

The realization of (s) as [s^ʕ] in Kuwaiti Arabic

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Introduction:

An investigation of linguistic and social factors influencing the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] in Kuwaiti Arabic (KA) was carried out. The investigation is unusual in that the variable in question is different from the pharyngealised /s^ʕ/, which is a part of the sound inventory of many Arabic dialects. This variable has been found productive in the speech of two Kuwaiti communities from different ethnic backgrounds: Najdi (originally from Saudi Arabia) and Ajami (originally from Iran).

The aim is to analyse the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] 1) in the context of general Arabic emphatic spread (adjacent to a primary emphatic context) and 2) as a factor of ethnicity, age and gender in KA in what will be termed as secondary emphatic contexts (adjacent to /r/ and /g/).

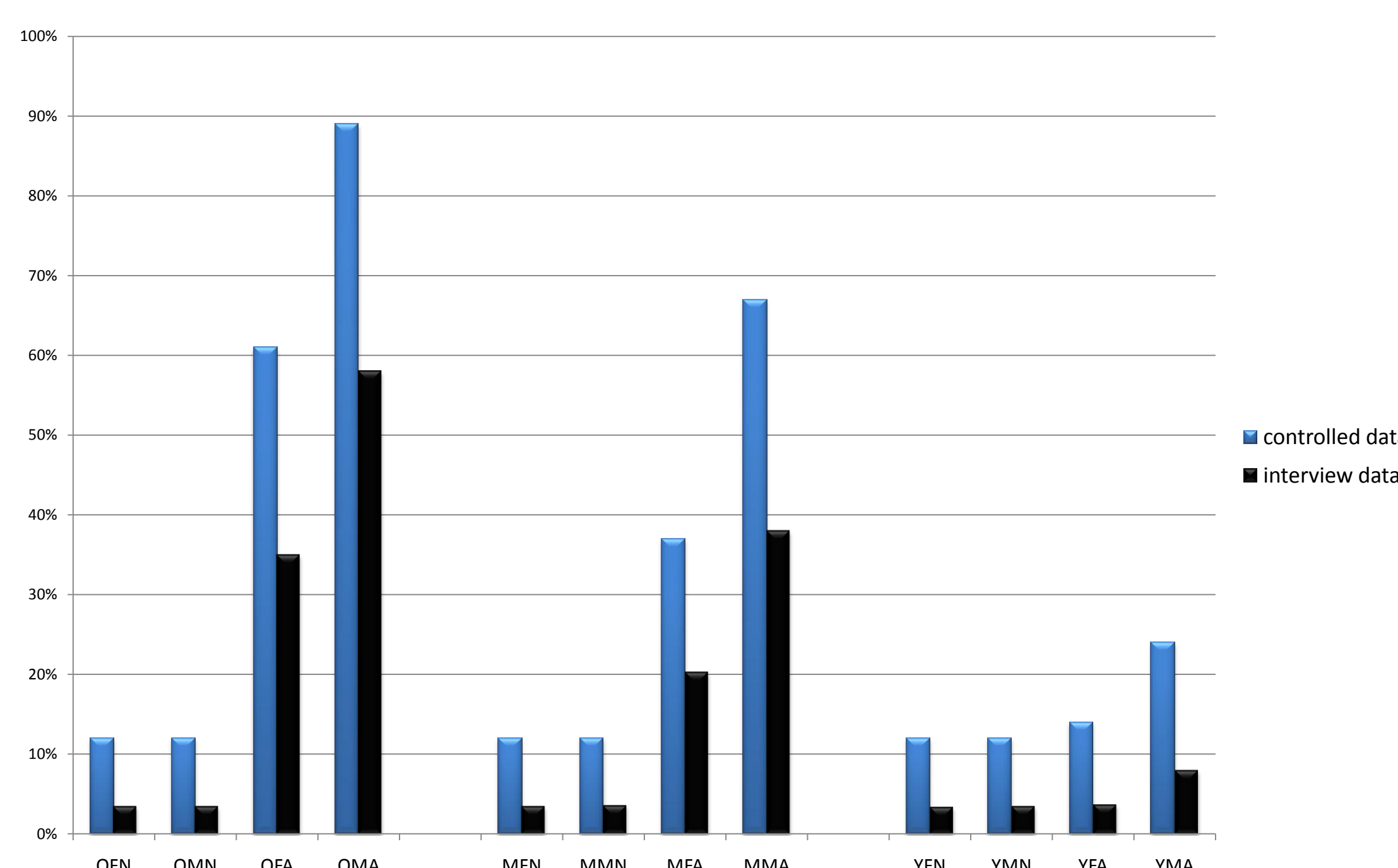
Methods:

- 48 Kuwaiti speakers representing two ethnicities (24 Najdi and 24 Ajami)
- three ages groups (chosen according to relevant milestones in the history of Kuwait)
- a balanced number of males and females
- spontaneous data :interviews + controlled data: picture elicitations and a map task
- Tokens from controlled data: 1200 (25 tokens per speaker)
- tokens from interview data :1621 (an average of 34 tokens per speaker)

