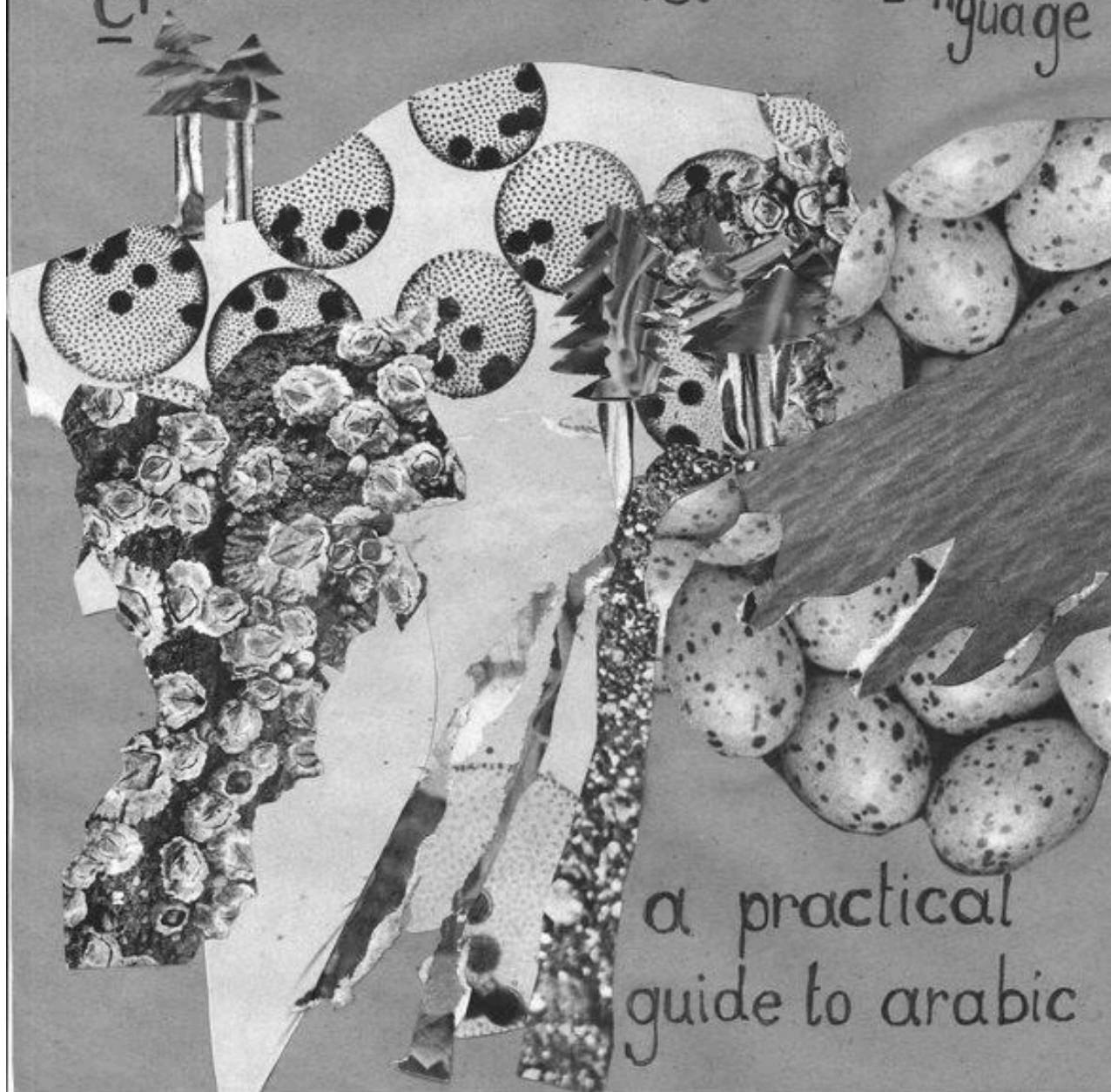


COL كَلِمَات

crushing the obstacles of language



a practical
guide to arabic

Introduction
Abjads
Arabic
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English
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Hey!

What you're going to be reading was written, edited and illustrated in the course of the winter of 2023-2024 by a group of friends from different places, speaking different languages, anti authoritarians who are all somewhat involved with migrant struggles around Europe.

This fanzine was born from countless discussions, criticism and unprocessed ideas we have accumulated throughout the years. It's fair to say it came out as a hot mess. On the one hand, we were trying to pick on you/ourselves born to white middle class families and living in 2020's Fortress Europe, asking uncomfortable questions about the politics of language, about alienation but also about mutuality. At the same time, it was trying to be a clumsy sort of guide book to introduce the specific challenges Arabic speakers face when learning English, to English speakers.

Think about how much easier it would be if Arabs helped Arabs with learning English with an English studybook in Arabic, because everything would be explained in a language they understand, and because they would know from firsthand experiences what difficulties they are struggling with. This fanzine can potentially help you dive into some of the parts Arabic speakers might find hard about English, but it's all written in English so you can read it without actually knowing Arabic.

We don't fool ourselves to think that by omitting the terms "teacher" and "student" in that last paragraph we are solving the issue of hierarchy that we reinforce daily with people around us, in autonomous spaces as much as in the workplace. In regard to our topic, hierarchy in the classroom is a symptom of a societal problem, and also of an interpersonal one. We want to emphasize that teaching English, helping acquire it, whatever you name it, is not a source of any specific nobility, and those who don't speak it will never be inferior to those who do. Forced assimilation to one acceptable language, one accepted class, takes such an enormous toll on civilization. The infinite knowledge found in the cultures and languages we lost while thinking they're less important than those we used to cleanse them with. The billions of potential ways of expression that vanished due to ongoing violence, racism and stigma.

Nobody involved in writing this is a professional in any of the topics they write about, and we don't think being professional would determine anyone's success in learning a language. We feel that a lot of what learning a language is about is communal responsibility. So much of your success depends on if people around you had the patience, the care and the time to listen to you struggling to form your sentences, and then insisting to understand what you meant with it, taking the time to answer it so you can understand, all without watching you from above. That means way fucking more than getting a degree in education or linguistics. In fact, quite ironically, we found that essays addressing the difficulties of Arabic speakers in learning English weren't even accessible at all, not for people that weren't familiar with linguistics. It would be basically impossible to read these essays and apply them in lessons, not to talk about having to pay for articles and books to gain information that should be accessible to all. Just a nice reminder about how the academy is systematically trying to prevent information from reaching to the people who would actually use it. It's especially faint for the case of people that the state doesn't really give a shit if they die in the sea, in the woods or on the streets.

We called it كَلْب (meaning “each” or “all” in Arabic) or Col (meaning the lowest point in a mountain ridge) because it's that nice and breezy point where everybody could meet if they climbed up from their isolated valleys. We rather make some effort to meet up there, at that one point where the all animal trails cross the mountain range, where the winds burst through the enclosed basin, where you can actually see the view on both sides of that separating mountain.

We tried to take off or put as side notes whatever wasn't crucial. There's probably so much important information we're missing, or mistakes we've made.

Please write to this E-mail colfanzine@protonmail.com if you would like to inform about any of these mistakes for possible next editions or if you want to share any kind of thoughts upon reading this. We also invite you to write if you would like to collaborate in any topic that came up to your mind, or to translate this fanzine so it's applicable for languages other than English-Arabic, or if you are an angry anarcho-fragilist upset about this piece of garbage we published.

We really hope it gets to whoever wants or to whoever needs to have these thoughts in mind, and possibly motivates more people to make spaces around them that see these nuances of human interactions not as 'political work' or an implementation of an 'anti-fascist agenda' but as something strong and exciting.

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The Enigma of the Self-hating White Kid

We can talk about governments and their prosecutors' endless attacks on foreigners, on right-wing waves of xenophobia in every corner of the west. Much has been said and written about terror states implementing hierarchies based on ethnicity, on valuing one's blood over the other's, it's overwhelmingly scary these days. But it's not new.

Imagine a scenario. Another fucking beating of a migrant by Nazis in your city. You, or... let's say, *your friend*, go out to protest with their anti-racist group, shouting slogans about the exclusion of foreigners by some blood thirsty elites, by hateful racist fanatics and by psychopaths in uniforms. Slogans in English, French, Germano-Norweigo-Swedish, Greek. One person shouts “urriyah”, because.. well, that's the only Arabic word they know.

Are we all in this together? Are we all struggling synchronically, a body without organs, operating freely? Is there translation to English in your weekly assembly? To Arabic? Is it because no foreigners ever joined, or because they didn't think they could?

