

## مطالعه‌ای تجربی در باب تأثیر متغیرهای اجتماعی سن و جنسیت بر کاربرد تعارف‌ها در زبان فارسی

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## An Experimental Study on the Effect of Age and Gender on the Use of Compliments in Persian

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### Abstract

Compliments are universal categories which are found in all languages but they are more common in some languages like Persian. The objective of this study is to examine the effect of social variables of "age" and "gender" on the amount of usage of compliments by Persian speakers. To do this, a questionnaire including 15 questions was given to 100 male and female Kermani participants in different age-groups. The research theoretical framework was Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory. Static analyses indicate that there is significant difference ( $P < 0.0001$ ) between the usage of compliments by the participants of different ages; in older age-groups they use more compliments to show politeness to their addressees. However, there is no significant difference ( $P = 0.28$ ) between male and female Persian speakers in using compliments although the structures of compliment representations are different. This point reveals that both gender. Groups use compliments in their verbal interactions to show politeness.

**Key Words:** Persian Compliments, Age, Gender, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Sociolinguistics.

### چکیده

تعارفات مقولاتی جهانی هستند که در همه زبان‌ها یافت می‌شوند اما در برخی، مانند زبان فارسی، رایج‌ترند. هدف از این پژوهش بررسی تأثیر متغیرهای اجتماعی سن و جنسیت بر میزان استفاده فارسی‌زبانان از تعارفات است. بدین منظور، پرسشنامه‌ای شامل ۱۵ سوال به تعداد ۱۰۰ نفر از شرکت‌کنندگان زن و مرد کرمانی در گروه‌های سنی مختلف داده شد. چارچوب نظری این پژوهش، نظریه ادب براون و لوینسون (۱۹۷۸) بوده است. تجزیه و تحلیل آماری داده‌ها نشان می‌دهد که میان کاربرد تعارفات فارسی‌زبانان کرمان در سنین مختلف تفاوت معناداری وجود دارد ( $P < 0.0001$ )؛ بدین صورت که در گروه‌های سنی بالاتر افراد بیشتر از تعارفات استفاده می‌کنند تا مراتب ادب را به مخاطب خود بیان نمایند. اما میان زنان و مردان فارسی‌زبان در استفاده از تعارف تفاوت معناداری وجود ندارد ( $P = 0.28$ ) هر چند که ساختارهای بازنمایی تعارف در آنها متفاوت است. این امر نشان می‌دهد که هم مردان و هم زنان در تعاملات کلامی از تعارف برای نشان دادن ادب استفاده می‌کنند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** تعارفات فارسی، سن، جنسیت، نظریه ادب براون و لوینسون، زبان‌شناسی اجتماعی.

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## Introduction

Compliments are defined as expressions of praise, admiration or approval (Oxford Dictionary 2000: 234) which are used in interactions to show respect toward the interlocutor(s). In Persian society, they are very influencing in daily interactions and can be accepted or rejected depending on the situation, culture and the persons who interact with each other. Expressions used in prayers, invitations, address terms, appreciations, greetings and emotional phrases can all be regarded as compliments (Karimnia and Afghari, 2011: 40-41).

Compliments are expected to be affected by social variables of different types such as age, gender, education, social class, intimacy, context, etc. For example, the youth apply somehow different compliments comparing the old. Also, compliments used in informal conversations are distinct from those used in formal situations due to politeness norms (Daneshgar, 1381/2002: 66). People mostly use them to compensate the negative face or save the positive face in conversations (Derki, 1386/2007:38). Compliments are very useful to lessen the impact of contradictions and soften the atmosphere in interactions (Johnson and Roen, 1992: 28).

## Methodology

In the following part, methodology of the research including theoretical framework, research questions, participants and methods are to be presented and explained.

## Theoretical framework

Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory is used as the theoretical framework of this study. The focus of attention is on the concepts of 'face', both 'positive' and 'negative' ones as well as 'positive' and 'negative politeness' which are briefly defined below:

To them: "face is something emotional in everyday speech and it can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. Thus 'face' is the public self-image that people want to claim for themselves. So, when people try to maintain face in their conversations, in fact, they are aware of its vulnerability. Everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened ... it is in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's face" (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 61-62).

