

The Persian Dialects of the ^ʿ*Ajam* in Kuwait

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In the general framework of Arabic-Persian language and cultural contact in the Persian Gulf, this paper explores the various stages of linguistic and cultural assimilation among Kuwaiti citizens collectively known as ^ʿ*Ajam*. The ^ʿ*Ajam* are ethnic Persians who migrated to present-day Kuwait at the turn of the 19th-20th century. Although they have since been Arabized to varying degrees, many of them still hold strong family and religious ties to Iran.

The talk presents excerpts from my recorded spoken data with several ^ʿ*Ajamī* families (*Bahbahānī*, *Tarākmah*, *Aškanānī*, *Lurī*) during multiple trips to Kuwait, as recently as the summer of 2016. It provides a phonetic, lexical and syntactic analysis of their use of Persian dialects. The data includes prominent examples of code-switching and code-mixing, and offers a better understanding of the underlying implications of language contact in a region that has functioned as a single commercial and maritime unit for centuries.

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