We would like this to change. It's not just reflecting about your privileges that solves the issues they encompass. It's not saying the right thing in the right place, or being on the right side of history. These are real people! They will not and cannot be reduced to concepts, easy to swallow, simplified and translated for our convenience.

Were you ever in a situation when you tried to speak your broken-ass French with a cashier in the mini-market, and said to yourself: “god damnit she probably thinks I'm such a stupid human being, a complete fucking dumbhead...” because all you could express was a pile of unorderly, badly pronounced phrases that made very little sense? She didn't have to be a self proclaimed racist to give off a general sense of patronizing, simply because you were pretty hardcore stuttering trying to buy that damn beer.

Not speaking a language well enough usually makes you feel stupid.. in that language. But when you are obliged to use that language for everything you do, you are more likely to feel stupid most of the time. You would feel inferior just because you can't get things out the way you would have wanted to.

And when you feel stupid you feel less secure to make friends. Many non-europeans we have encountered along the way have expressed feelings of being deserted by the same “comrades” that were supposed to be their friends, right after the weekly “open kitchen” meal was over.

We, radical, anarchist “locals”, or whatever you choose to call it, are always talking about alternative ways of living, caring, practicing strong, horizontal, interpersonal and dynamic structures as the fundamentals of a community. In fact, we are very quick to use the word *community* for a couple of people we’ve known for virtually 2 weeks. But creating a community is hard fucking work. And a community is forever based on communication. If friends can’t speak to each other, express each other’s inner worlds, are they really friends?

Non-verbal communication can be just as important, and singing, dancing, cooking or drawing together can be ways of making connections not based solely on words. Sometimes these are actually better ways of expression than words, because they express things words cannot. But there comes a moment when experiencing a nice moment together is not enough for both sides, you actually just really want to say something, to coordinate, convey a message, express a thought. But you don’t share the same language.

A new language is.. a new everything!

Language is shared and widespread, but is at the same time also very personal. Every two speakers of the same language have their own interpretations to the same exact words. Maybe this specific composition of letters reminds you of a memory with friends from 10 years ago... maybe what you see as a chair, someone sees a couch. What makes it a “couch”? Why is it not a “chair”? Are couches also chairs? What about “armchairs”???

But then, we speak a different language too. So from minor differences in definition between two speakers of the same language, we get to big barriers between two groups of possibly tens of millions of speakers – for millions of people, every chair can be a couch, and yet there’s another word for another object, like a type of cushion, that doesn’t even exist in English.

If we talk about emotions, things get much more complicated. What does it mean to be sad? Maybe the word “sad” translates from one language as pitiful, therefore weak, and there is another more specific word for being sad yet assertive? But “assertiveness” is a little more connected to anger in that other language, and these invisible differences can completely change how people talk about things. It’s vague, and endless, but it’s also very concrete to our daily lives.

Languages get DIFFERENT :o

But let’s leave these nuances aside for a sec, we just want to be able to communicate with our friends, and get as close as we can get to the real meaning of things. So why can’t they spend a few months learning the local language? It’s hard, but when you go for Erasmus in Spain, you learn Spanish.. so you can talk with people.. make friends... How difficult can it be?

Mind you that if you speak literally 95% of languages spoken west of Turkey and north of Cyprus as a mother tongue , you got yourself a nice little shortcut to learn any other language in that area. There are several reasons for this:

- You would basically have to spend very little to no time to learn the alphabet
- Your language is based on shared roots and shared structures of words– yes, even Russian and French come from the same language, spoken around 5000 years ago, and the

foundations of both languages – pronouns, numbers, conjugations of verbs and articles, are still way more similar than to Arabic or to Turkish

- You are more likely to have a wider range of shared common phrases, metaphors, reference points, intonation patterns and emotional connotations of words, in comparison to languages in other places

Not all languages were born equal, of course, and mass producers of music and TV shows like the U.S also send their franchises all around and make it easier to learn English by passive and active exposure – for people exposed to it. Maybe someone from Tunisia is naturally less exposed to this content than a Danish person.

There are also cultural and economical differences between new-arriving migrants from Africa and Europeans moving to a neighboring country, for example. This also has a big influence over the opportunities each has to acquire a language.

It's important to note that some people that speak Arabic might not be able to read in Arabic, or in any other language. Possibly, due to the lack of educational resources in their countries, due to gender discrimination, or because it's not even their first language, like the situation in North and Sub-Saharan African areas. The languages they speak there can be as different as Arabic is from Polish.

But another important reason can be attributed to the fact that most Arabic speaking cultures are historically more oral than literate. Western culture has evolved to rely a lot, sometimes explicitly, on written form, the so-called "objective" form. You want to learn something, you read a book - no one is going to have a better answer than a fucking book. You're on your own.

In some places, and not due to low literacy, people would rely way more on talking with people for advice than to read a book about it. It's more likely they would use personal experiences or use proverbs to illustrate them to a friend in need, probably more than the average European. This has changed in recent years, and Arabs use phones to write and consume a lot of written media. In many languages online media differs quite drastically from formal writing. And yet, in Arabic it can be even more extreme because writing in the Literate Arabic form is seen as wayyy over the top and cringe just to chat with friends. That's why they would usually use a written representation of their local dialects to write, sometimes using a mix of Latin letters and numbers(!) instead of Arabic ones¹. So much that this actually came to be a pretty standardized writing method among young Arabs. And yet it's still not an official language with uniform rules.

All these factors are very likely to have an effect on how normalized reading officially published texts is in their lives and how they treat written form. Their literacy level and approach to written forms of communication should never make them feel belittled by you or anyone. The whole point is - if they want to learn to read and write English because they see it as important in their life, we should help them as much as we are able to. So.. how?

This is what this text is about

We want to try to give people that choose us to help them learn a language better chances to actually succeed in it. For this to happen, we think getting some essential background information on their mother tongue and also addressing the peculiarities English has, is actually very necessary. It can help us understand better what are the difficulties a person might face in their learning process. We do not think that a small booklet is enough to get

¹ This is because the only script supported in the early personal computers of the 90's was the Latin script, so Arabic speakers created an alternative script in many different areas corresponding to their spoken dialects. Bottom to top, this script slowly developed and standardized, and is still widely used today. Similar scripts have been developed for Greek, Russian and Serbian.

acquainted with a language so different from English, nor can it teach you how to be a really damn good teacher. Heck, most of us who contributed to this text don't even speak English nor Arabic as a mother tongue - for some it's a second or third language. We are not professional teachers and this is no academic course. But we feel there's a lack of resources for teachers of Arabic speakers, and that Westerners are not putting enough attention on the specific challenges that Arabic speakers face trying to learn English, simply cause they don't speak Non-European languages, and it is unimaginable to them how different languages can get. If someone can get anything from this text or just find it somewhat interesting, that's awesome (and maybe potentially motivate you to learn a new language!)

We wrote this booklet as an aid to Arabs learning to read the English alphabet. It's a little BIG for one read, so don't hit your head against the wall trying to pick up and apply all the tips and guidelines written here. Some of them could be used when preparing a class, or when reading a text with someone, or just for the sake of curiosity. In many ways, it's kind of dry and unprocessed because this is not so much about methodology of teaching, on how to make it like.. interesting and engaging. This fanzine is here to give you a couple of new perspectives and shine light on things you might have not thought about, but what you do with this material is really up to you.

It can also be used as a tool to learn reading any language where the Latin alphabet is used, or to as a general explanation about alphabets like Cyrillic or Greek in contrast to Abjads (a term explained later). But because we *were* trying to get into specifics, the bigger part of the fanzine is dealing with pronunciation of English as it's the most widely used language in the world, and more specifically on the General American accent, as it's the English accent with probably the most exposure in the world. Ehhh...

A thought:

This is all a very big compromise. We see ourselves as anarchists, anti-racists, anti-authoritarian, but we would also like to think of ourselves as just.. nice friends! Like, wouldn't it be nicer if we didn't have to teach someone a mega, hyper colonialist language, and instead learn their mother tongue? Like, yes... Well, some single countries in Africa have hundreds of different languages, how could we learn a new language for every new person we meet? hmm..

But Arabic IS one of the world's most widely spoken languages, also due to more ancient colonialism. As a colonial language, it developed many dialects in vast areas of North Africa and the Middle east, each based on the specific influences of the languages of the indigenous peoples who resided there before, that either merged with the Arab population or were forced to learn it. So.. it's complicated, diverse and it's hard to pronounce.. but so is English for Arabic speakers!

Farsi and Pashto, Urdu and Hindi, these pairs of languages are not too far away from one another. Think something like.. Spanish and Italian. Then there are pairs of languages like Swahili and Lingala or Filipino and Indonesian that are further away from each other but are still part of the same language family, like Russian and Polish are. Each of the languages mentioned above have literally tens or hundreds of millions of speakers.. Learning to speak even one of them to a basic level can really change the way we communicate with people around us, and can give us opportunities to connect on a mutual basis, on a more personal exchange of cultures and stories.