They also deal with 'face' as 'wants' and declare that we can treat face as a kind of basic want in which everyone knows that others have sort of desires and

interests that must be satisfied in interactions. Brown and Levinson (Ibid: 60-70) classify the concept of 'face' in the following way:

1. Negative face: It is related to a "territory, personal limits, rights to non-distraction" so it means that it is a kind of want of everyone in which s/he desires not to be impeded by others. Therefore, s/he wants to have "freedom of action and freedom of imposition."
2. Positive face: It is related to "positive self-image or personality" and the desire of being approved or appreciated by others. So it means that it is a kind of want of everyone in which s/he desires to be a member of other groups.

According to them, "negative face is familiar as the formal politeness" in which the notion of 'politeness' comes into mind; but in the case of positive politeness this issue is less obvious.

In this theory, Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) refer to those acts which are intrinsically threatening to somebody's face. When this happens, positive or negative politeness is used as compensatory strategies to redress the act. In positive politeness, the center of attention is on common interests while in negative politeness the interlocutors' face should not be threatened (Ibid: 60-65).

As Brown and Levinson stated "positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his desire that his wants should be thought of as desirable." Here redress means satisfying the interactive desires and wants of both parties of communication (Ibid: 101).

Brown and Levinson (Ibid: 129) claimed that "negative politeness is regressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded." They stated that negative politeness "corresponds to rituals of avoidance." According to them (Ibid) "Where positive politeness is free-ranging, negative politeness is specific and focused; it performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects".

So, compliments are used to show their respect toward others both by increasing politeness and also by decreasing impoliteness, i.e. redressing FTAs (Ibid:101-126).

## Research Objectives and Questions

The general objectives of this research are to investigate how social variables of 'age' and 'gender' influence the use of compliment structures in Persian and to examine the relationship between

compliments and the concept of politeness. So, the following questions are to be answered:

1. Is there any relationship between the social variable of 'age' and the use of compliments in Persian? If so, how is this related and explained within the theory of politeness?
2. Is there any relationship between the social variable of 'gender' and the use of compliments in Persian? If so, how is this related and explained within the theory of politeness?

### **Data Gathering, Participants and Data Analysis Procedures**

A closed questionnaire, including 15 multiple questions, was given to a number of 100 participants of different age-groups and gender-groups of high school students, university students as well as teachers in Kerman. The subjects belonged to three age-groups: a) under 25 years old (40%), b) 25-45 years old (40%), and c) more than 45 years old (20%). They were also divided into equal number of males (50) and females (50). The statistical population was randomly selected from among students and teachers of different educational institutions.

The participants were free to write their names. If necessary, a brief explanation was offered to them.

The questionnaire was designed after a good deal of time observing how compliments were used in Iranians' verbal interactions and which types of compliments were used in different contexts and situations. The responses were then converted into numbers to be analyzed statistically by SPSS (v. 18).

### **Review of Literature**

Compliments as the real manifestations of language in use, are the subject of a new and recent interest in linguistics within the functional approach. As a consequence, no long history or numerous studies can be found in this area. In what follows, a number of studies done in this field both in Iran and abroad are presented.

In Iran, Daneshgar (1381/2002: 64) investigating the use of compliments among Iranian people, believes that these forms are part of Iranian cultural behaviors which are used as verbal habits. He also emphasizes their importance in learning Persian as a foreign language.

Alirezaee (1387/2008:101) regarding compliments as part of etiquette patterns in the culture of most eastern countries including Iran, focused on different types and functions of compliments in social interactions. He concluded that compliments which might be real or just a formal

behavior, greatly depended on the social variables of interlocutors such as their age, gender, education, etc.

The formal and conventional use of compliments was the subject of another study conducted by Poshtdar (1388/2009) who defined compliments as the interlocutors' identification etiquette techniques which were most of the time exaggerated. He concluded that Iranians used compliments to be more influential. Moreover, their choices depend on different situations they are placed in.

Golato (2002) investigated German compliment responses using conversational analytic methodology focusing on the organization of compliment sequences in German.

Huth (2006) studied the way L2 learners realized sequences underlying L2 compliment responses (CR) in talk-in-interaction. The results showed the inherently social nature of L2 compliments in the context of foreign language teaching.

Tang and Zhang (2009) investigated compliment responses (CRs) among Australian English and Mandarin Chinese speakers. The findings demonstrated that Chinese participants used fewer 'Accept' strategy and more 'Evade' and 'Reject' strategies than their Australian counterparts. Also, Chinese participants used fewer combination strategies than the Australians

Following Tang and Zhang's theoretical framework, Razi (2013) compared and contrasted compliments and compliment responses among Australian and Iranian university students. As part of the conclusion, she emphasized the importance of cultural differences in teaching a language as a foreign language.

