

Notre Dame University Louaize. *Spoken Lebanese: A Special Program for Lebanese Living Abroad and for Those Who Wish to Learn Spoken Lebanese*. Mekayel, Lebanon: Meouchy & Zakaria, 2009. \$50 ISBN 978-9-953-45780-2. 244 pp.

A legitimate need exists for new pedagogical tools in the field of Arabic as a Second Language, as interest in the study of the language has surged in the past decade. Notre Dame University Louaize offers a fine resource to address this void with the launch of the Spoken Lebanese project. *Volume I: English—Spoken Lebanese* is the initial release in their efforts to aid those who desire to learn and to speak Lebanese Arabic.

The softbound seven-and-half-by-eleven-inch text comes with eight colorful audio cds that fit into the book cover. The book consists of an introduction, sixteen episodes, and a glossary. The introduction briefly discusses how to utilize the text. The book uses a chart of transliteration and follows the format of first English, then transliterated Lebanese Arabic, and finally written Modern Standard Arabic throughout the entire text. Each ten-to-fifteen page episode is one thematic unit complete with contextualized vocabulary. Each episode contains one focal dialog linked to the episode's theme, followed by five activities designed to explain the vocabulary and expand on the theme. The sixteen situations presented in the text were chosen for their usefulness to the beginning student; for example, introductions, numbers, clothes, family, and animals. Finally, each episode ends with a list of designated vocabulary. A seven-page glossary at the end of the book creates a master word list from all sixteen episodes. Instructionally, the episodes are constructed so that the learner simultaneously listens to the audio cd and reads the dialog, next listens to and reads the activities, and finally re-listens to the dialog. If needed, the learner may check the word list at the end of the episode for clarification.

Spoken Lebanese is an introduction to spoken Arabic truly aimed at the beginner. The transliteration chart and system used is concise and understandable. The chart will be continually referenced by any learner, and a better location for it would have been on the back of one of the covers or as an easy cut-out. Other recommendations include providing a more substantive introduction that gives some historical and linguistic background to the study of Arabic. However, the text's straightforward

design and conciseness are ultimately assets when studying a language with such a challenging reputation.

The audio recordings linked to each episode are appropriately paced and clear, and they add notable value to this resource. English is read by a male and Arabic is read by a female; however, for the Arab readings having both a male and female reader would have reinforced gender markings and added realism to the dialogs. The activities that follow each episode are not mechanical exercises, they are lists of words or mini-dialogs designed to be listened to and verbally repeated—perhaps a better title for them would have been “extended dialogs” or “further discussion.” The activities successfully link to the theme of each episode, while recycling vocabulary and grammatical concepts from previous episodes. However, *Spoken Lebanese* was not designed as a grammar text; in fact, there are no grammar explanations anywhere in the text. *Spoken Lebanese* was designed as a presentation and reinforcement of contextualized input, and in this capacity the textbook absolutely excels.

This book-and-audio series is a recommended resource for several audiences. First, this text is an excellent self-study for Arabic heritage learners, particularly (but not solely for) Lebanese, the largest group of Arab Americans. Also, many students studying the commonly taught Modern Standard Arabic desire to speak a native spoken language (MSA is the language of formal speeches, writing, and religion, but the Arabic spoken in homes and in public depends on which dialect is spoken in the region where one resides). Lebanese Arabic is understood throughout much of the Arabic-speaking world, owing to the past and continued popularity of Lebanese composers and singers. Thus, the text would serve as an excellent addition to a formal Arabic course.

In sum, this book is a recommended entry point for learners interested in speaking Arabic. This reader hopes that the three other releases of the project: *Volume II: French—Spoken Lebanese*, *Volume III: English—Standard Classical Arabic*, and *Volume IV: Spanish—Spoken Lebanese* are equally valuable to their respective audiences.

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