

**The Reading Matrix**  
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**The Berlitz Passport to Arabic**

*Reviewed by Ibrahim Suliman Ahmed*

Title	Passport to 31 Languages
Publisher	Berlitz and The Learning Company
Platform	Microsoft Windows ® 98/95
Minimum hardware Requirements : for PC	16 MB of RAM; 15 MB of available hard disk space ; SVGA graphics- 256 color support or higher ; Double speed CD- ROM; Window compliant sound card ; Window compatible mouse or pointing device; microphone ( for speech Recognition)
Price	<a href="http://www.learningco.com">Http://www.learningco.com</a> - <a href="http://www.berlitz.com">http://www.berlitz.com</a>

As the word Berlitz might suggest this program is a “computerized” version of their successful “phrase book” approach to language learning and is aimed at the general traveler or businessman who might need some basic Arabic to get started. This is evidenced when we look at the phrases chosen which usually use the first person pronoun أنا (‘ana) “I”. The program is, however, very versatile in that a wide variety of translation languages can be specified and the choice of target language is equally diverse. For example a Spanish speaker wishing to learn Arabic can choose Spanish as the translation language and Arabic as the target language. This allows a huge number of possible permutations and means this two CD pack can be sold worldwide. As in the Rosetta stone program it is clear that a general format has been produced and different languages imposed on top. The photographs are generally of westerners pursuing western behaviors.

There are two CDRoms. The first is an installation disc that can be used with any of the 31 languages available in the Berlitz series. The second disc needs to be inserted to run the particular language chosen. The first important point to note is that Berlitz allows a verbal response from the student. (Contrast this with the Rosetta Stone CD, which offers only non-verbal controlled practice). Part of the initial installation is for voice recognition software. The program is not in a windows format and once entered has to be exited before the computer can be used for any other program.

Once the installation is complete, the program goes straight to the “options” screen, which is for the student to sign in. This allows any number of students to use the program and keeps a record of the date of each use. Adjacent to the sign-in screen are 4 buttons: Main, Help, Option and Exit. “Option” is highlighted to indicate that is where we are. If the student is unsure how to proceed then the help button overlays the screen with instruction labels. Choosing “Main” brings up a new screen which allows a choice of five possible activities.

The main menu is divided into five titles, namely:

- Learn by topic
- Pronunciation
- Dictionary
- Grammar
- Travel

“Learn by topic” has the bulk of the possible lesson material and we shall examine this last.

“Pronunciation” has a record and playback feature. Unfortunately this seems to require additional software installation, the specifics of which were not given so the present researcher was unable to access it, use it or assess it.

“Dictionary” is just as the name suggests; any item of vocabulary in the program can be searched for and its translation and pronunciation given. This is a huge improvement on the ordinary dictionary, which has to rely on phonemic symbols to aid pronunciation.

“Grammar” contains an overview of the Arabic language, its phonetics, orthography and syntax. There is not much here of use to the student however, and could be greatly expanded and improved. One would expect a searchable reference section whereby the student could select any grammar point, for example “formation of questions” and see the rules and clear examples of their use.

“Travel” brings up the first of six pages, which give a general overview of the Arabic people and their customs. Each “page” has a photograph of either people or places followed by a text, accompanied my rather non-Arabic music!

Having explored these other buttons a student would generally be interested in getting down to some work and would click on “Learn by Topics”. This brings up another screen. The main part of the screen is a scroll-down menu of 17 topics and their subtopics. To the left, at the top, a photograph is displayed of one of the photos used in the particular topic area; as one clicks on different topics the photo changes. Below this another box contains sample vocabulary from the chosen topic. At the bottom, on the left is a “print” button.

To the right of the main scroll-down menu, at the top, are the main navigational buttons of “Main” “Help” “Options” and “Exit” and below that another box which allows the student to select the form or mode of dealing with the topic chosen. These could be called the sub-menus and are:

- Words
- Phrases
- Matching
- Flash cards
- Association

Each of these allows the student to focus on either vocabulary practice, useful phrases a traveler might need for a given topic (for example, for the topic “Our body” the student can repeat such phrases as “Help” “I am ill”) or test their learning. As the name suggests “matching” involves listening to a target word in Arabic (its written form is also given) and clicking on the appropriate picture or part of a picture. Flash cards are exactly as those a teacher would use in a normal classroom and could be used either for presentation or controlled practice. The “association” activity is more advanced and does not connect to each topic, which is a pity and a lost opportunity. There are 6 irregular shapes, each has a phrase in Arabic written on it. The student must decide which one is the odd one out and drag it using the mouse to the “shred-o-matic”. A score is kept. This activity is more a form of reading practice.

