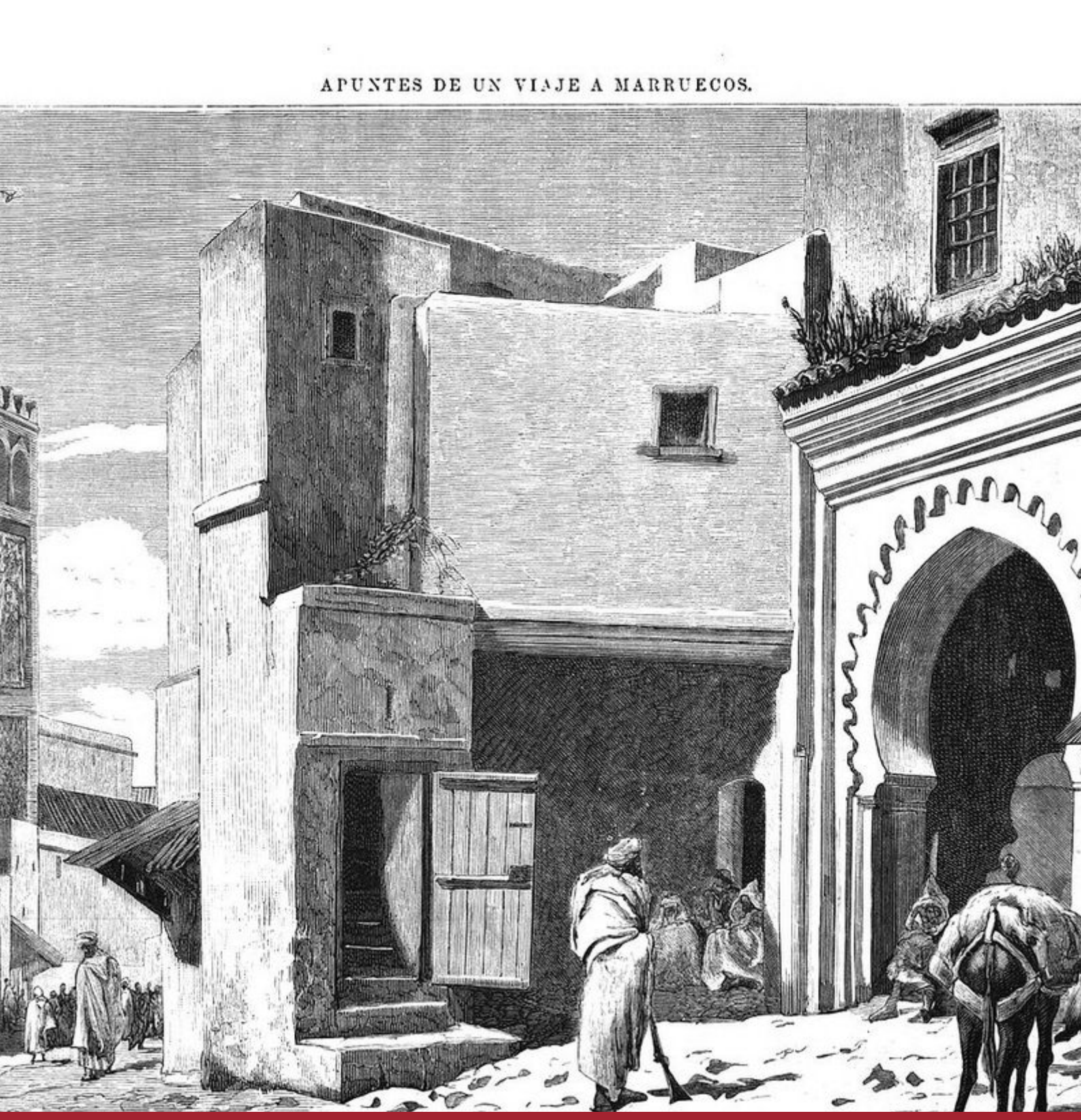


LEARNING DARIJA الدارجة

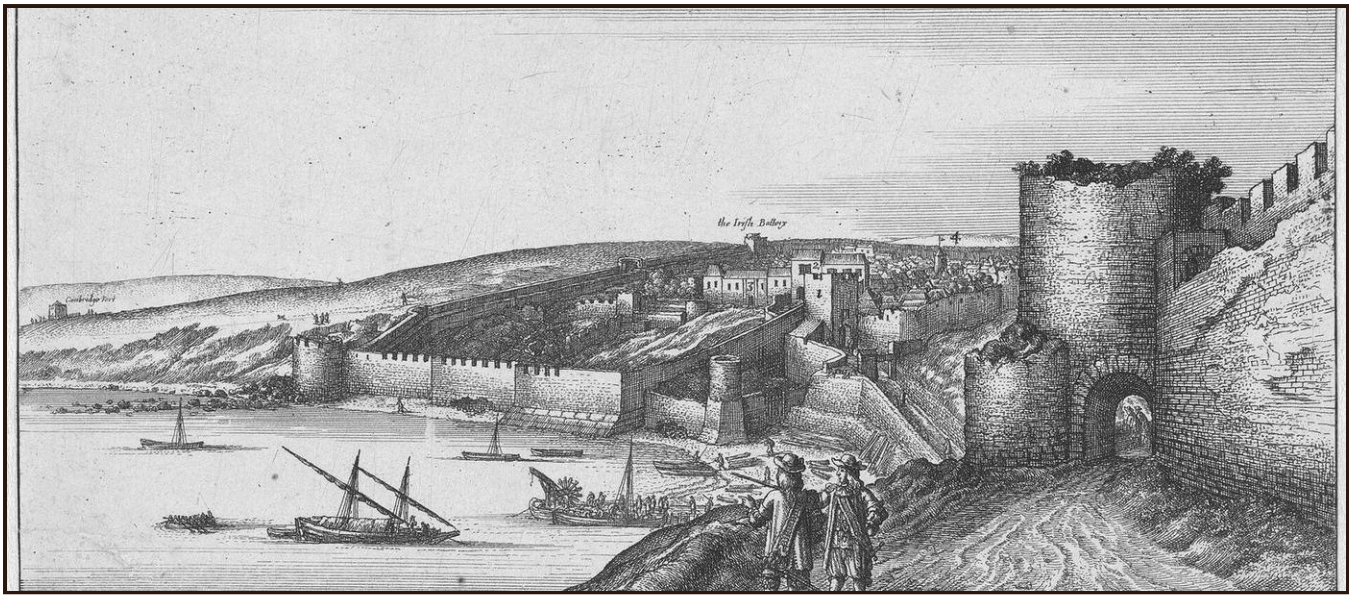
A1

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)

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.

بَ	بِ	بُ	بْ
fatḥa	**kasra**	**ḍamma**	**sukūn**
ba	*bi*	*bu*	*b*
stroke above: sounds **a**	stroke below: sounds **i**	curl above: sounds **u**	small circle above: **no vowel**: the consonant stands bare

بّ
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: صْبَاحْ 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	ا	بَ	صْ
7	ā	ba	s

صْبَاحْ *sbaʔ*

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

Not your h

7: مَرْحْبَا *mar7ba*

New. 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 ه, a different letter, and swapping them changes the word.

ع

The one nobody is given

3: سْعِيدَة *s3ida*

The hard one. 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

The ch in “loch”

kh: الْخِيرْ *l-khir*

New. 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

The sh in “ship”

sh: شْنُو *shnu*

You have it. 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

An s with a hollow mouth

s: صْبَاحْ *sba7*

New. 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

A g that scrapes

gh: مَغْرِبِي *maghribi*

New. 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 3likum — السَّلَامُ عْلِيكُمْ
peace be upon you

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

w 3likumu s-salam — وْعْلِيكُمُ السَّلَامْ
and upon you peace

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

ahlan — أَهْلًا
hello

sba7 l-khir — صْبَاحْ الْخِيرْ
good morning

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

msa l-khir — مْسَا الْخِيرْ
good afternoon, good evening

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

mar7ba — مَرْحْبَا
welcome, hello

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

"How are you?"

labas — لَابَاسْ
fine; how are you?