Maybe some speak a colonialist language you don't.. taking time to learn Spanish or French can also strengthen your ties with people from European (ex?) colonies.

The point is: don't take this fanzine literally, just as a guide to help you "help" someone. Take it as an invitation to think again what you mean when you think of mutuality. Don't just read the Arabic section and freak out, it's a beautiful fucking language and with the right patient approach, soon enough you *will* succeed to hold a conversation, at least! Studying in informal ways in occupied spaces, we have been exposed to experimental and exciting ways to obtain languages. The "teacher" teaches an Irani English, but the "teacher"

himself is really into learning Farsi, so during the class he also gets to ask for some clarifications on certain words. Another “student” is Kurdish but also knows Arabic, and speaks better English than his fellow Syrian classmate, so when he understands something the other student doesn’t, he can explain it to him. The other “teacher” is trying to improve her Arabic so she teaches the Syrian person English while using Arabic, and the Syrian corrects her for some small mistakes she makes at the same time. Hierarchies fall because no one’s knowledge is more important or valuable, we could feed each other knowledge as if we’re feasting on our shared delicious crops.

Ok, enough with romanticism. Let’s get to work!

Introduction to Abjads

Abjads are writing systems in which only the consonants are represented, and the vowels are not mentioned in writing. This means that a word like “Paradise” would actually be written like “prds”. If you don’t read Abjads like Arabic or Hebrew, this might sound confusing to you - but in fact there are probably around 500 million people who use this type of writing system daily.

So how do they know what the vowel is? Do they just.. guess it?

Think about it like this: vowels are *kinda* redundant sometimes.. no? Like, what if you’re a fluent English speaker, and I **jst stp wrtng th vwls fr sm wrds**.. it may look weird, but it’s not impossible to understand!

But we’re actually lying.. sort of - there are no **PURE** abjads still used today. So they would occasionally use one of the consonants to double as a vowel. Kind of like the letter Y in the Latin alphabet, that can be both a consonant in the word **You** and a vowel in the word **Gym**. In Arabic, there are 3 of these kinds of letters: (ي) for the vowel **I**, (ا) for the vowel **A** and (و) for the vowel **U**.

This is to represent a longer vowel, like the difference in the **e** sound between **ferry** and **fairy**, or the **i** sound difference between **kit** and **kid**².

Some more context:

Abjads are actually the most ancient writing system, and Phoenician, one of the most important Abjads, is the source of literally ALL alphabets that survived until this day (except Korean). From the alphabets constructed by indigenous people in Canada, through Greek, Devanagari in South Asia and all the way to indigenous Philippines’ scripts.

Almost all abjads are written from right to left. If you’re asking why, the best answer would be: Well, ask the Greeks why! They were the ones to flip the Phoenician script to be written from left to right. The scripts that didn’t evolve from Greek, like Latin and Cyrillic did, just stayed the same way they always were. Good old right to left³.

Now, Arabic!

Arabic has 28 letters that can all be used as distinct consonants. Yes, distinct - not like how the sound for k in the word “**k**ite” is pronounced exactly like **ch**aracter, **c**orn, **ba**ck, **q**uit and Kazakh**st**an. At the same time, there can be 2 letters in Arabic that are represented in English in one way, like the difference between the **th** in “**th**at” (ث) and “**th**under” (ث). But we

² A little bit about vowel length in English in the “voice vs. voiceless consonants” section

³ except the Brahmi scripts in south and south-east Asia and the Ge’ez script in Ethiopia that just did the same thing as the Greeks did independently. Uyghurs flipped the script direction to be written from top to bottom, in rows going left to right.

will get to this later. It's written from right to left, and does not have a distinction between capital letters and small letters. Instead, letters change according to their place in the word, this means that the same letter can be written in up to 4 different forms according to where it's found - in the beginning, the middle or the end of a word. Most letters connect to each other from the back and the front, creating a continuous line, and basically cannot be written separated from each other.⁴

Arabic has a lot of "dialects" that can be as different as separate languages, even in really super small areas.. "Fussha", which is the "literate" or "formal" language, is studied in schools and universities, and also used in the written media like books and religious texts, ads and newspapers, as well as in speech on the news broadcasts, TV shows and other public contexts. This is why it is understood by most arabic speakers, no matter where they're from. But.. it would sound to them as Shakespearean English would sound to English speakers.. so mostly, it wouldn't be used too often unless the two speakers just can't understand each other's dialects whatsoever.

Because of the nature of the Abjad system explained above, vowels generally stay unwritten, but also tend to have less importance to Arabic speakers.. This means that vowels, as well as consonants, vary A LOT, and are not as strict as in English. A simple word like "ruht" رحت (written letter to letter r-h-t) meaning "I went" can be pronounced, depending on the dialect or even the speaker, as "ruhtu", "ruhet", "rihet", or "riht", all considered as the same exact word. Same goes with consonants - letters vary and in different dialects can be pronounced differently. For example, "qalb" قلب meaning "heart" can be pronounced as "qalb" (hard k), "kalb", "alb" or "galb", depending on the region.

Other than that, spelling rules are pretty straight forward: normally, every letter is pronounced. This might mean that languages with a lot of irregular writing patterns can become challenging, because they would find it strange to write a letter that they don't actually say.

Very few letters that exist in English do not exist in Arabic. For example, the letter P is realized as B in Arabic, so "nik (a)lbulis" نيك البوليس (Fuck the police) is pronounced with a B despite being loaned from English. Another one is V, that can sometimes be pronounced as a W or an F in Arabic.

Other examples are consonants that exist but don't have distinct letters, or are specific only to certain speakers or dialects. This is similar to how the G in **cage** and **prestige** can be pronounced differently, but sometimes also the same.

The Vowels

In Arabic, as mentioned before, most of the vowels are not written down. but that's not it.

There are also only 3 distinct vowels - A, I and U.

As English speakers, we can represent vowels in many ways - we know the vowels in **god**, **good**, **gourd** and **goal** are all different vowels, even though they all have an **O** in them. But in Arabic, there are literally only 3 **conceivable vowels**. When an English speaker tries to learn French, they usually get stuck on all the different vowels; there's "**peu**", "**beau**", "**coeur**".. what the hell is this letter anyway? How am I supposed to even hear the difference? So it's the same for arabic speakers with English vowels.

This means that very often, the first mistake an Arabic speaker would make is to read the word **good** as **god**, or **god** as **good**, because Arabic only has the vowel **U** to represent both of these vowels. And in most cases, it's not even written down! How do we differentiate the two?

⁴ Illustration softwares often need to be adjusted to be compatible with Arabic, and so you can find a ton of embarrassing "anti-racist" manifests which cannot even be read properly by Arabs. If you're going to add Arabic to your text, plz check the text with an Arabic speaker after printing before making hundreds of copies of it.

Luckily, some of the vowels in English actually **DO** exist also in Arabic... they're just not represented in written form!

To explain this, we will give an example:

In Arabic, a word like "fid", that has a long **i** like in "feed", would be written, letter by letter in the latin alphabet, as "f-y-d"

The word for oil, "zet", where the **e** sounds like the vowel in "head", would still be written with the same letter as the previous example "z-y-t". So it's pronounced differently, but written the same. Just like how the words "far" and "cat" are both written with the same **a**, but the **a** in them is pronounced differently. Yep!

Looking into English learning books for Arabs, you find that the most effective choice when teaching the vowels, is to compare them to vowels in words that exist in Arabic like seen above. These materials are not translated, though, so we collected some easy reference points that you as a teacher might not have without knowing Arabic, but the student most likely will.

This method is in fact not good for arabic speakers alone. Once we understand the differences in how we speak, we can actually locate a lot of similarities! These similarities can help us explain a lot of things to speakers of seemingly very different languages. More on this in the English section.

Besides these 3 vowels, Arabic has 2 diphthongs (meaning two vowels one after the other) - 'aw' and 'ay'. These vowels, in most Arabic dialects, merge into long vowels - 'aw' becomes a long 'o' and 'ay' becomes a long 'e'. What this would often mean is that when there's any type of 'o' or 'e' vowel in English, Arabs might automatically lengthen it, because that's how they are used to pronounce them. It can be helpful to put emphasis on this fact, for example, by comparing words in English with short 'e' vowels and long 'e' (words with short vowels like *bet* and long vowels like *bed*)⁵.

Later in this zine, you can check out concrete examples and reference points from Arabic, hopefully to help them distinguish the different vowels.

The Consonants

As said before, there are 28 consonants in the literate Arabic language.

