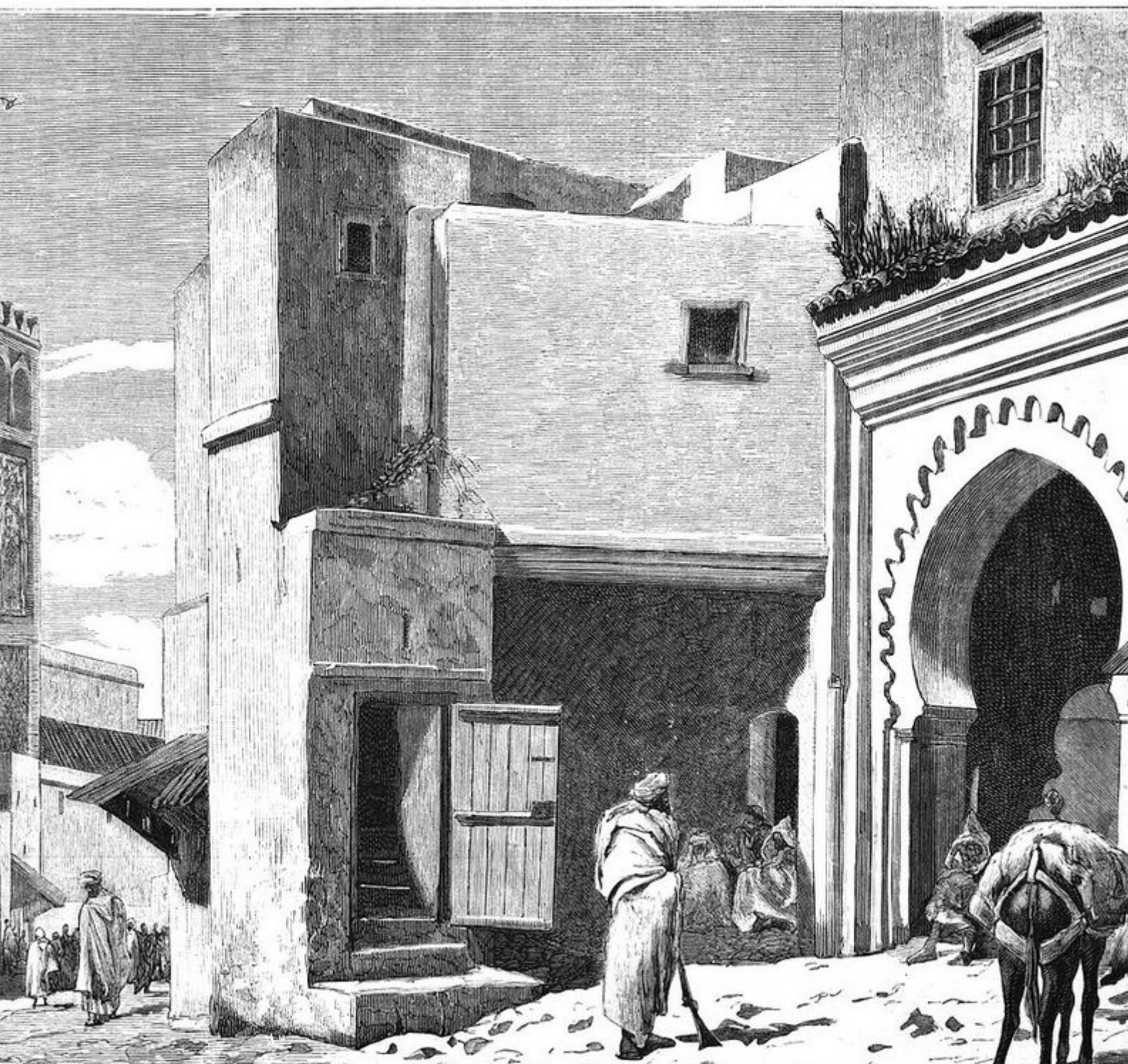




LEARNING DARIJA **الدارجة**

A1

MOROCCAN ARABIC FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Lessons 1 to 18

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Tangier from above Wenceslaus Hollar, Divers Prospects in and about Tangier (1673)

LESSON 1 • A1

GREETING WITHOUT A VERB

Eighteen greetings and the eight pronouns. Plus the thing English speakers find hardest to believe: in the present tense, Darija has no verb “to be” at all.