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

ki dayr — كِي دَايْرْ
how are you? (to a man)

ki dayra — كِي دَايْرَة
how are you? (to a woman)

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

bikhir — بِخِيرْ
well

l-7amdu lillah — الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهْ
praise be to God

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 — وْنْتَ
and you?

Introductions

smiti سْمِيتِي
my name is

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

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

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

mtsharrfin مْتْشَرّْفِينْ
pleased to meet you

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

Leaving

bslama بِسْلَامَة
goodbye

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

thella f-rasek تْهَلَّا فْرَاسَكْ
take care

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

lila s3ida لِيلَة سْعِيدَة
good night

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 نْتَ لَابَاسْ؟

nta labas?

3 هِيَ مْنْ فَاسْ

hiya mn Fas

4 حْنَا هْنَا

ʔna 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". *ʔna 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: كَانْ, *kan*. In the present there is simply no slot to fill.

The eight pronouns

Pronoun	Say	Means
أَنَا	*ana*	I
نْتَ	*nta*	you (to a man)
نْتِ	*nti*	you (to a woman)
هُوَ	*huwa*	he
هِيَ	*hiya*	she
حْنَا	*ʔna*	we
نْتُومَا	*ntuma*	you (plural)
هُومَا	*huma*	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 كَانْ, *kan*. It is a real verb and it is in the dictionary. It is also **the past tense**.

أَنَا مَغْرِبِي

"I am Moroccan."

*

أَنَا كَانْ مَغْرِبِي

"I was Moroccan." Grammatical, and not what you meant.

And the one people hear first: اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰه 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.

مَرْحْبَا بِيكُمْ

رِيَاضْ الزِّيتُونَة

Sign by the door

كَرِيمْ بَنَّانِي

رِيَاضْ الزِّيتُونَة

الْمْدِينَة الْقْدِيمَة، فَاسْ

صْبَاحْ الْخِيرْ، مْسَا الْخِيرْ

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?
4. Why does the card carry two greetings rather than one?

6 CHECK

1 Match

Pair each line with the thing said back to it.

1	السَّلَامُ عْلِيكُمْ	a	سْمِيتِي كَرِيمْ
2	كِي دَايْرْ؟	b	وْعْلِيكُمُ السَّلَامْ
3	شْنُو سْمِيتَكْ؟	c	تْهَلَّا فْرَاسَكْ
4	بِسْلَامَة	d	الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهْ

2 Pick the right one

Only one of the three is correct Darija.

1.
a. أَنَا مَغْرِبِي
b. أَنَا كَانْ مَغْرِبِي
c. مَغْرِبِي

2.
a. نْتُومَا لَابَاسْ؟
b. نْتِ لَابَاسْ؟
c. هُوَ لَابَاسْ؟

3.
a. هُومَا مْنْ فَاسْ
b. هِيَ مْنْ فَاسْ
c. حْنَا مْنْ فَاسْ

3 Supply the pronoun

Fill in with أَنَا, نْتِ, هُوَ or حْنَا. Each is used once.

أَنَا نْتِ هُوَ حْنَا

1. ___ سْمِيتِي كَرِيمْ
2. ___ مْنْ فَاسْ
3. ___ لَابَاسْ؟
4. ___ هْنَا

4 Switch the gender

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

1. نْتَ لَابَاسْ؟

2. هُوَ مْنْ فَاسْ

3. كِي دَايْرْ؟

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 سْمِيتِي مْنْ لَابَاسْ مْتْشَرَّفِينْ