Kim (2010) conducted a research to examine how Korean and Japanese EFL learners' speech acts of compliments were transferred from their native cultures when they were interacting in English.

In a contrastive study, Karimnia and Afghari (2011) compared English and Persian compliment responses. The data which was gathered from TV programs was then analyzed within the theory of politeness. The main part of their conclusions was that the two languages used distinct strategies. While Persian speakers tended to use non-acceptance (rejecting) responses, English speakers generally employed acceptance strategy. Also, they claimed that negative politeness was irrelevant to Persians' use of compliments.

Lin, Woodfield and Ren (2012) investigated the impact of geographical region on the use of compliments by Taiwan and Mainland Chinese among higher education students. The results showed

that both groups preferred to offer 'Explicit' and 'Implicit' compliments in the form of 'Requests', 'Assumptions' and 'Want statements'. The results showed explicit compliments as the most popular strategy. Beside, it was revealed that compliments of both regions might have undergone a change, possibly influenced by Western cultures.

Tajeddin and YazdanMehr (2012) investigated the structural patterns and pragmatic functions of compliments made by Iranian EFL learners. The participants were adult intermediate EFL learners old of both sexes and studied English between 1.5 to 5 years. Based on the findings, participants showed a great tendency to utter their compliments in simple statement forms; fifty percent of their compliments were made in this way. Exclamations and Wh-question forms were also used to a lesser but considerable degree.

Motaghi Tabari and Beuzeville (2012) compared Persian and Australian compliment responses to see if Persian speakers were influenced by Australian cultural norms when they were in the new community. The results showed that although there were similarities in the choice of compliment response types by Australians and Persians living in Australia, there were still some differences.

In what follows, some samples of Persian compliments (PC) are presented. Phonetic transcriptions in are given IPA font and their English translations are also inserted after each compliment. Some similar compliments are used in questionnaire and the authors mention these examples to familiarize the readers with the discussion.

۱- از آشنایی با شما خوشوقتم! (مفتخرم!)

[ʔæz ʔɑfenaʔi ba ʃoma xoʃvæGtæm]  
[moftæxæræm]  
Pleased to meet you!

۲- خوش آمدید! مشتاق دیدار!

[xoʃ ʔamædid] [moʃtaGe didar]  
Welcome. Eager to see you.

۳- سفره‌تون رنگین.

[sofrætun rængin]  
(I wish you always) keep a good table.

۴- سعادت نداریم، بعداً خدمت میرسیم.

[sæʔadæt nædarim] [bæʔdæn xedmət miresim]  
We don't have bliss. Later, we'll be at your service.  
(Later we'll visit you in another party.)

۵- اول بزرگتر، بعد کوچک تر.

[ʔævæl bozorgtæra] [bæʔd kutʃektæra]  
First the older, then the younger.

۶- خدا از بزرگی کمتون نکنه.

[xoda ʔæz bozorgi kæmetun nækone]  
I wish God never diminish your nobility.

۷- مغازه متعلق به خودتونه!

[mæGaze moteʔæleG be xodetune]  
It's your own shop. (Seller to the customer).

۸- ممنون، نظر لطف شماست.

[mæmnun] [næzære lotfe ʃomast]  
Thanks, it's very kind of you.

۹- خدا بیامرز دشت.

[xoda biamorzædæʃ]  
God rest his/her soul.

۱۰- خوشحال شدم صداتونو شنیدم.

[xoʃhal ʃodæm sedatuno ʃenidæm]  
Glad to hear your voice.

۱۱- الهی عاقبت به خیر بشین.

[ʔelahi ʔaGebæt be xejr beʃin]  
You may have a happy ending. / You may come to good.

۱۲- پارسال دوست امسال آشنا!

[parsal dust ʔemsal ʔafena]  
Long time no see.

۱۳- همکاری با شما افتخاری بود برای ما.