- Greet and take your leave at the three times of day.
- Ask and answer “how are you?” the way it is really done.
- Say your name and where you are from.
- Build a complete sentence with no verb in it.

1 HOW TO READ THIS

The Arabic in this lesson is **vowelled**: it carries small marks above and below the letters telling you which vowel sounds. Out in the street they are not there — Arabic is written without them and readers supply them from memory — but here they all are, because they are the difference between reading and guessing.

THE FIVE MARKS

Three are vowels, one says “no vowel here”, and the last doubles the consonant. With these five you can already read all eighteen words below.



ba

stroke above — sounds **a**

bi

stroke below — sounds **i**

bu

curl above — sounds **u**

b

small circle above — **no vowel**: the consonant stands bare

بْ

SHADDA

bb

the “w” above — the consonant **doubles**

The sukūn is the one you will meet most in Darija and the one that looks wrong at first. Moroccan Arabic stacks consonants where English would slip a vowel in: صَبَاخْ opens with *sb-* and nothing between them. That is not a typo.

ONE WORD, TAKEN APART

Read right to left. Each consonant carries whatever mark sits on or under it:

حْ
7

ا
ā

بْ
ba

صْ
s

صَبَاخْ *sba7*

2 SIX SOUNDS THAT WILL COST YOU — OR NOT

This is where your language sets your homework. English gives you the thinnest hand of the three languages this site is written for, and it is better to know that now.

ح

NEW

Not your h

مَرْحَبَا 7· mar7ba

ح is a breath pushed through a tightened throat, with no scrape to it. Think of fogging a window but bearing down. Your ordinary h is *o*, a different letter, and swapping them changes the word.

ع

THE HARD ONE

The one nobody is given

شَعِيدَة 3· s3ida

ع exists in no European language. It is a squeeze at the very bottom of the throat — the start of a mild gag — and it comes out as a strangled vowel. There is no shortcut; you get it by listening. For now, just do not turn it into a plain a.

خ

NEW

The ch in “loch”

kh · الخَيْرُ *l-khir*

خ is the rasp at the end of Scottish “loch” or German “Bach” — a sound English abandoned centuries ago and only keeps in borrowed names. A Spanish speaker gets this one free: it is their ordinary j. You will have to build it.

ش

YOU HAVE IT

The sh in “ship”

sh · شَنْوُ *shnu*

ش is exactly your sh. Nothing to fix, nothing to learn. Worth banking, because a Spanish speaker does not have this sound and reaches for ch instead.

ص

NEW

An s with a hollow mouth

s · صَبَاحُ *sba7*

ص is an ordinary s said with the tongue dropped and the throat opened, as if your mouth were full. And it spreads: the vowel beside it darkens. Say *sbah* with your usual s and you will be understood, and you will sound foreign from the first syllable.

غ

NEW

A g that scrapes

gh · مَغْرِبِي *maghribi*

غ is near the g of “go” but with friction — and it is the French r of “Paris”, voiced. A French speaker is handed this one outright. You are starting from nothing on it.

The digits in the transcription are not a gimmick: 7 is ح and 3 is ع because each digit looks like the letter. It is what the whole of Morocco has typed since mobile phones arrived, and what you will see in any message.

3 EIGHTEEN WORDS

Grouped by family, not alphabetically: you learn them in the order you use them. The transcription uses digits because that is what you will meet on every phone in Morocco: 7 is ح, 3 is ع, kh is خ.