In every language, words 'behave' in different ways. In some languages, like English, you can see words with really heavy syllables: for example, the word (and syllable) "strengths", with 3 consonants in the beginning and 4 in the end. In comparison, Arabic is much more light - the 'heaviest' syllable in Arabic is a syllable with only one consonant in the beginning and two in the end, like بنت "bint". Words that start with two consonants simply do not exist.⁶ This means that when learning English and seeing two letters come one after the other without a vowel, especially in the beginning of words, arabic speakers' instinct would be to automatically put a little vowel to help with pronunciation. Like maybe "glad" would be pronounced "gelad" cause in most dialects of Arabic, there are no words that start with "gl", so they are separated to two syllables. By the way, if you think English is so great at producing terribly heavy words, just think of languages like Czech (uhhh, Brno ??), or Georgian ("gvprtskvni" [!!] ⁷). Words starting with two consonants would generally be added a short E in the beginning to break it apart, so English words like "smartphone" would be pronounced more like "ess-mart-fon". This can also be seen in names of places that were Arabized, like how the name "Washington" in Arabic is "Washinton".

Another thing happening in Arabic that doesn't happen in English is the double consonant system. When a small 'w'-like sign is added above a letter, it doubles the consonant, making it more stressed, or long. Although it might look like it, English doesn't actually have double

⁵ More on this in the English vowel part, in the Voiced vs. voiceless section

⁶ This changes in the dialects, so some words like كتير "kteer" are possible. In comparison to English, it's still much less heavy.

⁷ გვერცხვილი- "you peel us"

consonants, even when there are two identical letters one after another. For example, in the word *fuzzy*, they are pronounced only as one z. In Arabic, a word like جَمَد (jammad, in Arabic j̣ṃd), would be pronounced like jam-mad, so the consonant is extended. This happens also in Italian. Imagine, making ourselves bring forth the most cliché Italian accent, and saying “Pizzzzza brutttta!” That’s the extension of the consonant also existing in Arabic. When reading and writing in Arabic, some Arabic speakers might analyze a double letter in English the same way. So just tell them: “ah, you thought that English makes any sense? sorry, it’s way more fucked up than you think”.

Introduction to the English language

Yes, English fluent speakers reading this: English is way more complicated than you think. Not only is the writing straight-out messed up, but also the tenses are completely foreign to Arabic speakers because there are so many different ones, used sporadically, and native speakers very rarely actually know how to define them. Arabic is said to have roughly 2 tenses: past and non-past⁸. Luckily, grammar will not be covered in the fanzine because it’s just way too much for this format!!

So let’s talk about writing in English. English is around 1500 years old, since it separated from its mother *North Germanic* language back in the year 500. Basically from 300 years after, when vikings arrived to Britain, until today, English keeps on carelessly stealing from foreign languages. The mission to violate any reminiscence of PURE English is a long, dirty mess⁹. It adopted the Latin alphabet, which is a completely different language from what English used to be back then. But it had to use the few vowel letters it had, so a bunch of vowels got just the 5 letters existing in latin.

To add to the fuckery described, words started storming into English through conquers and religious influences from both Latin, Old Norse and Old French and people had to have all these words written, now in their special English accent edition. Then, major shifts in the vowels started occurring between the years 1400-1700, probably due to the Black Death that forced people to migrate inside England, bringing different local accents with them, which eventually became the standard. This changed the way people said all this chaotic bundle of unrelated words named English.

This meant that words like “bite” were, in fact, pronounced like a non-native student would pronounce them, literally: “bi.te”. How do you think the word boot was pronounced? You guessed it right, “bot” (with a long o.. like.. 2 times o. So like.. how it’s written). What was also happening was that people started pronouncing some consonants less, just like the infamous “gh”, so from something like a hard ‘h’ sound, it completely disappeared.

But not so fast! Around the time this was happening, some assholes started writing dictionaries in English, so they basically wanted to “freeze” the way English was written, and finally standardize it, after a thousand years of writing it more or less however you wanted. Around that same time, Dutch typesetters of English, we shit you not, were getting paid by the line, and so they just shamelessly stuck additional letters to earn more money. And so the cursed dictionary writers froze also the writing methods of these typesetters. Being stupid Latin ass-lickers, they also decided to resort to an even more grotesque and traditional way of writing. So, just to emphasize the irony of it, some words that were loaned from French, the typesetters of French were actually trying to save paper by writing LESS letters that were anyway not pronounced anymore, like the word “isle” changing to “île”. But then, when they were brought into English, they were pronounced **the same way** as in French¹⁰, but **SOMEONE** thought it would be fun to go back to the Latin spelling, so we got “isle” (like “isola” in Italian).

⁸ There are words similar to the role of “will” in English, marking the Future, as well as grammatical “moods”, each having different conjugations: subjunctive (You want to go home), jussive (You should go home) and imperative (Go home!). These forms are used more in the literate arabic in comparison to the dialects.

⁹ anyone trying to tell you there’s something like “pure english” is a dumbass

¹⁰ It changed to the current pronunciation in the Great vowel shift mentioned before.

All these factors, along with many others, have made English a literal dumpster fire of a language to learn to read, and even more to write. It's so hard - and when words are longer, there are way more places to make mistakes in. Heck, there are spelling tournaments all around the U.S testing kids under the age of 14 how well they can spell really hard words to spell. Basically, a festival celebrating how inconsistent and outrageous the writing rules are.

Correct spelling is important so long as someone profits off people failing in it

We can complain all we want about this arbitrary writing system, but fact is that this same language has evolved to become the language to rule the western world. It fucks you up, genuinely, because if they really wanted everyone to be able to learn to write it in 2 hours of studying it, like the Korean alphabet, they would have changed, simplified and adjusted it to reality, to the way we actually say things. But it's not. Ivn yf oui rait ol ða werdz wiðawt uh singl wan ov dem korekti, u vil stil bi eybl tu unðrstanð ęt prty mutch pꝛfctli. Some of these letters don't even exist in English for fucks sake and you probably managed, so what is even the point to be so percise in writing?! So we can't fool ourselves to believe it's a matter of communication - we do NOT need to write correctly to be able to express what we want to say. We dare you to find spelling mistakes in this fanzine, it's not one of these fanzines that specifically honors the wise dictionary writers of the 17th century.

Still, we DO live in a society whose fundamentals lie in grades and assessing people according to irrelevant skills to the job they are supposed to do. And writing is the easiest fucking criteria to check, because actually a computer can check it automatically, and then the graders don't even need to make an effort and actually READ what you wrote. They don't need to check if what you're saying makes any sense, or if you're possibly a kind of smart person even if you have a spelling mistake here and there (as if the two are anyway related to each other). It takes just a few spelling mistakes to fail you completely for an unprofessionally written essay. It's also such a stigmatized notion not to spell things "the right way", that people find it a good enough criteria to judge each other for it.

Accents are in many ways the same - practically aesthetic differences that determine your status in society. If you have a rolling R, and not a *retroflex approximant* like "**REAL AMERICANS**", literally, your tongue is in the wrong fucking spot in the mouth for them, you're so much more prone to be tagged as a stupid, uneducated, maybe even a dangerous alien.

So, hopefully you agree with us that these are all classist, racist, colonialist pieces of rotting brussel sprouts.

AND YET..

Learning how to spell correctly and to speak with an accent, can really change some people's lives, or even save them on some occasions. They can even be used just as a set of skills you can deploy when needed, in a job interview, or in an encounter with a cop, or when translating evidence of a genocide from your native language for a well-known newspaper. We support people that need access to information we can give them, and it's theirs to decide what to do with it after or when to use it.

So let's go into specifics.

☆ † Lord give us strength † ☆

The Vowels

We've mentioned before, in the Arabic vowels section, that some differences between vowels are invisible (this invisible difference is also called "allophones"). Fact is that they're not only invisible for Arabs, but also, and mostly, for English speakers themselves. Like in the example of "far" and "cat", which are not the same **A** - there are many more vowels in English we just don't really acknowledge, but we still say them all the time.

English has at least 10 vowels, and another 5 diphthongs (2 vowels conjoined). We also mention the diphthongs, because in some cases, these are also invisible! Like the loved English word “no”. The **o** in **no** is not just a regular **o** sound like in **not**, it’s a different **o** that in English is always accompanied by a small “w” vowel in the end, like **snow**! Meaning, the words “so” and “go”, are pronounced exactly with the same vowels as “bow” and “show”, despite not having the w at the end.

So we agreed there are sneaky little vowels, there can be two vowels represented by the same vowel letter. But there can also be a vowel represented in two different ways.

Take as an example, the vowels in “hood” and “should”. Is there any difference in pronunciation? What about “talk” and “rock”?