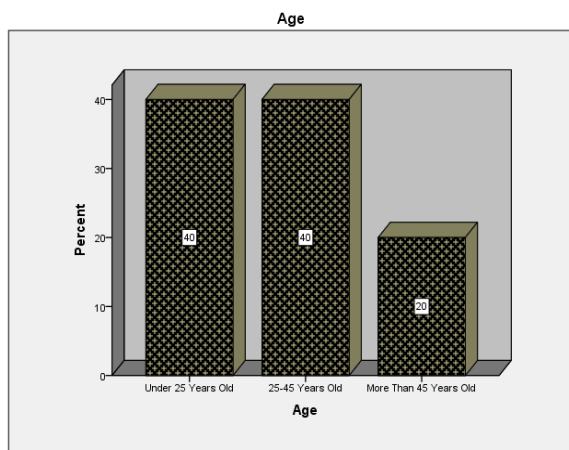
[hæmkari ba ʃoma ʔeftexari bud bæraje ma]  
It was an honor for us to work with you.

### Data Analysis

In order to find if the two variables of 'age' and 'gender' affect the use of compliments in Persian, a questionnaire including 15 questions based on typical situations in which compliments and compliment responses are commonly used (mentioned in part (1) introduction) was designed and given to 100 Kermani participants of the two gender-groups with different ages.

### Compliments and Age-groups

The participants of the study belonged to three different age-groups of: a) Under 25 years old (40%) with valid percent of (40), b) 25-45 years old (40%) with valid percent of (40), and c) More than 45 years old (20%) with valid percent of (20). The descriptive statistics of the participants based on their age is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Frequency of the participants' age

To answer the first research question regarding the relationship between the social variable of 'age' and the use of compliments by Persian speakers, a One-Way ANOVA analysis was run which is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Compliments and age-groups

age-groups	N	Mean	S D	F	df	P
Under 25	40	31.07	4.29		B = 2	
25-45	40	35.72	3.97	24.55	W = 97	.000
More than 45	20	38.10	3.37		T = 99	
Total	100	34.34	4.86			

As the results show, since P-value ( $p < 0.0001$ ) is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference among different age-groups regarding the use of compliments. Comparing the means (Under 25(Mean or M) = 31.07, 25-45M = 35.72, more than 45M = 38.10), it is concluded that different age-groups have different tendencies to the use of compliments in Persian.

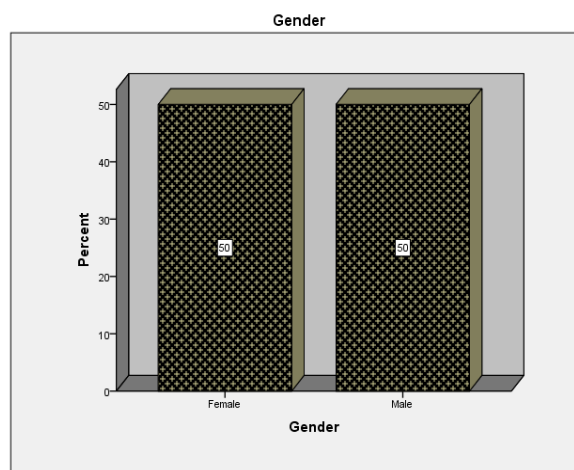
Besides, based on the Student-Newman-Keuls (SNK) post hoc test, there is a significant difference between each age-group regarding compliment scores. The older participants had higher compliment scores compared with the younger ones. It means that the older participants show more tendencies to apply compliments to get

the positive politeness, or compensate the negative face by using compliments. So, the older groups tried to use compliments with higher effects in their conversations to show that they observe other's face more than young people.

In sum, regarding 'age', there is a statistically meaningful relationship between the use of compliments and age-groups among Persian speakers.

### Compliments and Gender-groups

A number of 100 participants, including 50 males (50%) with valid percent of (50) and 50 females (50%) with valid percent of (50) who were randomly selected were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics of the participants regarding the variable of gender is shown in the Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of the participants' gender-groups

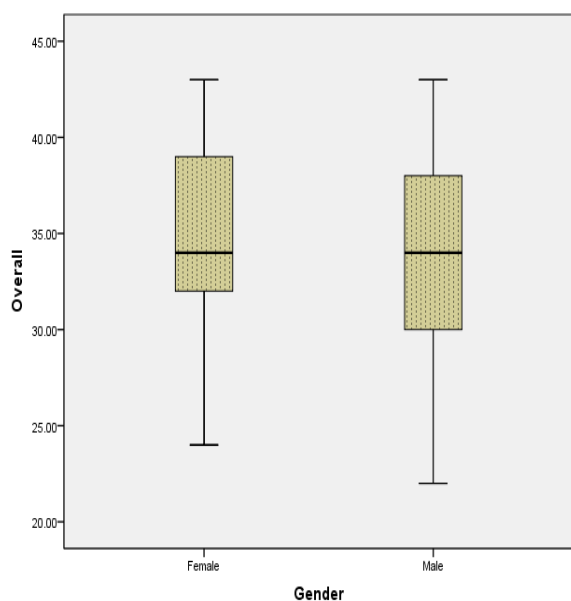
To answer the second research question concerning how gender differences affect the use of compliments in Persian and among Persian speakers, an Independent Samples t-test was launched. Although Persian speakers of the two groups used different and even sometimes distinct compliment structures in their verbal interactions, the results of this study imply no significant difference ( $p = 0.28$ ) in their tendencies to use these forms Table 2.