ARRIVING

s-salamu ʔalikum
peace be upon you

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ

The universal greeting. Any hour, anyone. It is not answered with anything except the matching formula.

w ʔalikumu s-salam
and upon you peace

وَعَلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامُ

The obligatory reply. Answer that greeting with “hi” and you have cut something short.

ahlan
hello

أَهْلًا

sbaʔ l-khir
good morning

صَبَاحُ الْخَيْرِ

Literally “morning of the good”. The article glues on: *l-khir*.

mso l-khir
good afternoon, good evening

مَسَاءُ الْخَيْرِ

Covers everything from mid-afternoon on. Darija does not split afternoon from evening the way English does.

marʔba
welcome, hello

مَرْحَبَا

The word on this lesson's sign. Also works as a plain “hello”.

INTRODUCTIONS

smiti
my name is

سَمِيْتِي

Literally “my name”. No verb again: *smiti Karim* is “my name Karim”.

shnu smitek
what is your name? (to a man)

شْنُو سَمِيْتِكَ

To a woman it sounds the same but is written سَمِيْتُكِ.

mtsharrfin
pleased to meet you

مُنْشَرَفِينْ

One form for one person or several, man or woman. Nothing to choose.

“HOW ARE YOU?”

labas
fine; how are you?

لَابَاسْ

The best value in the lesson: it is both the question *and* the answer. *Labas?* – *Labas*. Literally “no harm”.

ki dayr
how are you? (to a man)

كِي دَايْرْ

ki dayra
how are you? (to a woman)

كِي دَايْرَة

Same word plus the feminine *-a*. English “you” does not split like this; Darija's does, and it will keep doing so.

bikhir
well

بِخَيْرِ

l-ʔamdu lillah
praise be to God

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

The ordinary answer to “how are you?”, whoever says it and whatever they believe. It works like “can't complain”: a formula, not a statement of faith. The first letter is not your h.

w nta
and you?

وَنْتْ

LEAVING

bslama
goodbye

بِسْلَامَة

Literally “with peace”. The everyday goodbye, not a solemn one.

thella f-rasek
take care

تَهْلَّا فَرَاْسَكْ

Literally “look after your head”. Said constantly, and warm.

lila sʔida
good night

لَيْلَة سَعِيدَة

Only on leaving, never on arriving.



THIS LESSON ONLINE

learningdarija.com/en/course/1/

4 THE SENTENCE WITH NO VERB

These four sentences are correct and complete. Read them and work out what is missing.

1

أَنَا مَغْرِبِي

ana maghribi

2

نَتَّ لَا بَاش؟

nta labas?

3

هِيَ مِنْ فَاش

hiya mn Fas

4

حَنَا هْنَا

7na hna

WHAT IS MISSING FROM ALL FOUR?

THE RULE

There is no verb. None at all.

In the present tense Darija has **no “to be”**. You put the pronoun, you put what you want to say, and the sentence is finished. *ana maghribi* is “I Moroccan”, and it means “I am Moroccan”. *7na hna* is “we here”, and it means “we are here”.

The verb does exist in the past and the future, and there it is a real word – كَانَ, *kan*. In the present there is simply no slot to fill.

THE EIGHT PRONOUNS

PRONOUN

SAY

MEANS

أَنَا *ana*

I

PRONOUN	SAY	MEANS
	نْتَ <i>nta</i>	you (to a man)
	نْتِي <i>nti</i>	you (to a woman)
	هُوَ <i>huwa</i>	he
	هِيَ <i>hiya</i>	she
	حَنَا <i>7na</i>	we
	نْتُمْ <i>ntuma</i>	you (plural)
	هُمَ <i>huma</i>	they

Two things to notice. Singular “you” **splits by gender** — *nta* to a man, *nti* to a woman — which English never does, so it is genuinely new work. But the plural does not split at all: *huma* is they, full stop. A French speaker has to unlearn *ils/elles* there; you have nothing to unlearn.