How do we even record all these differences? Since every vowel letter can potentially sound like another vowel letter depending on the word, it’s hard to have a common reference point.

That’s why we are going to use a phonetic alphabet and make a big list of words, just to know which vowels we are talking about. Memorizing the unique letters of this alphabet doesn’t matter as much as it’s important to keep in mind we say things in a different way than we write, and to have examples to give for each of the cases. We are going to use a general American English accent here as a reference point. We tried to generalize how it is written in English, and to find examples of words in different dialects of Arabic in which this same vowel is used:

In the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):	Examples in English	When is it written?	Examples in Arabic
i (close front unrounded vowel)	seed, read, niece, conceive, wheat, keep, teach, shield	usually referred to as a <u>deep</u> I, must contain 2 vowel letters	din دين dzil جيل dʒæmil جميل
ɪ (near-close near-front unrounded vowel)	bit, kid, kit, pink, tip, rip, sip	a short I, always written with a single <i>I</i>	bɪnt, nɪmt بِنْت, نِمْت
ɛ (open-mid front unrounded vowel)	dress, met, bread, bed, red, correct, said, sweat	a proper E, mostly written with one <i>E</i> , sometimes <i>EA</i> or <i>AI</i>	Imala, happening in some dialects of arabic, like Lebanese: klɛb, ,sɛkɪn, ʒɛmɪʕ كلاب, ساكن, جامع
æ (near-open front unrounded vowel)	bath, trap, yak, tram, sand, gap, tan, glance, harass	an open A vowel, written with a single <i>A</i>	In some dialects: كتاب, سباق, رجال kitæb, sɪbæq, rɪdʒæɪl
ɑ (open back unrounded vowel)	father, spa, bother, lot, barn, wasp, boss, cloth, dog, off, all, bought, flaunt	a more closed A, written both with <i>A</i> and <i>O</i>	In the same dialects as above row: صار, بار, طال, ظاهر sʕar, bar, tʕal, ɔʕahɪr

ʌ (open-mid back unrounded vowel)	bus, flood, what, gut, butter, brother	even more closed A, sometimes written with a single U	close to ضل, ضم, صد, صب, صد dʕɑl, dʕɑm, sʕɑb, sʕɑd
ʊ (near-close near-back rounded vowel)	book, put, should, look, good, would	referred to as a closed U vowel, written usually with OO, or OUL (L is silent)	Many dialects: قلت, رحلت, شفت, خذ qult, ruht, ʃuft, xud
U (close back rounded vowel)	goose, new ¹¹ , true, rude, mood, sued	U vowel.. written with U when there's a silent E, or with OO	Literate (Fussha) Arabic مُسَافِر, قُرْب, قُوَّة musæfir, qurb, quwa
oʊ	goat, home, toe, no, bow, tone	sounds like the name of the letter O, usually when there's a silent E at the end, or when there's no consonant at the end	similar, but not exactly like صَوْت, ضَوء sʕawt, dʕaw?
eɪ	lake, paid, feint	sounds like the name of the letter A, usually with a silent e, or ai	Lebanese Arabic: بيت, صيف, رَدَّيْت bejt, sʕejf, rædejɪt
aɪ	bride, prize, tie, bright, price, psyche, buy, my	sounds like the name of the letter I, usually with a silent E, when Y is in the end or with IGH	:close to سَيْف, بَيْت, زَيْت sajf, bajt, zajt
aʊ	now, ouch, scout, town	an AW sound, always written with O+another letter	similar to حَوْف, نَوْم, مَوْت, كَوْن xawf, nawm, mawt, kawn
ɔɪ	boy, choice, moist, soil, joy	an OI sound, written with either OI or OY	no equivalent

SPECIAL VOWELS aAAaaA:

ə (mid central vowel)	about, oblige, arena, ballad, focus, harmony, parade, curl	a schwa, a shortening of a vowel, this occurs in longer words or in short words coming between longer words. More about it below!	Moroccan Arabic دارجة شمس, جلس! ʃmæs, dʒləs Lebanese, Syrian Arabic حركة قصيرة في اللهجة الشامية نمت, رحلت, شفت
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¹¹ In some accents sounds like “nyu” (nju), this variety in pronunciation can be attributed to palatalisation (detailed below), like the difference between ‘chew’ and ‘few’ even though they’re both written the same

			nəmət, rəhət, jəfət
ɜ	heard, murder, pearl, sure, turn, burn, perfume, dollar, color, third	affected by the R, every short vowel can become this type of “R colored ɜ vowel” a vowel that doesn’t exist otherwise in English	no equivalent

This is a VERRRY rough trial in making some order in something that’s naturally chaotic. Thousands of years of language evolution has made English and Arabic two very untamable languages. Just to check yourself if you understand the patterns, try to think of a few more examples in English for each row. Most dictionaries actually use this phonetic alphabet, so you can check yourself if you aren’t so sure you got them right.¹²

A few notes:

- This is just an aid for you to help you guide students to differ between the different vowels. Don’t use it in class as it is, please! Instead, maybe while reading a story from a children’s book, or speaking about how was going to the beach this weekend, you would recognize a difficulty with pronunciation.. Like with the word “boat”. The learner might think it’s pronounced ‘bat’. In these cases, you can take the specific word they had a difficulty with as a reference point, and use some more examples of words that sound similar to clarify it. For this example, the word “goat”, or “soap”, have the same letters and the same vowel.
- Use it carefully with fellow learners- they might be pronouncing the vowels in the Arabic words completely differently than the English because they read the same word in a different dialect, or just.. because!¹³ We tried to note in which regions it’s more likely they would say the words in the same way mentioned. But it’s not perfect as different speakers sometimes pronounce words different from one another, and accents change greatly even between two nearing villages. We advise you to first pronounce the examples in English very slowly, and in case it’s completely alien to them and they find it hard to repeat, maybe the examples in Arabic could help a little.
- You might be pronouncing some of these words with different vowels - this can be either because you speak with a more specific accent of North America.. or another English accent.. or English is just not your native tongue. That has nothing to do with your capability of teaching the language in any case. These variations exist even if you were the perfect example of a speaker of the one and only General American accent, so what you teach today according to the table above may become irrelevant when speaking to an Indian, a Nigerian, or a Filipino, who pronounce words differently in their accents.. There are tons of accents and dialects and it’s part of the fun!¹⁴

Stress in English

One of the important features of English pronunciation is stress - on which syllable of the word do you put the most emphasis? Take the example of the pair “insight” and “incite”. In the first word, the stress is on the “**ins**ight”, and in the second word, the stress comes on the “**inc**ite”, but besides this, they sound exactly the same.

¹² Mind that there are dozens of English accents, so every dictionary can analyze words differently

¹³ Idiolects are the accents people adopt individually, so even in the same family we might pronounce the same word differently. Not only that, the same word can be said by the same person in two different ways in two consecutive sentences.

¹⁴ All these notes apply to the consonants table found later in this zine as well!

The stress in English can be phonemic (meaning, enough to be misunderstood for it, like in the example above), but mostly it just dictates the way you will say the word as a whole. Most of the examples in the table above have one syllable only. But if we take a word like “character”. Try to figure out, where is the stress? Yep, “**character**”. In English, the vowels surrounding the stress are generally shortened, many times to a schwa “ə” (found in the chart). This schwa sound is the most common vowel in English! It’s just a really soft and short vowel, and each of the vowels can turn into it in specific situations. So in the case of the word above, someone who reads the word for the first time would probably pronounce it as ‘cha-rack-ter’, all with vowels in the same length. But native speakers would generally pronounce it as ‘charəctər’, and sometimes even completely omitting the second vowel, so ‘charctər’.

Another example to understand it, the word “Savanna”. The stress is on “Savanna”, and so the vowels surrounding it would not be said as ‘sa-va-na’, but actually, ‘səvənə’. The ‘va’ would most likely be a longer and way more open vowel than the rest. When teaching longer words, you can try to put emphasis on this stress - raise your voice, say it slower, more open than you usually would. Maybe even use your hands, your legs, facial expressions, whatever it takes! The word “App**RO**priate” can become a small dance, so the sound connects to a visual memory, and all that would finally be connected to a meaning.

But stress doesn’t only happen on syllables of a specific word, it can also happen in a sentence. We rarely actually notice it, but it can actually make a difference in meaning! If we say the sentence “I didn’t burn that trash can”, we can actually say it in so many different ways:

- “*I* didn’t burn that trash can” (it was someone else)
- “I **didn’t** burn that trash can” (even though you say I did)
- “I didn’t **burn** that trash can” (I flipped it over on the street)
- “I didn’t burn **that** trash can” (it was the other one)
- “I didn’t burn that **trash can**” (it was that police station).

