

Flash Arabic.

Carlsbad, CA: Penton Overseas, Inc., 2006. ISBN: 978-1-59125-943-5.

This review aims to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the set titled *Flash Arabic* in the series *Speak in a Week*, published by Penton Overseas. The set is composed of 1001 color-coded and double-sided flash cards. The color green denotes verbs, purple denotes prepositions, red denotes adjectives, and blue denotes nouns. One side gives the Arabic word and its phonetic transcription, the other the word's meaning in English. Some cards include visual hints. The set does not include a statement of objectives, nor does it offer any guidelines or learning strategies. The order of vocabulary items does not follow the logic of high frequency use but, rather, lists words in alphabetical order.

One criticism I have concerns language mistakes that should not have occurred if the publisher had had the product reviewed by a language professional who knew Arabic. Mistakes include the following:

مطار instead of مطر, إلى instead of إلی, على instead of علی,
نادرأ instead of نادرأ, الشارع instead of الشارع,
المخبز instead of الخباز.

In some cases, a word is repeated twice, for example: بقى; one time it is correctly translated as “to stay” and another time it is mistranslated.

Another example is the word دل; it is translated as meaning “to lead” and “to lend.” Other examples include the word وطن which means “homeland” and not “furthermore.”

A second criticism I have is that the English phonetic transliteration is not accurate. Some of my students were unable to match the phonetic transcription to the word(s) it corresponds to. The cards do not include inflection marks even though this is common practice. However, adding the short vowel in the phonetic transcription is not optional. For example, the word مشمس is transliterated into *Mishmiss*. The proper short vowel is ضمة *Dammah* and therefore the correct transliteration should be *Mushmiss*.

In some cases, the transliteration follows the Gulf dialect, not the MSA rules of pronunciation. For example, the letter **ق** is pronounced like a “Q” in MSA and with a “Gu” sound in Gulf dialect. Words like **فندق**, **قهوة**, **ورق** are transcribed as Fundug, Gahwa, and Warag. If this is a rule that the writer wanted to use, s/he should have said so from the beginning. However, this practice is not consistent on all cards; for example, the word **أشقر** is transcribed as “Ashqar.” Actually the set could benefit from including a CD to help beginning students. Some words belong to dialect, for example **شواي شواي**. When introducing dialect, the writer should point it out to students.

Some cards include good visuals; for example, the verbs for “carry,” “catch,” “hold,” “marry” and at least 10 more verbs have excellent illustrations. However, some visuals are rather confusing; to convey the adjective “valuable,” for example, the card picture jewelry. Another example is the adjective “serious,” which has a picture of a young man wearing a suit.

Blue cards containing nouns are another issue. They introduce words in the definite form but the translation gives them in the indefinite form or vice versa. For example, **العنوان** is translated as “an address.” This problem is crucial as it confuses students. Some cards offer the plural form in Arabic but the singular in English, for example, the word **العيون** which means “eyes” but is translated as “eye.” There are many such mistakes. One of my students worked on identifying cards that had no mistakes at all but could only find 265 (out of a total of 1001).

When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. My students and I made lemon tea, lemonade, lemon marmalade, and, of course, lemon meringue pie. We made up a game called “Find All the Mistakes on the Cards,” and it provided an excellent drill. All things considered, *Flash Arabic* would be best used in a controlled classroom environment under the supervision of an instructor.

The price is a modest \$12.95, which is affordable, and makes *Flash Arabic* look attractive to student users. However, flash cards are intended to be used frequently, so they should be made of a more durable material.

Flash Arabic represents a worthwhile idea but needs serious revision. Ideally, it would offer fewer vocabulary items printed on material of higher quality and would include both a CD and a Work Book.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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