WHAT ENGLISH HANDS YOU, AND WHAT IT CHARGES YOU

Free: you already say the pronoun every single time. “Am Moroccan” is not English. A Spanish speaker has to fight a lifelong habit of dropping it, because Spanish verbs carry the person. You never learned that habit, so there is nothing to break.

Free: no polite “you”. Darija says *nta* to everybody, exactly as English says “you” to everybody. French and Spanish speakers both have a formality reflex to suppress here.

Charged: dropping the verb. English cannot form a sentence without one, and your hand will keep reaching for the missing word.

YOUR MISTAKE, NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S

When the “to be” slot feels empty, English speakers go looking for a word to fill it — and the word they find is **كَانَ**, *kan*. It is a real verb and it is in the dictionary. It is also **the past tense**.

×

أَنَا كَانَ مَغْرِبِي

“I was Moroccan.” Grammatical, and not what you meant.

✓

أَنَا مَغْرِبِي

“I am Moroccan.”

And the one people hear first: **الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ** does not start with your h. ح is made further back, a tight breath with the throat narrowed — English has nothing like it, and neither does French. Say it with the h of “house” and you have produced ه, a different letter. A Spanish speaker is at least handed خ for free; you get neither.

5 A SIGN AND A CARD

No prose yet — street text. These two are what you meet on arriving at a riad in Fez, and between them they use five words from this lesson. Notice that neither line contains a verb.

مَرْحَبًا بِكُمْ

رِيَّاضُ الزَّيْتُونَةِ

Sign by the door

كَرِيمٌ بَنَانِي

رِيَّاضُ الزَّيْتُونَةِ

الْمَدِينَةُ الْقَدِيمَةُ · فَاسْ

صَبَاحُ الْخَيْرِ · مُسَا الْخَيْرِ

Business card

DID YOU FOLLOW IT?

1. Which word on the sign means “welcome”?
2. How many verbs are there on the sign?
3. The card says فَاسْ. What is it?

6 CHECK

1 MATCH

Pair each line with the thing said back to it.

1	السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ	a	شَمِيتِي كَرِيم
2	كِي دَايْر؟	b	وَعَلَيْكُمْ السَّلَام
3	شْنُو شَمِيتْكَ؟	c	نَهْلَا فَرَاْسَكْ
4	بِسْلَامَة	d	الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

2 PICK THE RIGHT ONE

Only one of the three is correct Darija.

- a. أَنَا مَغْرِبِي

b. أَنَا كَانَ مَغْرِبِي

c. مَغْرِبِي
- a. نْتُوْمَا لَا بَاسْ؟

b. نَتِ لَا بَاسْ؟

c. هُوَ لَا بَاسْ؟
- a. هُوْمَا مِنْ فَاسْ

b. هِي مِنْ فَاسْ

c. خَنَا مِنْ فَاسْ

3 SUPPLY THE PRONOUN

Fill in with أَنَا, نَت, هُوَ or هُنَا. Each is used once.

أَنَا نَت هُوَ هُنَا

1. شَمِيتِي كَرِيمَ ____

2. مَنْ قَاشَ ____

3. لَابَاشَ؟ ____

4. هُنَا ____

4 SWITCH THE GENDER

Rewrite each one addressed to a woman, or about a woman.

1. نَت لَابَاشَ؟

2. هُوَ مَنْ قَاشَ

3. كِي دَايِرَ؟

5 WRITE

Introduce yourself in three lines: greet, give your name, say where you are from. Without a single verb, which you will not need.

أَنَا شَمِيتِي مَنْ لَابَاشَ مُتَشَرَّفِينَ

I CAN NOW

☐ Greet in the morning, in the afternoon, and on leaving.

☐ Answer “how are you?” without stopping to think.

☐ Give my name and where I am from.

☐ Build a whole sentence with no verb, and say why none is needed.

☐ Tell ح apart from the English h.