Weirdly enough, these variations are not only connected to meaning, but they have an effect on the pronunciation in some words! This is pretty abstract, and is quite hard to hear if you don’t hear a recording, so bear with us. So, some short words in English have “strong” forms and “weak” forms. Conjunctions and articles (“a”, “the”, “for”) or ‘helper’ verbs (“can”, “would”, “been”) can be either in their “weak” (=short) form, or their “strong” (=emphasized) form, all depending on the meaning of the sentence.

When we want to say the sentence “I do it for you”, we can either say it stressing the word “you” - “I do it for **YOU**” (not for her), or stress the “for” - “I do it **FOR** you” (not with you). If you listen carefully, in the first example, the vowel in “for” is shorter, it gets a schwa (like with the word Səvənnə) - this is its weak form. When you say the second example, the “FOR” is pronounced as it’s “supposed” to - with an ‘o’ sound.

This goes as far as to actually having two different pronunciations for a word according to its meaning in the sentence. In the sentence “There are a lot of people waiting there”, the first and the last words are “there”, but in one it’s talking about the existence of something (do these people exist in that place, or are they absent? - There are people), and in the second one it’s talking about a location (where are they waiting? - There). Listen closely and you’ll hear it - a native speaker would say “Thər are a lot of people **there**”. So in the first “there”, a schwa, but on the second - a normal ‘e’. Try swapping the two “there”s.. it probably sounds less natural.

(For a way better explanation than we could ever give in text, you can check the youtube video “The Genius of Weak Forms”, it’s actually pretty surprisingly interesting.)

This was mentioned before - all those out there speaking fluent English as a second or third language: the point of this section is not to scare you off from teaching English.

We **DO NOT** want to make everyone speak like Americans. Or British people. Or like anything, actually. We believe accents are beautiful and personal and lovely! Like.. body odor or... color of eyes!

We see language as a tool to communicate, first of all. If we are able to convey what's on our mind using 5 vowels instead of the 10 usually used by Americans, that's great! These examples are here only to try to make some sense of the hot mess English pronunciation is. Everyone is free to use this information as they please. Someone might cringe because you're teaching them to sound "too American". Maybe for someone else it's frustrating because they fail to reproduce these vowels. In any case, they should feel comfortable to keep saying it the way they fucking want to say it, as long as they are understood. They will have to fight so many other battles, with writing and reading and grammar, and in most cases, people are understood even if they say things differently than the person they're talking to. Lift their confidence, make them focus on their accomplishments!

The Consonants

The English language, generally speaking, has 24 different consonants. As we get further into it, we will realize this, like everything they ever taught you about English, was a complete lie!

Like mentioned before, in every language there are allophones, which are variations in pronunciation that its speakers probably don't notice while speaking, which means that when they teach the language they actually teach it wrong.

Take the word 'dressed' as an example- most likely, if a non-fluent speaker would ask you how to pronounce it, you would answer something like: "What do you mean??? Just like that, d-re-ss-d. So easyyy woow". But!! You are **WRONG**, and you're also **MISLEADING!** Non-native speakers will most likely say it as as d-re-ss-d (in the phonetic alphabet: [dʁɛsd])¹⁵ when, actually, YOU yourself are saying it d-re-ss-t ([dʁɛst]). What have you done?? You're a terrible teacher!

Nono, come back! You're not, we're not (or at least not for that reason), it's just how languages work. Especially in English, where it's much worse, because letters barely ever represent the sounds you actually make, as seen in the table below. So you must accept that some of your knowledge of the language will be hard to transfer to your friends learning it. That's why you've read all the way through here, and we'll try to trace these invisible characteristics of english that teachers usually overlook.

Let's first take a glimpse into the main comparisons between English and Arabic consonants that actually make a difference, as in like, you might not be understood if you pronounce them wrong (also called Phonemes). The phonemes, aka **IMPORTANT** stuff, are presented in a similar fashion as they were in the vowel table above. For some of these consonants it's hard to find equivalents in Arabic, but we tried our best:

In the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):	Examples in English	Equivalent letter in Arabic	Examples in Arabic
b	bat, ball, bag	ب	بيت, برد, بكير bajt, bard, bakir
k	car, kite, character, account, ticket, trekking, Iraq	ك	كيف, كل, كم kif, kul, kam
kw	quit, acquire,	كو	كويت, اكوام kuejt, ?akwam

¹⁵ It is explained further on in the Voiced vs. Voiceless section, but to actually say "dressed" with a 'd', the speaker would also have to add a small vowel either before or after the 'd', to make it 'voiced'.

d	dad, feared, odd, kindergarten, flutter*	د	damm, دور, damm, daqq, dur
dz	ponds, gods	تذ, تذ	in dialects, words like انذكر, التزوج ?edzakkɪr, ?edzawwɪʒ
f	fine, gift, half, laugh, tough, physical, phone	ف	فرق, فوق, فافل farq, fawq, filfil
g	gate, egg, ghost, guard, catalogue	ج, ق (only in some dialects)	Egyptian : ج جد, حاج, جميع gadd, hag, gamiʕ Saudi Arabic/Beduin ق: قلب, قال, قوس galb, gal, gos
ʒ	genre, beige, leisure, division, equation, seizure	ج North African and Levantine	جبال, حاج, جد ʒbal, haʒ, ʒad
dʒ	magic, jump, graduate, bridge, judgment, soldier, adjust, veggies, congratulations	ج in Algeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and in Fussha (Literate Arabic)	جبال, حاج, جد dʒbal, haɖʒ, dʒadd
h	he, who	ه	هو, هذا, هم, جهة huwa, haða, dʒiha
j	yes, onion, tortilla,	ي	يوم, يكتب, شيء, حي jawm, jaktub, fajʔ
l	line, lamp	ل	لا, لو, حال la, law, hal
m	mine, hammer, climb, autumn, assumption,	م	مي, ملح, دم maj, milh, tam
n	nice, inn, knee, Wednesday, gnome, pneumonia,	ن	نار, نحو, فن nar, naħw, fann
ŋ**	sing, long, hang, link*, tongue	doesn't exist, closest to نُج, نُق ng (how it sounds like when you say the words "fan girl" together)	
p	pot, app, hiccough, steppe	exists distinctively only as the	ابتسم, ابتلع, ابتداء ?ɪptasam, ?ɪptalay,

		non-native letter پ, but appears in some words	?iptada?
ɹ ***	fur, rain, rhyme, wrong	doesn't exist	
s	song, mess, city, scene, horse, listen, asthma, sword, waltz,	س	سين, قاس, سر, احساس sin, qas, sir, ?aħsas
ʃ	shout, cushion, expansion, speciality, ocean, machine, tissue, nation, mission	ش	شماي, شك, رش ʃaj, ʃakk, raff
tʃ	chop, chew, such, batch, cello, righteous	تش	only foreign names like: تشاد Chad
z	zoo, fuzz, has, tease, xylophone, breeze	ز	زاد, فاز, زوج zad, faz, zawdʒ
ts	nuts, quartz, pizza, tsunami	تس, تز	بيتزا bitsa dialectal: اتسلق, اتسلم ?itsallik, ?itsallim
t	ten, dressed*, doubt, thyme, cigarette	ت	تم, فات, تين tamm, fat, tin
v	vine, have, of*, Stephen*	exists distinctively only as the non-native letter ف, but appears in few words	pretty close to أفضل avdʕal
w	we, war, what, why, whine, whip, persuade, choir,	و	ورد, قاوم, وين ward, qawam, wajn
θ ****	thin, path, fifth, through, thunder, thanks	Fussha ث	ثياب, ثورة, تلج, بعث θiab, θawra, θaldʒ, baʕaθ
ð ****	the*, breathe, bathe, though	Fussha ذ	ذرة, إذن, إذ, ذهب ðura, ?iðn, ðahab
ks	fax, saxophone, accent, backs, axe, excel, yaks	barely any good examples	

gz	exam, eggs, bags, exhibit	practically doesn't exist	
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*yep.. it will be explained later

** When you say the word “sing”, you actually don’t say the letter g at the end. Think of the word “link”, but taking the ‘k’ off, so you’re left with a soft n.¹⁶

*** more in the rrrr(ghhh) section!

**** ‘th’ has two different sounds and it’s important to distinguish them. Arabic speakers have two distinct letters for these.¹⁷

—

So you might have noticed some ugly truths about the language that you’ve never been told. Let us go through some of these weird occurrences, among others that are not included in the table. Some of these things are universal stuff happening in every language, and we are going to take some examples from English and through them try to grasp why so many times English writing is so far away from the way it’s pronounced. These next points, in contrast to the Phonemes mentioned above, are mostly regarding Allophones - none important varieties of sounds. These are only important to sound more like a native speaker. This means that people probably would understand you if you say “congratulations” with the sound ‘t’ and not like the ‘j’ in Jack, or if you say your ‘r’ rolled like in Spanish and not as an “approximant” like in American English.