**Table 2.** T-test for compliments in two groups of males and females.

Gender	Males			Females			t	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Commitment	50	33.82	5.04	50	34.86	4.65	1.07	98	.28

That is, both gender-groups tended to use different types of compliments in their speech in order to show their politeness toward their interlocutors. It can be understood that the two groups have a high tendency to apply ordinary compliments in their conversations to show that they are polite enough. But there isn't a considerable distinction between the two groups in the use of compliments.

The overall relationship between the gender differences and the use of compliments is also shown in the Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Boxplot for gender differences in compliment use

The figure shows the maximum and minimum for mean in each gender-group as well as the tendency of the groups to apply compliments. As the figure shows, females had more tendencies to use compliments in their interactions, but not significantly.

So, compliments are used as regressive actions addressed to the addressee's negative face. They are used to maintain positive politeness, expressed to defend face. As positive politeness, compliments redress the addressee's positive face or his/her desire to be accepted by others in interactions. The groups investigated in this research applied compliments in their speech to avoid FTA, pay attention to others' face and not to threaten others by impolite expressions.

The results showed a significant difference among Persian speakers of different age ranging in the use of compliments, that is, the older the

participants were, the more they tended to use compliments in their verbal interactions to show their politeness towards the interlocutors. When participants of higher age use more compliments than participants of lower ages, we can understand that politeness has great importance for them so they consider positive face and try to avoid FTA.

The results also indicated no significant difference between the two gender-groups in the use of compliments. It implied that both gender-groups had similar tendency to use compliments to show their politeness towards their interlocutors in their verbal interactions. The two groups applied ordinary compliments in their interactions because paying attention to others' face was important to them, and politeness played a considerable role in their conversations.

Based on the findings of the study, the participants preferred to use compliments to achieve positive politeness in order to redress the negative face in their conversation. They tried to avoid negative face, or have the desire to be unimpeded. Compliments with negative or positive effects were used to soften the interactions. So, all participants preferred to have a polite relationship with their interlocutors.

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## Appendix

- الف) با عرض معذرت. حسابداری به من نامه ضمانت نمی‌دهد. انشاءا... دفعه بعد.
- ب) فکرهایم را بکنم، ولی مطمئن نیستم.
- پ) متاسفم. از یکی دیگه بخواهید.
- موقعیت ۴)** به یکی از آشنایان نزدیکتان زنگ می‌زنید تا تولد فرزندش را تبریک بگویید. چه عبارتی را به کار می‌برید؟
- الف) تبریک. به سلامتی.
- ب) بالاخره کوچولو به دنیا آمد.
- پ) قدم نو رسیده مبارک. چشمتون روشن!
- موقعیت ۵)** همراه با چند تن از همکاران صمیمی‌تان، قصد ورود از یک در را دارید. کدام عبارت را بکار می‌برید؟
- الف) نمی‌فرمایید؟
- ب) بفرمایید. خواهش می‌کنم. نمی‌شه. اول شما ...
- پ) شما بفرمایید.
- موقعیت ۶)** شما به دیدن بزرگ خانواده رفته‌اید. در پاسخ عبارت زیر به ایشان چه می‌گویید؟
- بزرگ خانواده: "خوش آمدید. خدا عمرتان بدهد."
- الف) خواهش می‌کنم.
- ب) اختیار دارید وظیفه‌ام بود.
- پ) سکوت می‌کنید.
- موقعیت ۷)** دوست صمیمی‌تان را بعد از مدتی طولانی می‌بینید، در احوال‌پرسی با او چه عبارتی را استفاده می‌کنید؟
- الف) سلام. به به! چه عجب. شما کجا اینجا کجا؟

