

# Arab podcast entrepreneurs bring the fun into learning Arabic

**Arabic podcasts for English speakers are steadily growing in popularity as more students try to unlock the secrets of the notoriously difficult language. Ehab Saleh and Mohamed Moshaya, creators of Arabicpod.net, are at the forefront of the trend.**

HANNA LEI CAMP, BALADNA

Most Arabic podcasts provide recordings on specific topics in classical Arabic, or "survival phrases" for those seeking some quick help on the streets. But all those poor souls who have endured the grind of hours in Arabic classes filled with shy expatriates studying grammar charts know that Arabic instruction desperately needs some laughter. Moshaya and Saleh started ArabicPod.net for exactly that reason.

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dreds of years, all over the world, but in the same way. This doesn't follow the modern need. We need something more attractive, people want to have fun. The traditional way works, but not for everyone," said Saleh.

"I think it was basically the entertainment factor that was missing in Arabic teaching. Often people debate what language to learn, and I think the fun factor was really missing," said Moshaya.

When the two started, podcasts teaching languages like Spanish and Chinese were already well-established, but there was almost nothing in Arabic. Today,

Arabicpod.net is the most popular Arabic-education podcast listed on iTunes.

"We saw a gap in the market for the Arabic language. We saw the power of podcasts for teaching. We thought here we go, it's time to get Arabic into the market," said Saleh.

Their model is simple: they offer free beginner lessons lasting roughly ten minutes, and then charge a nominal fee for access to the longer and more intricate intermediate and advanced lessons. But the draw of the podcast comes from the easy

than grammar. In one podcast, they pretend to go to a restaurant, find the menu too expensive, and ditch before the waiter returns. In another, they enact a scene where a boy begs his father to avoid going to school. Topics of cultural interest, like a discussion of the Eye (sometimes called the Evil Eye in English) are peppered with anecdotes from their own experiences. The two said they didn't devote much of their time to getting the word out, insisting it was all their listeners telling others

about the podcast. The listeners themselves are diverse; they've received emails from South Americans of Arab descent,

from elderly South Africans, and even one from a blind listener, who cannot study Arabic in the traditional way. Another listener is a pregnant German woman who, though not Arab herself, loves the language and wants her baby to grow up listening to it. But both Moshaya and Saleh are full of ideas to improve their podcast, hoping one day to expand with sections devoted to specialised topics like business Arabic, and dialects like Levantine and Egyptian. Recently, two new podcasters located in Beirut have begun contributing shows to the website.

The fees they charge for the more advanced lessons are enough to cover the bandwidth required for the thousands of downloads

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rapport the two friends share. Saleh, a Jordan national, met Moshaya in Britain when both were in college. Moshaya had grown up in the UK speaking English with his mother and Arabic with his father, and lived in Jeddah for 12 years. They frequently joke with each other and with their guests, who are sometimes fellow native speakers and sometimes complete beginners from whom they coax repetitions of the difficult phrases. They also choose topics with an eye towards entertainment rather

they get a month, but not yet enough to let them leave their day jobs to devote their time to the podcast, which both say they would like to do.

"We have tens of thousands of people listening to us and we know this. Some people just want to learn classical, some colloquial, some just business Arabic. We're really trying to cover everyone's needs," said Moshaya.

"To keep them interested in the Arabic language, that's the challenge."



## Archaeologists find evidence of ancient civilization in southern Syria



Underground cemetery in Tell al-Ashari

**Archaeologists working in Tell al-Ashari in the Dara'a Province have discovered underground cemeteries dating from the Roman Era between the 2nd and the 4th centuries CE.**

The discovery, now being hailed as one of the most significant archaeological findings in recent years indicates a human presence in the area dating back ten thousand years. Excavation activities in the northern part of Tell al-Ash'ari revealed building remains from the Roman times, while a building that was used as 'hammam' (Arabic for baths) was found to the south

of the site.

