

Intermediate Arabic II

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Course Objectives

This is an Arabic course with a twist. In other words, it is a language course with a cultural approach. It aims at developing the learners' language skills through literary appreciation of original texts in Arabic that lead to more cultural exposure and, eventually, to a more authentic language experience.

The course depends on two premises. First, cultural assimilation goes hand in hand with language acquisition. Second, learners' creative output in the language they are learning and their interaction with creative writing by native speakers of that language solidify acquired language skills.

The course, thus, has two objectives. On the one hand, it builds on the level of language proficiency the learners have already achieved. On the other hand, it takes learners on a sidetrack that challenges them to *experience* the language first hand rather than learn it as much as possible - bearing in mind that they are not learning Arabic in an Arab country. Arabic literary texts of adequate but challenging level, in that sense, are a close substitute for immediate exposure to the culture.

Teaching/Learning Methodology

The class is divided around a number of Arab writers. Each writer would be covered as such:

- 1) Background information about the writer, including biographical information and a glimpse of her/his work. The learners are expected to read about the writer in Arabic, but are definitely welcome to read about her/him in English on their own to understand her/his writing. A discussion in Arabic of the background researched by the learners is held in class.
- 2) The learners read a designated sample of the writer's literary work before coming to class. Text-based vocabulary, pronunciation, and some grammatical items are pointed out in class.
- 3) The learners write a paragraph, a letter, a dialogue, or a short poem of intermediate level in Arabic thematically related to the literary text. The learners' writing is discussed in class.

- 4) An unseen literary text will be handed out to learners in the last few weeks of class, where they try to read it and discuss it in class without the help of a dictionary – or google and wikipedia.
- 5) Basic translation will be tried out from Arabic into English and vice versa of parts of the text. The accuracy of translation is not the issue here. The insight learners derive from finding out links between English and Arabic is important.

Writers

The writers we will work with are all contemporary Arab writers. The criteria for selecting the writers and the texts are:

- 1) Introducing a variety of writing styles and regional backgrounds. The writers are from different Arab countries.
- 2) Tackling different themes that are at once familiar and culture specific, ranging from romantic, political, feminist, and religious.
- 3) Adequacy to the intermediate level without being oversimplified. The texts are challenging but not difficult. They are certainly multilayered linguistically and thematically.

The Writers

- 1) Nizar Qabbani (poem).
- 2) Naguib Mahfouz (excerpt from a novel).
- 3) Gibran Khalil Gibran (poem).
- 4) Soaad Sabbah (poem).
- 5) Mahmoud Darwish (poem).

All texts will be photocopied and handed out in class.

Except for the excerpt from Mahfouz's novel, all the poems have either been put to music and made into popular Arabic songs or have been recited in public by the poets themselves. Either mp3s or YouTube urls will be available to students before class.

Assessment

Class participation (30%):

You need to come to class prepared with the following:

- 1) Your own short notes in Arabic about each writer. Be prepared to share them with all of us.
- 2) Reading the text at home. Practice reading it out and look up as many of the words as possible. Be prepared to read the text out in class and discuss some vocabulary. It is not just how well you read or how accurate you know the vocabulary; it is also how hard you tried to do that in Arabic that counts here. The reading and the vocabulary will be fine-tuned in class, but only after you have demonstrated your effort.
- 3) General and spontaneous discussion about anything related to the writer, the text, the themes and the background is highly encouraged – as long as at least most of it is in Arabic.

Writing (30%):

You are expected to write a short paragraph, a letter, a dialogue or a poem in Arabic in response to each text/writer. The topic of your writing will be your choice, but I need to know about it in advance.

Presentation (20%):

You will make a brief presentation in Arabic about a writer/text of your choice. The language expectation is still within the intermediate level. Be expected to ask/answer some questions in Arabic.

Translation (10%):

You will translate one or two brief texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. Texts will be agreed upon in class.

Quizzes (10%):

At least one quiz will be held in class about an unseen text that you will not be given in advance to prepare. Dates will be agreed upon in class.