Dark L (ɫ/ ɮ)

The ‘l’ in the beginning of a word is not the ‘l’ in the end of a word. Try to listen to the difference ‘l’s in the words “luck” and “shall”. To make the ‘l’ sound in the second word, you roll the tongue more to the back. If you want to stress it even more, you can treat it as a sort of ‘w’, and see that most likely you would still understand the words, because some English accents really pronounce the ‘l’ in the end as a ‘w’. For Arabic speakers, this is similar to the ‘l’ in the word “Allah” الله, as opposed to the ‘l’ in words like ‘La’ لا. This happens in English also if the ‘l’ comes before another consonant, like in the word “felt” or “held”. In some accents in the U.S “dark l’s are even more common, and only in stressed syllables do they sound like Arabic-like ‘l’s. For example, the difference between the ‘l’ in “believe” where it’s in a stressed syllable and “bowling” where it’s in an unstressed one.

Voiced vs. Voiceless Consonants

All consonants we say in any language divide into two groups: voiced consonants, and voiceless. To determine if a consonant is voiced or not, put your finger on the side of your throat, just below the chin, and try to say the consonant. When you say the word “press”, what happens in your throat? First, there’s no vibration. Then, the vibration starts and in the end it stops vibrating again - what we understand from it is that the letter ‘p’ is voiceless because there was no vibration, ‘r’ is voiced because there was, and ‘s’ is voiceless again. From the sounds ‘b’ and ‘p’, which one is the voiced one and which one is voiceless? Try saying them with a vowel, like ‘ba’ and ‘pa’. Done? So, the ‘b’ is voiced because you feel this vibration on your throat. Now, try to say the word “cab”, and then “cap”. Do you hear any difference between the ‘b’ and the ‘p’ in these two words? Check your throat, does it vibrate when saying “cab”? Most likely, if you didn’t say anything after “cab” it doesn’t, and you can’t hear any difference¹⁸. Vowels are the pure vibration of the throat, so if there’s no more

¹⁶ Non-native speakers from virtually everywhere keep saying the ‘g’ because that’s how they were taught it, so actually teaching it from the start as a ‘soft n’ can help them not only sound more fluent, but actually just easen the pronunciation

¹⁷ More will be explained in the Voiced vs. Voiceless consonants

¹⁸ maybe you automatically add a tiny little vowel after the b’ to differentiate between them.

vowels, there is no more vibration. So, we understand that the only difference between the 'b' and 'p' is solely the voicing. More pairs like this are 't' and 'd', 's' and 'z' and 'k' and 'g'. What would happen, then, if a voiceless consonant like 's' is surrounded by vowels? For example, in the word "scissors". It's actually a 'z', right? This happens because there is a vowel before, and a vowel after. There's so much air flowing that it just becomes its sister 'z'. Try saying "scissors" while actually pronouncing the 's'. It's just.. more stuck.¹⁹ Another thing that can happen is that a voiceless consonant (with no vibration in the throat) *colors* the consonants it touches, too! Think about the word "igloo". If you actually want to pronounce the 'g', you have to burst a pulse of air to make it because it's voiced, and then at the same time stop the pulse to make an 'l', which is voiceless. So, naturally, you would choose only one - in this case, the voiceless 'l'. Try listening more carefully - are you actually saying the 'g'? Could you have just written it as "ikloo"? Same goes with the 'b' in the word "abstract" - it sounds basically like 'apstract'. The opposite happens with voiced consonants coloring. Take the 'p' in the word "dumplings" - it is most likely pronounced as... a 'b', its voiced partner. This happens due to the 'm' being a voiced sound, so it colors the 'p'.

Have you ever wondered why does the 's' in "backs" pronounced differently than the 's' in "bags", where it sounds like a 'z'? It's for the same exact reason! The 'k' sound in "backs" is voiceless, so the 's' is voiceless, but because the 'g' in "bags" is voiced, it *colors* the 's' to become a 'z' sound. This is the same thing that happens in words that end with a vowel - we said, vowels are the purest form of voice coming out of your mouth, so in the word "trees", the 's' turns into a 'z' sound, too!

Another invisible difference between voiced and voiceless consonants is actually connected to the vowels before them. Like mentioned in the Arabic vowel section, the 'e' in the words "bet" and "bed" are different in length - and sometimes, by almost twice as much²⁰! So, words with voiceless consonants at the end make the vowels before them shorter, and voiced ones, make them longer. Take these pairs and try to pronounce them and see if you can tell the difference in the vowel length: "bad" - "bat", "got" - "god", "let" - "led", "mob" - "mop".

Foo.. this was a long, and possibly a confusing explanation - for most of us these things come naturally, we would never think about our vowels being longer, or our throat vibrating when speaking. But to make your Arabic speaking friends' lives easier, and also yours, it's cool to put some sound changes in context - "scissors" is not just a weird word in which the 's' makes a 'z' sound, it's actually based on the way we pronounce things. By the way, it happens in literally every language - the difference is that some languages actually took the time to change the spelling of words according to the sound changes, and some languages (ehm ehm) piss on their speakers daily. God Save the King.

This same process happens in the aforementioned word, "flatter". Because the 't' is between two vowels, there's a lot of voicing. So it adopts its voiced counterpart, something like "fladder". But wait. it gets even worse.

Tapped R

¹⁹This is also the reason the 'f' in 'of' is actually pronounced as a 'v'. It's because "of", as a conjunction, always comes between words, meaning between its own vowel and the next word's vowel. So the 'f' becomes its brother voiced 'v'. The contrary happens when saying "of course" - there, most likely the letter 'f' will be a real 'f' because the 'k' sound of "course" is voiceless, and switching between the two types of consonants is *too much* work. Coloring doesn't happen in every case, in the word "kissing", the 's' wouldn't become a 'z'. This happens because we already have the basic word "kiss", wherein the 's' is pronounced normally. But if you say the sentence "They were kissing in the corner" really fast for a few times, most likely you will also start changing the 's' to 'z' just cause it's *less* work.

²⁰ The vowel in the word "beat" is 150 milliseconds long on average, while the vowel in "bead" is 360 milliseconds.

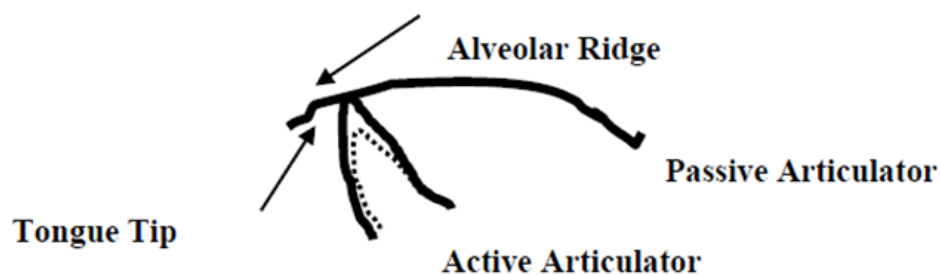
The controversial content written in this section may not be accepted by all readers, but remember: facts don't care about your feelings.

In most U.S accents, not only that it's not a 'd' in the middle of a word. It's an 'r', y'all. Apologetics would say it's just a 'soft d'. But if you listen closely, that 'd' actually becomes what is called a 'tapped R', the tongue passes shortly on the top of the mouth, making a sort of tap. This is just the normal 'r' in Arabic. It also happens with 'd', so in the word "peddle" for instance, the 'd' is not pronounced like in "dog" at all. This happens because the tongue goes back from where it's "supposed" to be because this way it's easier to pronounce the vowel coming just right after it. In the word "getting", the 't' is not pronounced like in "stand", but like a tapped R. So now that we're talking about 'r's, maybe it's time to address this subject too... oh boy.

