

BEL MASRI · بالمصري

Your First Ten Phrases of Egyptian Arabic

The Arabic your family speaks at the table

A Friday afternoon in Cairo. Too many people in one room, a tray of tea going round, and a wall of words you half know. These ten phrases carry you from the door to the goodbye. Say them and the room softens.

Every phrase comes from the Bel Masri course, spelled the way the app spells it.

HOW TO READ THE SOUNDS

7	A breathy H from deep in the throat, as in *el-7amdu lillah*.
3	Its rougher cousin, deeper still, as in *ma3lesh*.
S D T	A capital letter is a heavier, emphatic consonant, as in *khalaaS*.
'	A catch in the throat, like the middle of "uh-oh". In Cairo the letter q turns into this, so coffee is *'ahwa*.
g	Always the g in "go". Where other Arabs say j, Cairo says g.

AT THE DOOR

01 'ahlan wa-sahlan أهلاً وسهلاً

welcome

The warm hello. A host says it as you come through the door, and you say it right back when someone arrives after you. The short form, *'ahlan*, works for everyone else: the doorman, the waiter, the cousin you've never met.

In use: **'aywa, 'ana maSreyya. 'ahlan wa-sahlan!** Yes, I'm Egyptian. Welcome!

> *Say it before anyone says it to you.*

02 'ezzayyak / 'ezzayyik إزيك

how are you? (to a man / to a woman)

The question that follows every hello. The ending tells the listener who you're asking: *-ak* for a man, *-ik* for a woman. On a phone screen both look the same. Out loud, people hear the difference straight away.

In use: **masa el-kheer! 'ezzayyak?** Good evening! How are you?

> *-ak for him, -ik for her. This ending runs through the whole dialect.*

03

kwayyis, el-7amdu lillah

كويس، الحمد لله

fine, thank God

The answer, almost a reflex. *kwayyis* is good, *el-7amdu lillah* is thank God, and most people say both. This time the ending follows you, the speaker: a woman says *kwayyisa*.

In use: **kwayyis, el-7amdu lillah.** Fine, thank God.

> *Having a terrible day? Still el-7amdu lillah, with a heavier breath.*

04

tamaam

تمام

great, all good, exactly

The all-purpose yes. Someone explains the plan, you say *tamaam*. Someone asks if the tea is right, *tamaam*. It closes a small exchange and moves things along.

In use: **tamaam. we-sh-shamsiyya di?** Great. And this umbrella?

> *When in doubt, tamaam.*

05 etfaDDal / etfaDDali اتفضل

here you are, go ahead, come in

The word that comes with every plate, every chair and every open door. *etfaDDal* to a man, *etfaDDali* to a woman. You'll hear it ten times at one dinner, and once you start saying it, you'll pass things like a host.

In use: **'aywa, etfaDDal. 3ala feen?** Yes, get in. Where to?

> *Hand something over? etfaDDal. Wave someone in? etfaDDal.*

06 shukran شكراً

thank you

Works with anyone and never changes. There's a second thank you that follows your own gender, *mutshakker* for a man and *mutshakkira* for a woman, and it sounds a touch warmer. The reply you'll get is *el-3afw*, you're welcome.

In use: **7itta Sughayyara bass, mutshakker.** Just a small piece, thanks.

> *Unsure which ending is yours? shukran can't go wrong.*

07

ma3lesh

معلش

never mind, it's okay

The most Egyptian word there is. Someone bumps you, *ma3lesh*. You're late, *ma3lesh*. The shop's out of bread, *ma3lesh*. It forgives, it apologises and it shrugs, depending on the tone.

In use: **ma3lesh. feeh 3eesh baladi?** Never mind. Is there local bread?

> *Said to you after a mistake, it means you're forgiven.*

08

khalaaS

خلاص

done, that's it, it's settled

Ends things. The argument, the plate, the negotiation. Say it with a hand wave and the matter is closed. Pair it with *ma3lesh* and you've accepted an apology in two words.

In use: **ma3lesh ya noor, khalaaS.** Never mind, Nour. It's fine.

> *The capital S is a heavy s, from deeper in the mouth.*

ASKING NICELY

09

momken ... law sama7t

ممكن ... لو سمحت

could I ... please

momken opens a request, *law sama7t* closes it, and anything in between gets handed to you. The menu, the key, the bill. To a woman the ending shifts: *law sama7ti*.

In use: **momken el-minyu law sama7t?** Could I have the menu, please?

> *momken on its own, with raised eyebrows, is a complete question.*

THE GOODBYE

10

ma3a s-salaama

مع السلامة

goodbye

Word for word, with safety. The person staying behind answers *allah yisallemak* to a man or *allah yisallemik* to a woman, God keep you safe. Leaving an Egyptian home takes a while, so expect to say this more than once on the way to the door.

In use: **shukran, ma3a s-salaama.** Thanks, goodbye.

> *Said to you: allah yisallemak. Say it back when it's your turn to stay.*

Now hear them.

The 7 and the 3 never quite survive on paper. The Bel Masri app has every one of these phrases voiced in Cairene Egyptian, with the lessons that make them stick. Ten minutes a day, free to try.

Out now on iPhone and Android.

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