



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Arabic Language I

2627-1-E2002R005-E2002R00501

Course title

Arabic Language I

Topics and course structure

The course aims to provide students with the fundamentals of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), both written and spoken.

Alongside the study of the language's morphological and syntactic structures, emphasis will be placed on their practical application. The theoretical component will therefore be developed in parallel with reading texts and conversation activities designed to foster the acquisition of appropriate linguistic, lexical, and cultural competence. The language practice classes (A–L and M–Z), taught by a native-speaking instructor, complement and continue the main course. Attendance is considered an integral part of the course.

Objectives

By the end of the course, through regular attendance and active participation in lectures and language practice sessions, students will have developed basic proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic, both in receptive and productive skills, with particular emphasis on comprehension, guided production, and interaction on concrete everyday topics.

1. Reading Comprehension

Students will be able to:

- read and independently understand short fully vocalized texts;

- understand simple written texts on geographical, political-institutional, and cultural topics, particularly concerning:
- countries and cities of the Arab world
- essential aspects of political systems and public institutions
- cultural events, short news items, and holidays

2. Production and Interaction (Written and Spoken)

Students will be able to:

- produce simple sentences and short guided texts on familiar topics;
- participate in basic oral interactions on topics covered in the course;
- describe people, places, activities, and everyday situations;
- recount events in the present, past, and future using simple language;
- use basic vocabulary related to everyday life and the main communicative domains covered during the course.

3. Basic Linguistic Awareness

Students will be able to recognize and apply, under guidance, the main morphosyntactic structures of Modern Standard Arabic covered in the course, demonstrating an initial understanding of how the language system works (nouns, verbs, nominal and verbal sentences, agreement, and basic transformations).

COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS

Throughout the course, students will acquire the ability to perform the following fundamental communicative functions in Modern Standard Arabic.

1. Social Interaction and Self-Introduction

Students will learn to:

- greet and take leave formally
- introduce themselves and others
- ask for and provide personal information (origin, studies, occupation, interests)
- use expressions of politeness, gratitude, and appropriate responses

2. Exchanging Information and Describing

Students will learn to:

- ask for and provide information about people, objects, and places
- describe people (physical appearance, profession, interests)
- describe their home and living environment
- describe cities and places (neighborhoods, buildings, streets, landmarks)
- give and understand simple directions

3. Time, Daily Routine, and Simple Narration

Students will learn to:

- describe their daily and weekly routines
- express habitual actions and frequency
- narrate simple events in the present, past, and future
- describe future plans and intentions (e.g., trips and activities)

4. Needs, Preferences, and Everyday Activities

Students will learn to:

- express likes, dislikes, preferences, and interests
- talk about food and meals, including simulated communicative situations (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant)

- talk about jobs and professions using simple language
- describe their own experience of learning Arabic

5. Geographical and Cultural Contexts

Students will learn to:

- describe countries of the Arab world from both geographical and political perspectives
- understand and report essential information about cultural events and holidays
- understand and describe short informational texts on cultural and institutional topics

Through the use of written materials as well as authentic audio and video resources, the course aims to foster students' active participation throughout the learning process while promoting the development of independent critical thinking and communicative competence.

Methodologies

During the course, teaching will be conducted in person and will be predominantly interactive from the very first classes. Whenever possible, the practical language sessions will be conducted in Arabic. Attendance is strongly encouraged for all students. Throughout the teaching period, students will be assigned homework exercises to be completed independently, regardless of whether they attend classes.

Online and offline teaching materials

In addition to the required textbook (see the Bibliography section below), supplementary teaching materials will be made available on the respective e-learning course pages (Arabic Language I and Language Practice I – A–L / M–Z).

Programme and references

Beginning with the principles of Arabic orthography and phonetics, students will be introduced to the Arabic alphabet, including letter formation, pronunciation, and reading rules. They will also become familiar with the internal logic of the Arabic language through the use of Arabic grammatical categories (with grammatical terminology presented in Arabic). Comparisons with Italian grammar will be made only when necessary to clarify potentially ambiguous concepts.

COURSE CONTENTS

The Alphabet

- Long and short vowels
- Consonants and semiconsonants
- "Solar" and "lunar" letters (assimilation of the definite article)
- Special features of the alphabet: hamza, alif waʾla, alif maqṣṣara, and alif madda
- Word formation through roots and patterns
- Reading rules and prosody, with particular emphasis on the importance of rhythm

The Noun

- Definiteness (definite article) and indefiniteness (absence of the article)
- Independent subject pronouns and direct and indirect object pronouns (suffix pronouns)
- Formation of the feminine
- The nisba adjective (relational adjective derived from nouns)
- Nominal inflection: triptote (three-case) and diptote (two-case) declensions
- Demonstratives used both as pronouns and adjectives
- The construct state (iʔʔfa)
- Temporal complements in the accusative case
- The dual
- Broken plurals and sound plurals
- Adjective agreement
- Numbers from one to ten and their agreement with the counted noun

Particles

- Connectives (wa-, fa-, amm?...fa-)
- Particles expressing place and time complements
- Particles used to express "there is/there are"
- Particles expressing possession ("to have")
- Particles used to express the future (lan)
- Particles introducing subordinate clauses (li-, an-)

The Verb

- The present (indicative imperfect, al-muʔʔriʔ al-marʔʔ) and its negation
- The past (perfect, al-mʔʔʔ) and its negation
- The present subjunctive (imperfect subjunctive, al-muʔʔriʔ al-manʔʔb): when and with which particles it is used

Sentence Structure

- The nominal sentence (subject–predicate)
- The separating pronoun
- Attributive and predicative use of nouns
- Expressing possession ("to have") through the nominal sentence
- The verbal sentence (verb in initial position and subject agreement)
- Negation of the nominal sentence using the verb laysa (ʔʔʔ)
- Transforming a nominal sentence into the past or future using the verb kʔna (ʔʔʔ)

The syllabus and bibliography for non-attending students are the same as those for attending students.

