

Ahlan Wa Sahlan: Functional Modern Standard Arabic for Beginners. By MAHDI ALOSH. New Haven: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2000. Pp. xxv + 585.

This Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) textbook of 30 lessons differs considerably from those using a traditional grammar-translation approach in that it is “functional” in orientation. As A. explains in the introduction, “the focus, therefore, is on performing language functions using the language forms learned, not on analyzing them grammatically” (p. xviii). The book does not assume a linguistically sophisticated student, but, there are places in which the learner must wrestle with non-functional subject matter; e.g., when the articulatory phonetics of MSA is presented, including a mid-sagittal view of the speech tract (pp. 26-27), and the further diagrams showing the opposition of pharyngealized /s/ vs. /s/, and /d/ vs. /d/ (p. 42). Although on the whole accurate and not excessively intricate, one may quibble with some technical details; e.g., the consonant jīm is not “usually pronounced just like the s in pleasure” (p. 27), but rather is most often realized throughout the Arab world as a voiced alveo-palatal affricate. A word of caution to instructors: many a student’s grammatical background might be inadequate for such concepts as fāʿil ‘agent’ and nāʾib fāʿil ‘deputy agent’ (p. 316).

One of the book’s strengths is the presentation of culturally germane subject matter; e.g., two pictures of traditional Arab male headgear are offered with a discussion of the kūfiyya or yutra ‘headcloth’ and the ṣiqāl ‘circular black band’. Students will also appreciate the material dealing with the modern Middle East, such as the story about an Arab girl from Qatar (pp. 230-232). Far less effective pedagogically are the numerous texts dealing with American themes.

Let me now turn to the tome’s vocabulary. Unfortunately, A. has occasionally chosen rare items and forms; e.g., ‘the woman’ (twice on p. 121) is alʾimraʾa (the first glottal stop is, in

any case, erroneous since that hamzat ulwasl elides<sup>1</sup>), when, in fact, almarʔa is far more frequent.

We encounter maqṣaf 'cafeteria' (p. 204, 213, and passim), which is not given in N. S.

Doniach's The Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary of Current Usage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). Although given in Hans Wehr's A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. by J Milton Cowan (1974, p. 769) as 'refreshment room', it is not common. One word used seems to be erroneous: 'tape recorder' is musajjila (p. 57, p. 75, p. 117, p. 374, and passim). I only know musajjil, confirmed by Wehr (1974, p. 398). Upon checking with several native speakers, they accepted musajjil, but not musajjila. 'Tomato' is given as banadōra (e.g., p. 407), but Wehr (1974, p. 77) states that this is Syrian. I would think that tamātim or tamāta would be regarded as MSA much more so than banadōra, although Doniach (op. cit., p. 1277) lists all three.

'Laboratory' is given as maxbar (p. 191 and passim), whereas muxtabar is surely much more common.

Let me next take up some puzzling misvocalizations. MSA 'identity (card)' is huwiyya (Wehr 1974, p. 1037), yet it is vocalized (p. 133, p. 543, and passim) hawiyya, which, in fact, is a colloquial pronunciation. 'Identity card' is given as bitāqat hawiyya (p. 132), yet Wehr (1974, p. 1037) gives bitāqat ulhuwiyya. 'Museum' is given as muthaf (p. 411, p. 536, and passim). Wehr (1974, p. 92) gives only mathaf. My informants rejected the the /u/, which they thought dialectal. 'Petroleum, crude oil' is given as nift (p. 452, p. 542, and passim), whereas Wehr (1974, p. 987) gives naft. My informants believed the /i/ occurred, but that it was incorrect for MSA. Munir Ba'albaki's Al-Mawrid (Bairut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayēn, 1972, p. 679, gives the word only with kasra, however). Al-Munjid (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1956, p. 827) agrees with

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<sup>1</sup>Another error occurs in writing the hamza of 'Monday' as alʔiṮnayn (p. 271, p. 389, p. 508, and passim): this hamza should not be written, since it, too, is a hamzat ulwasl.

Wehr.

In conclusion, this is a good textbook. It certainly contains valuable material; however, many instructors will prefer other tomes, particularly since the MSA utilized is vocalized throughout. In my view, vocalized MSA is fine for the beginning lessons, but students must be weaned from the crutches of the diacritics (so too for Modern Hebrew) as soon as they possibly can, since “the real McCoy” is devoid of them.

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