## پرسش‌نامه

- جنسیت: زن ○ مرد ○
- سن: زیر ۲۵ سال ○ ۲۵ تا ۴۵ سال ○ ۴۵ سال به بالا ○
- لطفاً با توجه به هر موقعیت یکی از جواب‌های مربوط را انتخاب کنید.
- موقعیت ۱)** یکی از آشنایان دورتان با هدیه‌ای وارد خانه شما می‌شود. چگونه از او تشکر می‌کنید؟
- الف) دست شما درد نکند.
- ب) ممنون.
- پ) چرا زحمت کشیدید؟ هر وقت تشریف می‌آورید خجالتان می‌دهید!
- موقعیت ۲)** در یک مهمانی، میزبان، که یکی از دوستان نزدیکتان می‌باشد، در حال پذیرایی می‌گوید: "بفرمایید شام!" شما به عنوان مهمان چه جوابی می‌دهید؟
- الف) متشکرم.
- ب) وای خیلی خودتان را به زحمت انداختید. چرا اینهمه .....!
- پ) متشکرم، دستتان درد نکند.
- موقعیت ۳)** در مقابل تقاضایی قرار گرفته‌اید که مایل به انجام آن نیستید، (مانند ضمانت وام). یکی از همکاران اداره که با او صمیمی نیستید، سوال زیر را می‌پرسد. به این سوال چگونه پاسخ می‌دهید؟
- سوال: امروز تقاضای وام کردم. می‌توانید ضامنم شوید؟

**موقعیت ۱۲)** شما به عنوان دانشجو برای رفع اشکال درسی به استادتان مراجعه می‌کنید. بعد از پرسیدن سوالها و گرفتن جواب، چگونه از استاد تشکر می‌کنید؟  
الف) خیلی ببخشید استاد.  
ب) ببخشید.  
پ) ببخشید مزاحم شدم وقتتون رو گرفتم.  
**موقعیت ۱۳)** شما با دیدن کارهای هنری زیبای یک دوست صمیمی چگونه او را تحسین می‌کنید؟  
الف) آفرین.  
ب) خوب کار کردی. جالبه.  
پ) احسنت، بارک الله. به تو میگن هنرمند واقعی.  
**موقعیت ۱۴)** به فرزند یک دوست صمیمی به خاطر قبولی در یک رشته دانشگاهی خوب چگونه تبریک می‌گویید؟  
الف) تبریک میگم. انشالله در همه مراحل زندگی موفق باشی.  
ب) بسیار عالی. تبریک میگم.  
پ) تبریک. خوشحال شدم.  
**موقعیت ۱۵)** تصور کنید که از محل کار فعلی به محل دیگری منتقل شده‌اید. برای خداحافظی با همکاران خود از چه عبارتی استفاده می‌کنید؟  
الف) خدا نگهدار همگی.  
ب) همکاری با شما افتخاری بود برای ما.  
پ) هیچوقت فراموشتون نمی‌کنم.

ب) چطور می‌گویی؟  
پ) کجایی؟ اصلاً نمی‌بینیم!  
**موقعیت ۸)** در مراسم پرسه و ختم به خانواده مرحوم که از آشنایان دورتان هستند، چه می‌گویید؟  
الف) خدا صبرتان بدهد. ان شاء... با اولیا و اوصیا محشور باشند.  
ب) خدا رحمتشان کند.  
پ) تسلیت.  
**موقعیت ۹)** موقع پرداخت کرایه به راننده تاکسی کدام عبارت را خواهید گفت؟  
الف) چند شد؟  
ب) ببخشید. چقدر می‌شود؟  
پ) لطف کردید. چقدر تقدیم کنم؟  
**موقعیت ۱۰)** هنگام مشرف شدن دوست یا همکارتان به زیارت از چه عبارتی استفاده می‌کنید؟  
الف) فراموشمون نکنید.  
ب) نایب‌الزیاره. دعایمان کنید.  
پ) به سلامتی بروید و برگردید.  
**موقعیت ۱۱)** بیماری بعد از جراحی بهبود پیدا کرده و از پزشک خود به شکل زیر قدردانی می‌کند. پزشک در جواب بیمار چه می‌گوید؟  
بیمار: آقای دکتر واقعا دستتان شفا بود.  
الف) ممنونم.  
ب) لطف دارید. ما وسیله‌ایم. شفا دست خداست.  
پ) امیدوارم بهتر باشید.