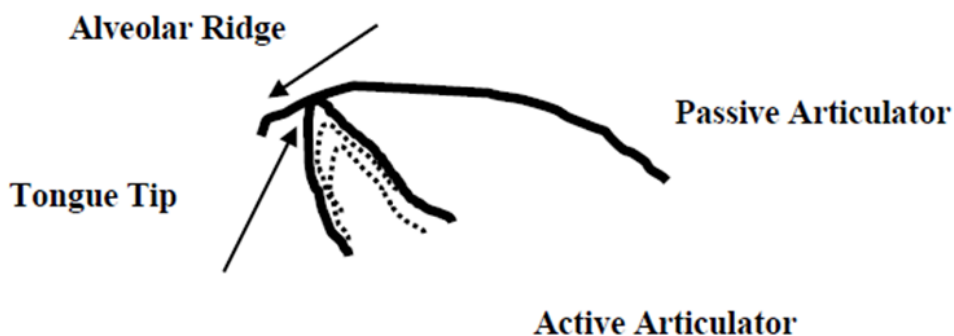
Goddamn bloody R

The 'r' is a tough one. So we got "tapped R", right? As said above, this is the normal 'r' in Arabic (words like "رَد, حَر, رَن, رَنَّ" 'rann', 'radd' and 'harr'). English 'r', in comparison, is super different. Let's see these diagrams we stole from somewhere (thanks Edward):

Let's start from Arabic. Arabic speakers generally pronounce the 'r' as a fast tap on the top of the mouth, which retreats immediately, like we see here (the dotted part is the tongue right after retreating). This happens also in U.S accents with the 't' in the middle of the word, like "water", "better".

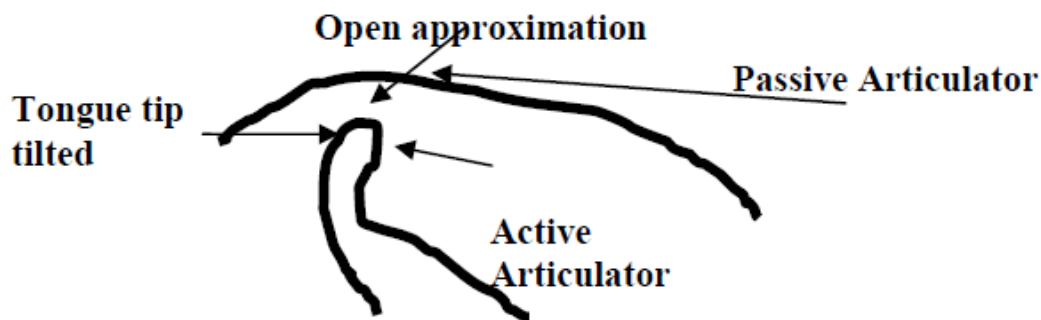


Then, the second type of 'r' is the one that exists in Spanish or Italian, which is a rolled 'r'. This is just the same as a tap, but instead of tapping the top of the mouth once, there's some kind of ballistic blow that makes the tongue tap it more than once. Think of saying the most cliché Spanish "Pero por qué???" This exists with doubled 'r' in Arabic, too, like the word "تشرافت" 'tsharrafet' meaning "nice to meet you!"



When we said "nice to meet you", we definitely did not address this R. But just in order to know your enemy: we are going to do something insane, and instead of tapping the 'r' on the

top, we roll it backwards, and we don't even touch the top of the mouth at all, and let the air flow gently through!



That's how you make that weird-ass English 'r'.

So, when you teach how to pronounce the word 'water', you are basically taking them to a tour between different 'r's, because the 't' is a tapped R, and the 'r' is a "retroflex approximant" aka that redneck "PARRrDON MA FRRRENCH".

T-dropping

Most U.S English speakers don't say the 't' in any word finishing with 't'. Like the word don't. They just say "down", or even "dō?" (so like, imagine this french nasal sound, and then a sudden stop). Try saying "Don't shit on that cat". There's not a single 't' in that sentence. If you say the 't's, you most likely are not speaking in an American accent. Just to fuck around with it even more, in the part "..Shiton that..", the 't' is not a 't', but a tapped R again, because "on" is just a conjunction, so a short word in between two more important words. So we treat these two words as one, meaning that the 't' is technically between two vowels, so it's voiced and then becomes a tapped r. Sweet Jesus.

Aspiration

Another feature we see is pretty much the next stage after voiceless consonants. Aspiration of consonants is basically that air pulse you take out when you pronounce the sounds 'p', 't' and 'k' in English. So instead of having the vibration in the throat like with 'b', 'd' and 'g', and instead of leaving it with no air like with 'p', 't' and 'k' you have in French for example, you just release the air even more outside of the throat, literally outside of your mouth²¹. This happens when the syllable is stressed, so like, take the word "tactic" - see how the 't' in 'tac' is actually said while breathing out some air, while the second 't' is just a normal 't', no extra breath.

To verify this, you can put your hand in front of your mouth and see if there is any pulse of air going out - when pronouncing the non-aspirated 'p', 't' and 'k' you're generally not supposed to feel anything.

Let's look into some examples, shall we! When the 't' comes together with an 's', it loses this feature, so imagine saying "stop", but then omitting the 's', (just repeating it without the 's') - there should be no breath going out on the 't'. Now say the actual word "top" - normally, native speakers would instinctively add the aspiration, so they would feel this breath. Luckily, arabic speakers aspirate 't' and 'k' too, so it's going to be really easy for them to pronounce these letters correctly. In the case of Arabic, though, aspiration doesn't only occur in stressed syllables, but in all syllables - so in the word "tactic" the 't' and the 'k' sound would both be pronounced exactly the same, with a small breath after them. Take time to say these words slowly, maybe exaggerating the aspiration, really pausing between syllables, so like "kkkhhitthhh-kkkhhattthh" and then just the more silent, unaspirated "kitkat", and then

²¹ in the phonetic alphabet, it's written p^h t^h k^h

merge them to form the English “Khhhhhit-kat”.

Palatalization

Ok, weird one. Try saying “due”, “dew” and “Jew”. Hear any difference? If not, it’s because you’re palatalizing, meaning, you touch your hard palate (top of your mouth, in the front) with your tongue. This makes the sound ‘dy’ (written in the table above as [dj]) turn into the sound of the letter ‘j’ in “jay” (or [dʒ] in the table). This happens also in the words mentioned above in the table, “congratulations” where the ‘t’ first becomes a ‘d’ (=voiced) and then palatalized (=gets a little J sound). More examples are “soldier”, that was once pronounced as it is written literally - ‘sol-di-er’, becoming ‘sol-je’ ([soʊdʒə] in the phonetic alphabet) or “pressure”, supposed to be pronounced ‘press-yur’, becoming ‘pre-sheer’ (or [pɹɛʃə]).²² This same process happens in other situations. Take the word “cute” - we teach that the final silent ‘e’ makes the vowel ‘u’ be pronounced as its name: ‘yu’ [ju]. But some words have lost that ‘y’ sound, so “rude” was supposed to be pronounced ‘ryud’, but because it’s harder to say it like this, we pronounce it as ‘rood’ [rud], with no ‘y’. With consonants that it’s easier to pronounce ‘y’ after, like ‘m’ (“mute”) and ‘p’ (“computer”)²³, the ‘y’ stays. In situations where it’s too much work to pronounce it, like ‘ch’ (“chew” as opposed to “few”), ‘l’ (“flute”) and ‘j’ (“jewelry”).²⁴

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For all those speaking English as a second language, it is very possible that your teacher didn’t even know any of this stuff when they taught you.

This is most likely because your real teacher was not the person giving you homework in school, but your favorite show with subtitles, or that emo band you were hooked on when you were 12, or that online game you were addicted to, or traveling abroad.

Maybe that’s a good note to end with: most of the process language learners will go through is going to be in the time between your lessons.

You couldn’t inject information into their brain, even if you were the best “teacher” in the world. Passive listening to the TV, having a crush you don’t share a language with, reading a children’s book, they all improve your speaking, reading and writing skills possibly more than any teacher could ever do.

The point is: learning together is fun. You simply being there for someone - patient and trying to figure out what difficulties they struggle with, serves as a boost in motivation for learning the language. For once, the person learning can feel good about the process, not having to bear with people’s looks belittling them on the street when they make a mistake, but instead someone explaining to them what might have caused the confusion in the first place.

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²² Even more cases: “measure”, was going to be pronounced ‘mez-yur’, but instead is said as ‘me-jur’ [mɛʒə]. “nature”, should have been ‘nay-tyur’, but instead is pronounced ‘nay-cher’ [neɪtʃə].

²³ also with ‘b’ (“abuse”), ‘f’ (“fuse”), ‘v’ (“view”)

²⁴ More examples: ‘j’ [dʒ] (“juice” is usually pronounced ‘juss’ [dʒʊs]) and “blue” is not pronounced ‘blyu’ but [blu] (even though in “fuel” it is pronounced with a ‘y’)

Wikipedia pages: Writing Systems, Arabic Phonology, Varieties of Arabic, English Phonology, English Orthography, Phonological History of English, Modern Standard Arabic, Arabic Chat Alphabet

HEAVY use of Wiktionary.org for English and Arabic pronunciation

Recommended Youtube video (used to write this): “The History of English in 10 minutes”, “The Genius of Weak Forms”