>SUBJECT + ADJ.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Example</td>
<td>a good doctor</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>The tall man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Example</td>
<td>طبيب حسن</td>
<td></td>
<td>الرجل الطويل</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider the following sentences:

The narrow house is clean
The good teacher is short
The ugly garden is hot and dirty

C Forming Questions

By putting the particle هل or the particle أ in front of a statement, we turn that statement into a question (note that like the و , we write the أ together with the following word, with no space between them):

YOU are tall
Are you tall?
He is short
Is he short?
The narrow house is clean
Is the narrow house clean?
The good teacher is short
Is the good teacher short?

In response to such questions, the word for 'yes' is نَاعَمْ، and the word for 'no' is لا.

Questions are fully covered in Chapter 19.

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7 When we put the particle هل in front of a word which begins with a connecting hamzah, such as ال, we encounter the double-sukūn problem: the ل of هل and the ل of ال both have a sukūn, and they are consecutive letters (remember, we're ignoring the connecting hamzah). To make the word pronounceable, we have to give the first ل a kasrah, which turns it into هل. This is the default way to avoid double-sukūns: change the first sukūn to a kasrah.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>garden</td>
<td>PL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| stone   | PL            | حجر    | بسّات
| house   | PL            | بيت    | نِثْرَأ | بِتّأ
| wall     | PL            | حائط   | حبّطَأ |
| pen      | PL            | قلم     | أفلام |
| cup      | PL            | نِحْنَأ | نِجَانَأ | فِنَحَجَنَأ |
| plate    | PL            | صحَن   | نَاظف
| lesson   | PL            | درُس   | شروْس |
| sword    | PL            | سيف    | سيُوف |
| clean    | PL            | نظيف   | نظف
| dirty    |               | ضَيِّقٌ1 .ǐÝBy putting the particle هَلْ1  or the particle أَ1  in front of a statement, we turn that statement into a question )note that like the وَ1 , we write the أَ1 togeth |
| good, beautiful | PL | حسن | حِسْنَأ |
| bad, wicked |               | سيِ | سيِ |
| ugly     | PL            | قبيح   | قباح |
| hard, strong, powerful [thing]; stern [person] | PL | شديد | شيدَأ |
| distant  | PL            | بعيد   | بعَدْأ |
| present  | PL            | حاضر   | حضِور
| narrow   |               | ضيق    | ضيِق |
| hot      |               | خار    | حار |
| dead     | PL            | ميت    | أمُوْاتٌ |
Translation Exercises

Exercise 2A

1. الدروس القصير.
2. هل البأساء حاضر؟ أنا حاضر وهو حاضر.
3. العلم القديم.
4. صحن صغير.
5. أَلَبْستَانِ النَّظِيفُ بَعْدَه.
6. هل الفنْجَانُ الحَارُ مَكْسُور؟ نعم، هو مَكْسُور.
7. آَلْبَيْتُ الفَقَيْحُ ضَيِّّق.
8. أنَّبَلُ يَنْهُرْ وَاسِعًّا. أَهُوَ طَوْيِلَ، هُوَ طَوْيِل.
9. أَلَتْ وَلَدُ حَسَنٌ؟ نعم، أنا وَلَدُ حَسَن.
10. الأَسْتَنْازُ رَجَلُ مِيَت.
11. السَّيْفُ أَنْحَدِرُ الطَّوْيِلُ وَسَيِّه، أَهُوَ مَكْسُورٌ؟
12. الحَجَرُ الكِبْرِيُّ السَّيِّدُ جَميِلٌ.
13. هل الطَّالِبُ وَلَدُ سَيِّئُ الفَقَيْح، لا، هُوَ حَسَن.
14. الرَّجُلُ أَسْتَنادُ جَميِلُ طَوْيِل.
15. الحَائِطُ السَّيِّدُ القَدِيمُ ضَيِّقٌ وَقَصِيرٌ.

Exercise 2B

1. A good lesson.
2. The long wall.
3. A broken pen.
4. The hot stone.
5. Is the new chair dirty? No, it is clean.
6. The strong door is narrow.
7. The big garden is far.
8. The teacher is a man. He is a small man.
9. Is the Nile a sea? No, it is a big river.
10. The beautiful student is dead.
11. The old house is ugly and the short street is bad.
12. The big wide cup is clean and new.
13. The ugly old book is long and bad.
14. The beautiful, distant sea is hot and powerful.
15. The good, small sword is dirty and broken.
For the complete textbook, please visit

www.arabic-studio.com