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 memory of Richard Slade Harrell, 1967 [Finns i Göteborg]  
  
Root-Echo Responses in Egyptian Arabic Politeness Formulae. Devin Stweart. Understanding Arabic [UB ÖSF]

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 *naʿīman* to you after you have had a shower you just automatically reply *aḷḷa yinʿam ʿaleyk*.

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 ši?*). 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.

## Greetings

### General greetings

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| السلام عليكم | وعليكم سلام (ورحمة الله وبركاته) |
| *as-salāmu ʿalaykum* | *wa-ʿalaykum salām (wa-raḥmatu allāhi wa-barakātuh)* |
| 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 *ḥadiṯ*.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| مرحبا | أهلاً/مرحبتين/مية مرحباش/يا هلا |
| *marḥaba* | *ahlan/marḥabatēn*/*mīt marḥaba*/hi |
| Hello | Hi/Two *marḥaba*s/a hunderd *marḥaba*s/hi |

### Greeting before noon

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| صباح الخير | صباح النور |
| *ṣabāḥ al-xēr* | *ṣabāḥ an-nūr/ṣabāḥ al-full* |
| 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.”

### Greeting after noon

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| مساء الخير | مساء النور |
| *masāʾ al-xēr* | *masāʾ an-nūr* |
| Evening of fortune | Evening of light |

### Welcoming

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| أهلا وسهلا | أهلاٌ فيك/أهلين |
| *ahla wa-sahla* | *ahlan fīk*/*ahlēn* |
| Welcome | Welcome to you/Two welcomes |

Also general filler in pauses in polite conversation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| نوّرتو | بوجودكم |
| *nawwartu* | *bi-wujūdkum* |
| You have enlightened | In your presence |

### When being introduced to someone

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| تشرّفنا | يزيدك الشرف |
| *tašarrafna* | *yazīdak aš-šaraf* |
| We are honored | May he increase your honor |

## Parting

### General good-byes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| مع سلامة | الله معك |
| *maʿa salāma* | *aḷḷa maʿak* |
| With peace | May God be with you |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| بيك شي؟ | (ما بدي إلا) سلامتك |
| *biddak ši?* | *salāmtak* |
| Do you want something? | (I don’t want anything except) your wellbeing |

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

### Parting before sleep

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| تصبح على خير | وانت بخير/وانت من أخله |
| *tuṣbiḥ ʿala xēr* | *w-inta bi-xēr/min ahlu/min ahl il-xēr* |
| Wake up in fortune | And you are well/of the its people/of the people of fortune |

### Parting from someone you have met for the first time

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| فرصة سعيدة | وأنا أسعد |
| *furṣa saʿīda* | *u-ana asʿad* |
| Happy occasion | And I am happier |

## Phrases for special occasions

### On annual holiday

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| عيد مبارك | الله يبارك فيك |
| *ʿīd mubārak* | *aḷḷa yubārik fīk* |
| Blessed vestival | May God bless you |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| كل عام وانت بخير | وانت بخير |
| *kull ʿām w-anta bi-xēr* | *w-anta bi-xēr* |
| May you be well all year | And may you be well |

### To someone in grief (at funeral (*ʿaza*))

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| عيد مبارك | الله يبارك فيك |
| *ʿīd mubārak* | *aḷḷa yubārik fīk* |
| Blessed vestival | May God bless you |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| العواض بسلامتك | الله يسلمك |
| *al-ʿiwāḍ bi-salāmtak* | *aḷḷa yisallimak* |
| May the compensation be in your health | May God give you health |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| العمر إلك | تعيش |
| *al-ʿumr illak* | *tʿīš* |
| The lifetime to you | May you live |

### To someone departing on a journey ?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| تروح وترجع بسلامة | الله يسلمك |
| *trūḥ u-tarjaʾ bi-s-salāma* | *aḷḷah yusallimak* |
| Leave and return in peace | May God preserve you |

### To someone returning from a journey

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| الحمد لله على السلامة | الله يسلمك |
| *al-ḥamdu li-llāh ʿala s-salāma* | *aḷḷa yusallimak* |
| God be praised for your wellbeing | May God preserve you |

## Phrases for not so special occasions

### Thanks

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| يسلم إيديك | الله يسلمك |
| *yislam īdēk* | **aḷḷa yisallimak** |
| May [God] preserve your hands | May God preserve you |

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| نعيماً | الله ينعم عليك |
| *naʿīman* | *aḷḷa yinʿam ʿalēk* |
| Gracefully | May God bestow grace upon you. |

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| تقبل الله | مني ومنك |
| *taqabbal alla* | *minni u-minnak* |
| May God accept | From me and from you |

### Asking someone to be patient/calm down

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| صلي عالنبي | الله يصلي عالنبي |
| *ṣalli ʿa-n-nabi* | *aḷḷa yuṣalli ʿa-n-nabi* |
| Pray for the Prophet | May God pray for the Prophet |

### Asking someone to pass a greeting

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| سلّم على X | الله يسلّمك/بيوصل/سار عنده |
| *sallim ʿala X* | *aḷḷa yusallimak/byūṣal/ṣār ʿindu* |
| Give my regars X | May God preserve you/It will arrive/It is with him |

### To host after finishing meal

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| دايما | صحة |
| *dāyima* | *ṣaḥḥa* |
| [May you] always [have food] | [I wish you] Health |

### To someone who is eating, drinking or sneezing

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| صحة/صحتين | على قلبك |
| *ṣaḥḥa/ṣaḥḥatēn* | *ʿala ʾalbak* |
| Health/Two healths | On your heart |

Also used to decline drink or food offered to you.

### To someone who is working or exerting themselves

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| الله يعطيك العافية | الله يعافيك |
| *aḷḷa yaʿṭīk al-ʿāfiya* | *aḷḷa yiʿāfīk* |
| May God give you vigor | May God invogorate you |

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| مبروك | الله يبارك فيك |
| *mabrūk* | *aḷḷa yubārik fīk* |
| Blessed | May God bless you |

### On hearing of the addressees ill health

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| سلامتك | الله يسلمك |
| *salamtak* | *aḷḷa yusallimak* |
| Your health | May God bring bring you health |

### On hearing that the addressee has children

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| الله يخليلك إياهم | الله يخليك |
| *aḷḷa yuxallī-lak iyyāhum* | *aḷḷa yuxallīk* |
| May God preserve them for you | May God preserve you |