A clear idea of the tasks involved in the five sub-menu option might best be given by taking a topic (for example, “Who we are”) and going through it step-by-step.

### Words:

If you click this option then a picture of a family appears (a very western family). At the top of the screen is the task option chosen, in this case “Learn by topic”. If the cursor is placed anywhere in this “header” band area then a drop down option menu appears allowing a return to the Pronunciation, Dictionary, and Grammar or Travel options. Below this is the name of the topic chosen, in this case “Who we are”. To the right of the picture, at the top, is a box containing the general navigational options of “Main” “Help” “Options” and “Exit”? Below this is a “Topic” button and clicking on this takes one back to the main topic menu. Below this are the buttons that allow a new choice of task, namely, Words, Phrases, Matching, Flash cards and Association. Words is highlighted to let one know that this option has been chosen but any time the student can opt for a new choice without having to go back to the other navigational screens. The navigation around the site is easy.

Immediately below the photograph are two long boxes, one above the other. The upper contains the target word written in Arabic and the lower the English translation. This is useful as it resolves any misinterpretation of the picture and ought to be an integral part of any audio-visual program.

Below the “written form” boxes, to the left, is a “loudspeaker” button which allows the student to hear the word pronounced as many times as needed. Next to this is a box, which allows the student to move forward or backwards with the target words and pages. For example, the photograph of the family has five target words and the student can move from one target word to the next and back again or the student can move onto a different “page” which brings up a new photo and a new set of words (grandparents). The student can also choose the target words by clicking on the picture. This allows the student complete choice in the words and order presented. Within the limited parameters of this kind of picture/word matching activity every possible option of choice is given. At the bottom, on the right, is an unmarked “repeat” button, which allows the student to hear the target word in Arabic as many times as desired.

One section of the photograph is highlighted (corresponding to word #1 for that lesson) in a colored box and the instructor pronounces the word, in this case رضيع (*radi*). A translation in English “infant” is also spoken. Remember that integral to this screen is a section for the written form in Arabic first and then the translation language below (English in this case). All the student has to do is click around the picture or word/page button to get a new word. If you click on any part of the picture, for example رجل (*rajul*) “man” the highlight square will move to the target and the instructor will pronounce it. Both written forms will automatically change. There are five target words for the first picture namely رضيع (*radi*) “infant”, ولد (*walad*) “child”, امرأة (*imra'a*) “woman”, العائلة (*al-i'la*) “family”. All these can be accessed by clicking the forward/backwards buttons on the icon “word”. Page: if you click this button (it has a right and left arrow) a new picture appears such as جد (*jad*) “grandfather”, جدة “grandmother”, زوج (*zawj*) “husband”, زوجة (*zawga*) “wife”. If you click on the picture of the man and the woman together, the man, his wife and their infant become targeted in a highlighted square. The rest of the target vocabulary for this lesson is:

متزوج (*mutazawig*) for “man” and متزوجة (*mutazawiga*) for the “woman”,  
 نجل، ابن دلو، ( *ibna, bint*) “daughter”, بنت، أم، والد ( *um, w«lida*) “mother”, أب ( *ab*) “father”,  
 ( *walad, najl, ibn*) “son”,  
 عم (من ناحية الأب) خال ( *akh shaiq*) “brother”, شقيق خ ( *al-ahl, alw«ldani*) “parents”,  
 الأخ أو تنب، ( *ibn al-akh aw al'ukht*) “nephew”, ابن الأخ أو الأخت ( *amun*) “uncle”,  
 ابن ابنة عم أو عمة، ( *ama*) “aunt”, عمة (من ناحية الأب) خالة من الأم، ( *bint al'akh aw al'ukht*) “niece”,  
 (من ناحية الأم)

مختص بالأقرباء والأنساب (‘ibn –‘ibna)- ‘am aw ‘ama aw khal aw khala) “ cousin, أو خال أو خالة (mukhta-un bil-‘aqrib«’I wal- ‘ansib«’I) “ related.

