

List of Syrian Arabic politeness formulae

A Contrastive Approach to the Analysis of Politeness Formulas

Root-echo responses in Syrian Arabic politeness formulas. CA Ferguson - Linguistic studies in me

Root-Echo Responses in Egyptian Arabic Politeness Formulae. Devin Stweart. Understanding Arabic

Arabic, in its various dialects, has highly developed systems of polite phrases for different situations, and many of these phrases have a specific response. Knowing these phrases, in what situations they are used, and how to properly respond to them, is an important part of Arabic communicative competence. For those of us who have learned Arabic as a second language, the number of these phrases, and indeed some of the situations that call for specific phrases, is remarkable. They are tricky to learn for a non-native speaker since there is often only one suitable response and it has to be instantaneous. For native speakers, of course, this is simply part of language and it isn't given much thought. When, for example, someone says *na^cīman* to you after you have had a shower you just automatically reply *alla yin^cam ^caleyk*.

Not knowing the basic phrases may lead to awkward social situations. One of the first people I got to know during my stay in Damascus always ended our telephone conversations by quickly asking me if I wanted something (*biddak šī?*). I found this a bit odd, as if I was a costumer in his shop, and in my confusion typically answered something like “no, thanks” (*lā, sukran*). There was always something awkward about these exchanges. It was only later that I discovered that this was just a formulaic phrase and that I was supposed to answer “your wellbeing” (*salāmtak*).

The list below includes politeness formulae and their appropriate response as used in the Damascus area. I only include such phrases that I have heard in use, and it is thus bias to situations where a non-Arab male may find himself. The list is by no means complete, but I do believe it includes the most common phrases.

The phrases below are given in Arabic and then in EALL transliteration as pronounced in Syrian Arabic. The translations provided are fairly literal. Many of the expressions no or only partial equivalent in English anyway. Each phrase is followed by its appropriate response. Forward slash indicates alternative responses. Note that that Arabic text is the wrong way around relative to the

reading direction, with the initial phrase to the left and the response to the right.

Forward slash (/) indicates alternative responses. Parentheses indicate optional extensions to responses. Square brackets indicate clarifications in the translation.

0.1 Greetings

0.1.1 General greetings

<i>as-salāmu ʿalaykum</i>) (<i>wa-ʿalaykum salām (wa-rahmatu allāhi wa-barakātuh)</i>
Peace be upon you		And upon you peace (and God's greace and his blessings)

Islamic greeting. The pronoun *-kum* (3mpl) is invariable the phrase and in its response. The optional extension of the reply in brackets is recommended in a *ḥadīth*.

<i>marḥaba</i>	/	/	/	
Hello	<i>ahlan</i>	<i>marḥabatēn</i>	<i>mīt</i>	<i>marḥaba</i> /hi
	Hi/Two	<i>marḥabas</i>	a hunderd	<i>marḥabas</i> /hi

0.1.2 Greeting before noon

<i>ṣabāḥ al-xēr</i>	<i>ṣabāḥ an-nūr/ṣabāḥ al-full</i>
Morning of fortune	Morning of light/Morning of rose

Xēr does not easily lend itself to translation. Wehr, the standard Arabic-English lexicon, translates it as “good thing, blessing; wealth, property; — good, benefit, interest, advantage; welfare; charity.”

0.1.3 Greeting after noon

<i>masāʾ al-xēr</i>	<i>masāʾ an-nūr</i>
Evening of fortune	Evening of light

0.1.4 Welcoming

/	
<i>ahla wa-sahla</i>	<i>ahlan fik/ahlēn</i>
Welcome	Welcome to you/Two welcomes

Also general filler in pauses in polite conversation.