Qasemm Muhammad, director of Dara'a Excavation Department told Baladna of the findings that include pottery, lamps, swords, effigies and medals, and date back to the middle of the Bronze Age. This is a clear indication that that Horan area was once a cultural crossroads in the ancient East. Tell al-Ash'ari includes a huge rough stone rampart similar to those found in Tell Ashtara (hill), 5 km to the north of al-Ash'ari. A number of spearheads, arrowheads and flint scrapers also show evidence of an inhabited area at that time,

## UNDP outlines plans for Syria

**United Nation Development Programme's Deputy Resident Representative Zena Ali-Ahmad confirmed on Sunday that the cooperation between Syria and UNDP must focus on poverty reduction, environmental issues, women empowerment and disaster reduction.**

SANA

She indicated that the UNDP is no longer a donor. It is now a partner and helps carry out Syria's national priorities. The cooperation will lend Syria assistance in development of local administration, labour and social affairs and participation in humanitarian and social campaigns to combat cancer. UNDP is also involved in the project to reduce rural poverty as 'Syria's poorest village' project, which aims to implement

infrastructures and strategies for health and education sectors, two priorities of the five-year development plans.

In a statement to SANA, Ali-Ahmad stressed that at the level of civil society sector, the basic partnership is with the Syrian General Secretariat of Development in addition to some other non-governmental associations, syndicates and organizations. UNDP also seeks to obtain a budget from World Wildlife Fund to finance environmental projects in Syria as of 2011.

According to Ali-Ahmad big numbers of newspapers and magazines in Syria during the past ten years reflect the development of this sector. "There is no country in the world that does like what Syria offers to the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in general," Ali Ahmed reiterated.

## Saudi Arabia generates green energy

Oil rich Saudi Arabia announced last week the completion of its first ever solar energy project. The solar park at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Jeddah, built in collaboration with German-based solar consortium Conergy represents significant progress in Saudi environmental concern. "For the first time, clean power is flowing into the national grid. This is a historical event for us in Saudi Arabia," said Abdulhadi Al-Mureeh, the managing director of NSS. The park of 9,300 solar modules will generate 3,332 MW hours of clean energy annually, saving 33,320 tons of carbon emissions. Despite the oil reserves that amount at 20 per cent of the world's capacity, Saudi Arabia has started projects to exploit renewable energy. Central to the program are a series of solar-powered desalination facilities incorporating locally developed nanotechnology to produce safe drinking water. Renewable energy projects reduce the amount of energy used to desalinate water and improve efficiency enough to reduce the overall cost by some 40 per cent. IBM researchers and scientists have worked for two years on several desalination technology projects. The partners will combine two of these to create a solar-powered desalination plant that will produce 7.9 million gallons of water a day for the town Al Khafji, which has a population of 100,000. Saudi Arabia has long thought about using solar power in small projects, such as a 1980s "Solar Village" program to develop the use of the technology in remote regions, its aspirations appear to be growing. "One of the research efforts that we are going to undertake is to see how we make Saudi Arabia a center for solar energy research, and hopefully over the next 30 to 50 years we will be a major megawatt exporter," Saudi Arabia's oil minister, Ali al-Nuaimi said.

## UAE bans weight loss green tea and coffee

**The Ministry of Environment and Water has banned the sale of weight loss products, gulfnews reported.**

Laboratory tests revealed potentially

harmful ingredients that were not declared on the label of Leptin Green Coffee 800 and Leptin Slimming Bag Green Tea. MOEW issued a decision on Sunday, banning the sale and import of the products nationwide. Ministry officials said they

were not registered as medicines and were being sold without prescription. The products, which are manufactured by America Leptin Pharmaceuticals, were banned in Saudi Arabia last month after it was found they contained Sibutramine.

Sibutramine was formerly licensed for slimming, but later suspended from use after studies revealed its link to cardiovascular diseases. America Leptin Pharmaceuticals has not left any comment to the ban.