### Phrases:

If you press the “phrases” task button then the designer will pronounce all the words one by one such as نعم (na`am) “yes”, من فضلك (min fa`lik) “ please”, شكراً (shukran) “thank you”, أهلاً (ahl`n). The written equivalent and translation is also given. There is a complete list of phrases in their respective topics in appendix 3.

### Matching:

The now familiar first picture of the man and baby appears. The instructor will pronounce one word and its written Arabic form will appear in the appropriate box. There is no translation, written or spoken, in English. The student should select the correct part of the picture by clicking on it. There is an icon for begin/stop and skip. To the right is a box where a score is kept: correct/incorrect/total-remaining/skipped. For instance, the instructor pronounces رضيع (ra`ḍi`un) “boy”. If you click in the correct target area the highlight box appears and there is an associated sound for “correct”. You get one point. If you click on the wrong part of the image then the correct answer is highlighted on the picture and an associated “wrong” sound is heard. The score on “incorrect” increases. The immediate feedback of the correct answer makes this activity less of case of trial and error as in the Rosetta stone “matching activities. It does not have the same demotivating effect when the correct answer is immediately given.

This activity uses the main target vocabulary and therefore provides both revision and reinforcement, as is the case in any target language moving from presentation to controlled practice.

### Flash Cards:

The purpose of these could be revision or a student might start with this activity. It is a passive presentation of the vocabulary in written and spoken form. Here the designer will pronounce each item of the target vocabulary, the word appears in Arabic and English, and appropriate part of the picture is highlighted. رضيع (ra`ḍi`) “infant”, ولد (walad) “boy”, رجل (rajul) “man”, امرأة (Imr’a) “woman”, العائلة (al-`iila) “family”, جد (jad) “grandfather” or “grandmother”, أب (‘ab) “father”, زوجة (zawja) “wife”, والدة (u`m , w«lida) “mother”.

ولد (‘ibn , kajl, walad) “son”,

We may notice that the student has a chance to listen to the all the target words as many times as he likes. At any stage he may pause or continue.

### A Brief Evaluation of the Program:

The format will follow that used for assessing Rosetta stone. However, since this program is very similar to a phrase book of useful words and is topic organized there is much more vocabulary input than grammar input. The section on the logical sequencing of grammar has been changed to read grammar/vocabulary.

#### Content

##### Hawaii analysis.

Listening Input. Audio. The quality is good. Native Arabic speakers are used. Students have a chance to listen as many times as they want.

Pronunciation Input. The student has the chance to record his voice and compare it with the native speaker’s pronunciation , which is a useful and essential feature.

Reading Input. One word and phrases are presented. There is nothing approaching real life reading tasks. The content here assumes that the user is already familiar with the Arabic script.

Speaking Input. None. There are no dialogues or even question and answer sessions.

Visual Input. The images are very accurate, clear, attractive and useful.

Vocabulary. The choice of vocabulary is generally that which would be of most immediate need for an adult beginning to learn Arabic. Sometimes, however synonyms are given and this is confusing. This occurs in the topic of “Who we are” when presenting the names for family members. Two or three words for one meaning are given such as, أم ، والدة (u'm , w«lida) “mother”. ولد ، نجل ، ابن (ibn , kajl, walad) “son”. It is, no doubt, an accident but the choice of target words in the topic “Our body” is perfect for the students I teach, i.e. medical students. It is perhaps surprising that such detailed and technical vocabulary has been included. (see Appendix 4) Perhaps the Berlitz people are used to doctors using their phrase books. It certainly makes this CD an obvious choice for a medical school.

**Presentation of Grammar and Vocabulary:** As in the Rosetta Stone program most of the cases of illogical sequencing come from the fact that Arabic has been imposed on a general format for language learning (with English obviously the base) rather than Arabic grammar dictating the sequence. It is sometimes difficult to judge whether instances of logical sequencing (as in the topic of “Who we are” when the target words are restricted to only the masculine and feminine singular, and the mixed form and plural are avoided) are accidental or not. This researcher suspects that such cases are indeed accidental as there are too many instances of illogical sequencing, when the parameters dictated by Arabic are not taken into consideration. For example, in the same topic “Who we are” it makes sense in English to group such words as mother, daughter and son together but in Arabic it is not a good idea because of the confusion of masculine and feminine forms. It would be easier for the student if the designer used the singular form. Once the student is familiar with the basic structures of masculine, feminine, singular and plural in the Arabic language the designer can present synonyms. A similar problem occurs in the topic “our body” with the use of the *idafaha*- construction. بؤبؤ العين (bubu' al-`ayin) “pupil” قرنية العين (quzahit al-`ayin) “iris”. أعلى الذراع (a`l«-adhir«) “paper arm”. In this phrase the designer uses the الإضافة (al-`I±«fa) construct state which is problematic for the students and, therefore, should have been avoided.

**Specific Structure and Focus of Attention:** The overall use of the “phrase book” approach means that very little careful attention has been given to grammar as such. There are a few glaring errors as in the topic of “beginning and ending our day” when the designer uses the Arabic infinitive wrongly استيقاظ (istiq«th) “waking up”, النهوض (nuhu±) “getting up”, and تصفيف (ta:fif) “combing”. In the topic of “things around us” the designer uses the colors in the masculine form but ignores the feminine. Colors in Arabic vary with masculine or feminine nouns. For example, we say for the masculine bag حقيبة زرقاء (aqiba zarq«) “blue bag”. That none of this is highlighted at all marks a limitation of this kind of program. It is a useful tool for acquiring vocabulary but is not really a comprehensive language learning device. The “phrase book” approach means there is an absence of words in the context of sentences or contextual sentences in a conversation. These would extend the possibility of working with grammar. In the topic of “things around us”, in the section on measurement, the designer uses the cardinal numbers in the right way, but he does not insert the numbers into sentences in order to demonstrate the variance with masculine and feminine such as:

ثلاثة أقلام (thal«thtu 'aql«m) “three pens” or he may say ثلاث بنات (thal«th ban«t) “three girls”. In the same vein the designer uses the تاء (t«) “t” with a cardinal number عشر (ashrata) which should be عشر (ashr) without ة (t«) “t”, because the object is masculine دقيقة (daqiqtan), and therefore the plural should be masculine دقائق (daqa'iq) “minutes”.

Vocabulary learning activities. These are extensive. A wide variety of practice activities are given.

**Input for writing activities:** There are none. This CD would be best used as a controlled practice activity which students can do at their own pace as happens when students spend time in a

language lab session. It would be possible to supplement this program with extension exercises as the content, being organized around topics, lends itself very naturally to real life situations.

Accuracy. There are errors in the program but they are fairly minor. For example, in the “phrase” activity in “Who we are” the wrong noun is chosen as in أنا هنا في فرصة (*an« hun« fi fur-a*) “I am on holiday”. The designer uses the noun فرصة (*fur-a*) for holiday but in Arabic we would use إجازة (*ij«za*) for “holiday” or maybe use عطلة (*u«la*) for “holiday”. In the topic on “our body” he pronounces العظم الخرقفي (*al-`aum al-`arkafi*) “the pelvic bone” but he writes العظم الخرقفي (*al-`aum al-`arkafi*) *alfakhdhi*. In “our body” the designer use the letter ث (*ta*) “t” (*tha*) “th” instead of the letter ذ. In the topic “the food we eat” the designer uses زر (*ruz*) “rice” and he omits the همزة (*hamza*) “a”, but he uses زر (*ruz*) “rice” side by side with the أرز (*urz*) “rice” which may confuse the students, therefore it would be better if only the standard Arabic أرز (*urz*) “rice” was used. In the topic of “what we eat” there is an incorrect choice of phrase for “toilet” تواليت (*tawalit*) “toilet” instead of حمام (*hamam*) “bathroom”, and the plural of حمام (*hamam*) “bathroom”, is حمامات (*hamamat*) “bathrooms”. In the topic of “beginning and ending our day” Monition of ل (*laam*) “I”

قلم كحلة (*qalm kuhla*) “eyeliner”. قلم لكحلة العين (*qalam li kuhlati al-`ayin*) “eyeliner.

The designer writes قلم لكحلة العين (*qalam li kuhlati al-`ayin*) “eyeliner, but he pronounces قلم كحلة (*qalm kuhla*) “eyeliner”. Therefore he omits the ل (*llam*) “I”.

Omission of مضاف إليه (*mudaf ‘ilayhi*) second noun

قلم كحلة (*qalm kuhla*) “eyeliner”. قلم لكحلة العين (*qalam li kuhlati al-`ayin*) “eyeliner.

Again if you take a close a look at the above phrase you may notice that the designer omits the مضاف إليه (*mudaf ‘ilayhi*) “second noun” which is العين (*al-`ayn*) “the eye”. In the topic of “how we feel”

ستيتسكوب (*sititiskub*) “stethoscope the designer uses the English word ستيتسكوب (*sititiskub*) “stethoscope, but in Arabic we say سماعة (*sama`a*) For لاصقة / بلاستر (*lazuq, blastr*) “band aid” the designer uses the English word بلاستر (*blastar*) “band aid” and قوزال (*lazuq*) “plaster” but we use لزقة (*lazqa*) “plaster”. In the topic of “how we feel” the use of the singular is made instead of the plural:

العاطفة والإحساس (*al-`atifa wa ‘l’ihsas*) “emotions and feelings”

If we take a close look we read العاطفة والإحساس (*al-`atifa wa ‘l’ihsas*) but in translation the designer uses “emotions and feelings” which ought to be the plural in Arabic العواطف والأحاسيس (*al-`awatif wa ‘a-l’ahasiis*). In the topic of “cities” it would have been more logical if he had divided the phrase in two sentences such as follows:

أنت على الطريق الخطأ (*anta `ala at-tariqi al-khata`*) “you’re going the wrong way”.and ;

أنتم على الطريق الخطأ (*antum `ala at-tariqi al-khata`*) “you’re on the wrong way”. And we feel the difference and notice and observe it as if there is an adverb after the pronoun.

أنت ( أنتم ) على الطريق الخاطئ ( الغير صحيح ) (*anta – antum `ala at-tariq al-khati ( al-ghair sahih*) “you’re going the wrong way”.

Again we may observe that the designer uses the phrase الغير صحيح (*al-ghayir sahih*) “the wrong way”, but Arabic language forbids the additional of ال (*al*) “the” to غير (*ghayira*) , therefore the sentence should be غير الصحيح (*ghayir as-sahih*) “wrong way”. In the topic on “the world around us” there is a faulty consonant.

زرافة (*zarafa*) “giraffe”, زرافة (*zarafa*) “girafa”

The designer uses the letter ظ (*zaa*) “z” instead of the letter ز (*zaa*) “z”

**Appropriateness:** As in the Rosetta stone program the choice of visual material is based on western ideas and cultural habits. The CD was probably aimed at a worldwide audience and is perhaps meant for western doctors and businessmen traveling to Arab speaking countries. As a teaching aid for Muslims from non Arabic speaking countries (and such a target group perhaps ought to have been anticipated) words like جعة (*ji`a, bira*) “beer”,

نبيذ / خمر (nabidh, khamr) “wine”.are inappropriate. These are forbidden for Muslims and such vocabulary ought to be omitted.

**Scope:** The information is of sufficient scope to adequately cover the basic topics for any general audience.

**Technical Aspects:**

**Navigation.** Icons: the icons are very clear. There is help option to assist the user. The student may choose, on any screen, to playback or repeat any lesson. Buttons are used consistently on all screens and it is obvious that ease of navigation, from anywhere to anywhere, has been a priority.

**Control:** The student is very much in control and the program responds quickly to all commands. There is quick screen transitions. The user can set the pace and stop or exit at any time.

**Sound:** Sound quality is good.

**Search Paths:** It is easy to locate any piece of information through the address <http://www.learningco.com-> <http://www.berlitz.com>

**References** and Additional information. The user has the chance to browse the program’s site on the Internet for additional information. The program has the ability to monitor the student’s progress.

**Bookmark and highlighting features:** There are bookmark and highlighting features.

Save feature: You may able to save your work.

## References

Passport to 31 Languages. Berlitz ® and the learning Company. Passport to 31 Languages ver.1.0Readme.TXT.September 1, 1998. See the below site:

<http://www.learningco.com-> <http://www.berlitz.com>

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