<i>nawwartu</i>	<i>bi-wujūdikum</i>
You have enlightened	In your presence

0.1.5 When being introduced to someone

<i>tašarrafna</i>	<i>yazīdak aš-šaraf</i>
We are honored	May he increase your honor

0.2 Parting

0.2.1 General good-byes

<i>ma^ca salāma</i>	<i>aḷḷa ma^cak</i>
With peace	May God be with you

<i>biddak ši?</i>) (
<i>salāmtak</i>	
Do you want something?	(I don't want anything except) your wellbeing

Said before the actual goodbye to signal the end of the conversation.

0.2.2 Parting before sleep

/

tuṣbiḥw-
ʿala inta
xēr bi-
xēr/min
ahlu/min
ahl
il-
xēr

Wake And
 up you
 in are
 fortunate/well/of
 the
 its
 peo-
 ple/of
 the
 peo-
 ple
 of
 fortune

0.2.3 Parting from someone you have met for the first time

<i>furṣa saʿīda</i>	<i>u-ana asʿad</i>
Happy occasion	And I am happier

0.3 Phrases for special occasions

0.3.1 On annual holiday

<i>ʿīd mubārak</i>	<i>aḷla yubārik fīk</i>
Blessed vestival	May God bless you

kull ʿām w-anta bi-xēr w-anta bi-xēr
May you be well all year And may you be well

0.3.2 To someone in grief (at funeral (ʿaza))

ʿīd mubārak aḷḷa yubārik fīk
Blessed vestival May God bless you

al-ʿiwāḍ bi-salāmtak aḷḷa yisallimak
May the compensation be in your health May God give you health

al-ʿumr illak tʿiṣ
The lifetime to you May you live

0.3.3 To someone departing on a journey ?

trūḥ u-tarjaʿ bi-s-salāma aḷḷah yusallimak
Leave and return in peace May God preserve you

0.3.4 To someone returning from a journey

al-ḥamdu li-llāh ʿala s-salāma aḷḷa yusallimak
God be praised for your wellbeing May God preserve you

0.4 Phrases for not so special occasions

0.4.1 Thanks

yislam īdēk aḷḷa yisallimak
May [God] preserve your hands May God preserve you

0.4.2 To someone who has cut their hair, shaved, or have had a shower or bath

<i>naʿīman</i>	<i>alla yinʿam ʿalēk</i>
Gracefully	May God bestow grace upon you.

0.4.3 To someone who has performed the prayer (*ṣalāt*)

<i>taqabbal alla</i>	<i>minni u-minnak</i>
May God accept	From me and from you

0.4.4 Asking someone to be patient/calm down

<i>ṣalli ʿa-n-nabi</i>	<i>alla yuṣalli ʿa-n-nabi</i>
Pray for the Prophet	May God pray for the Prophet

0.4.5 Asking someone to pass a greeting

X	/ /
<i>sallim ʿala X</i>	<i>alla yusallimak/byūṣal/ṣār ʿindu</i>
Give my regards X	May God preserve you/It will arrive/It is with him

0.4.6 To host after finishing meal

<i>dāyima</i>	<i>ṣaḥḥa</i>
[May you] always [have food]	[I wish you] Health

0.4.7 To someone who is eating, drinking or sneezing

/	
<i>ṣaḥḥa/ṣaḥḥatēn</i>	<i>ʿala ʿalbak</i>
Health/Two healths	On your heart

Also used to decline drink or food offered to you.

0.4.8 To someone who is working or exerting themselves

<i>aḷḷa ya^cṭīk al-^cāfiya</i>	<i>aḷḷa yi^cāfīk</i>
May God give you vigor	May God invogorate you

0.4.9 To someone who has acquired and item (through gift or purchase)

<i>mabrūk</i>	<i>aḷḷa yubārik fīk</i>
Blessed	May God bless you

0.4.10 On hearing of the addressees ill health

<i>salamtak</i>	<i>aḷḷa yusallimak</i>
Your health	May God bring bring you health

0.4.11 On hearing that the addressee has children

<i>aḷḷa yuxallī-lak iyyāhum</i>	<i>aḷḷa yuxallīk</i>
May God preserve them for you	May God preserve you