Students are also required to keep up to date with the course by regularly consulting the instructors' pages on the e-learning platform, where supplementary materials, the detailed course schedule, and a sample written examination will be uploaded. Students with special examination requests are kindly asked to contact the instructors by email at least 15 days before the examination date.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Required Textbooks

- B. Airò, S. Bertonati, Y. Odeh, M. S. Barakat, *Lingua araba e società contemporanea*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 2023 (reprint with errata), Lessons 0–8.
- Manca, *Grammatica teorico-pratica di arabo letterario moderno*, Rome, 2005 (PDF available online).

Recommended Reference Grammar

L. Vecchia Vaglieri, *Grammatica teorico-pratica della lingua araba*, Vol. 1, new edition, IPO, Rome, 2018 (or the previous edition, available online in PDF format).

Recommended Dictionaries

E. Baldissera, *Il dizionario di arabo. Dizionario italiano–arabo / arabo–italiano*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 2nd edition, 2014 (also available in digital format).

R. Traini, Vocabolario arabo–italiano, Istituto per l'Oriente, Rome, 1994.

Assessment methods

The final assessment consists of two components: a written examination and an oral examination. Students may take the oral examination only after successfully passing the written examination. To pass the course, students must obtain a passing grade in both components.

The final grade is calculated as the average of the written and oral examination grades and also takes into account students' active participation in the various teaching and learning activities throughout the course. In line with the regulations governing the other language courses offered within the Degree Programme, the grade obtained in the written examination remains valid until the end of the relevant academic year. For example, for the 2026–2027 academic year, the written examination grade will remain valid until February 2028.

Students who do not pass the oral examination by the final examination session of the academic year will forfeit the written examination grade and will be required to retake the written examination. Both the written and oral examinations must therefore be completed successfully by the final examination session of the academic year; otherwise, the written examination grade will be cancelled.

Registration through the Esse3 online system is mandatory for both the written and the oral examinations.

WRITTEN EXAM

The use of a dictionary is not permitted (and not necessary). It is therefore of fundamental importance to carry out constant and continuous practice throughout the year in order to acquire vocabulary, which covers both the topics of the Language course lessons and the Applications course. It is possible to keep track of this on the e-learning platform of both instructors by consulting the material uploaded during the year.

For the entire written exam, students are required to be able to fully vocalize everything they write and to know the basic grammatical terminology in Arabic.

The written exam will consist of five parts:

1. Listening–dictation:
 - Listening to sentences in which the missing word must be identified
 - Dictation of complete sentences
2. Reading comprehension
Reading and understanding a text of approximately 250 words with comprehension questions in multiple-choice, open-answer, or true/false format.
3. Vocabulary
Multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank questions on the vocabulary studied during the year.
4. Grammar (grammatical terminology is provided and required in Arabic)
 - Multiple-choice exercises on all grammar topics
 - Sentence transformations according to given criteria
 - Full vocalization of given sentences
5. Translation ITA–ARA
Translation of 2–3 simple sentences from Italian into Arabic (open answer).

Evaluation criteria

Particular emphasis is placed on the ability to operationally apply grammatical and lexical knowledge in analysis, transformation, and language production exercises, rather than on theoretical knowledge alone.

To verify that the student is able to correctly analyze, produce, and write in Standard Arabic with full lexical, morphological, and syntactic awareness, the following skills are assessed:

- fluency and speed in silent reading of fully vocalized texts
- acquisition and correct use of the vocabulary required at elementary level (A1–A2) and covered during the course
- comprehension and analysis of written texts
- recognition and application of the main morpho-syntactic structures of Standard Arabic (nominal and verbal inflection, agreement, distinction between nominal and verbal sentences, and ability to perform grammatical transformations)
- complete vocalization (?????) of words and sentences, demonstrating correct morpho-syntactic analysis (?????) of the studied structures
- translation of simple sentences from Italian into Standard Arabic, correctly applying vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and vocalization
- orthographic accuracy and clarity of written production
- transcription from listening, through sound discrimination, recognition of letters in their different graphic forms, correct use of ligatures, and correct segmentation of words within sentences

ORAL EXAM

The oral exam consists of two parts:

1. Reading

Reading of a vocalized text (approximately 30 words) with vocabulary studied during the year

Evaluation criteria

- ability to correctly link letters through proper reading of long vowels (harakat tawila), short vowels (harakat qasira), sukun, and shadda
- ability to correctly connect words (?????)
- distinction between “al” shamsiyya and “al” qamariyya
- adequate and intelligible pronunciation of letters (huruf)
- correct pronunciation of vowels (harakat)
- fluency, naturalness, and overall clarity of reading

2a) Free conversation

The exam will mainly be conversational, in the form of questions and answers, covering the topics of the syllabus.

Evaluation criteria

- ability to understand questions and respond appropriately
- naturalness and spontaneity of interaction
- appropriate and correct use of vocabulary and syntax in an unprepared dialogue situation

2b) Oral presentation (optional)

Students who wish may prepare presentations (maximum 4 minutes) on topics covered in class

Evaluation criteria

- ability to express themselves orally in a clear and understandable way, building a coherent discourse
- ability to use vocabulary appropriately in context
- ability to reuse vocabulary learned in class and apply it to their own personal experience

Office hours

By appointment, to be arranged via email at chiara.schiavi@unimib.it

Programme validity

The syllabi are valid for two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES