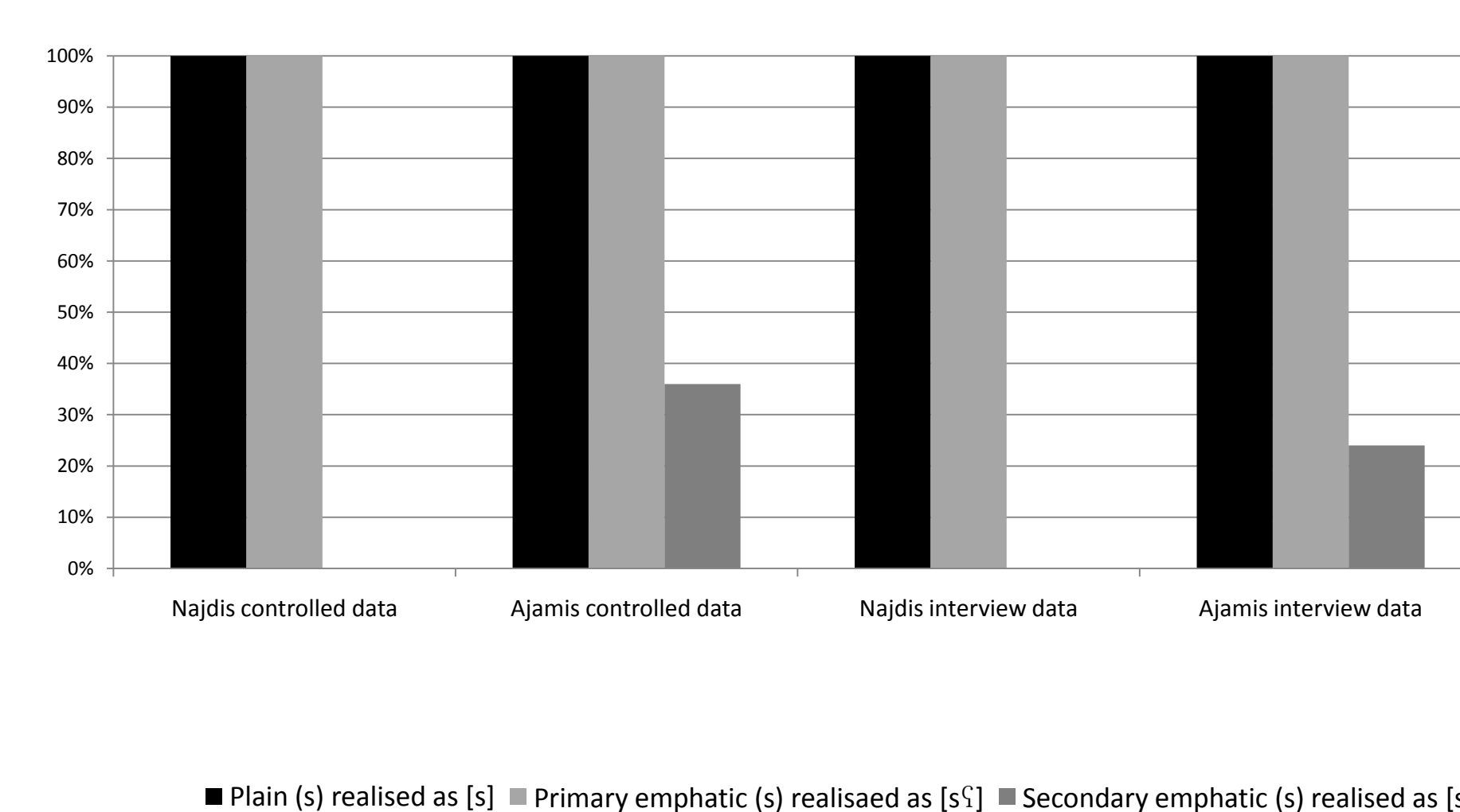
Results:

- The only realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] by the Najdi group was in contexts where there was a primary emphatic (/ð^ʕ/, /t^ʕ/, and /d^ʕ/).
- [s^ʕ] realisation was also found in the neighbourhood of a voiced alveolar trill /r/ or a voiced velar plosive /g/ in the speech of Ajamis.
- Age played a significant role in the realization of (s) as [s^ʕ], whereby old Ajamis used [s^ʕ] more than middle aged and young Ajami informant.
- Female speakers on the whole exhibited fewer emphatic [s^ʕ] realisations than male speakers
- Female Najdis produced fewer emphatic [s^ʕ] realisations than female Ajamis.
- Male Ajamis showed the highest realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ].
- Differences in the results in the two data methods (controlled vs. Interview) could be due to the difference in the number of target words in the environment of emphasis spread, where more target words occurred in the controlled data.

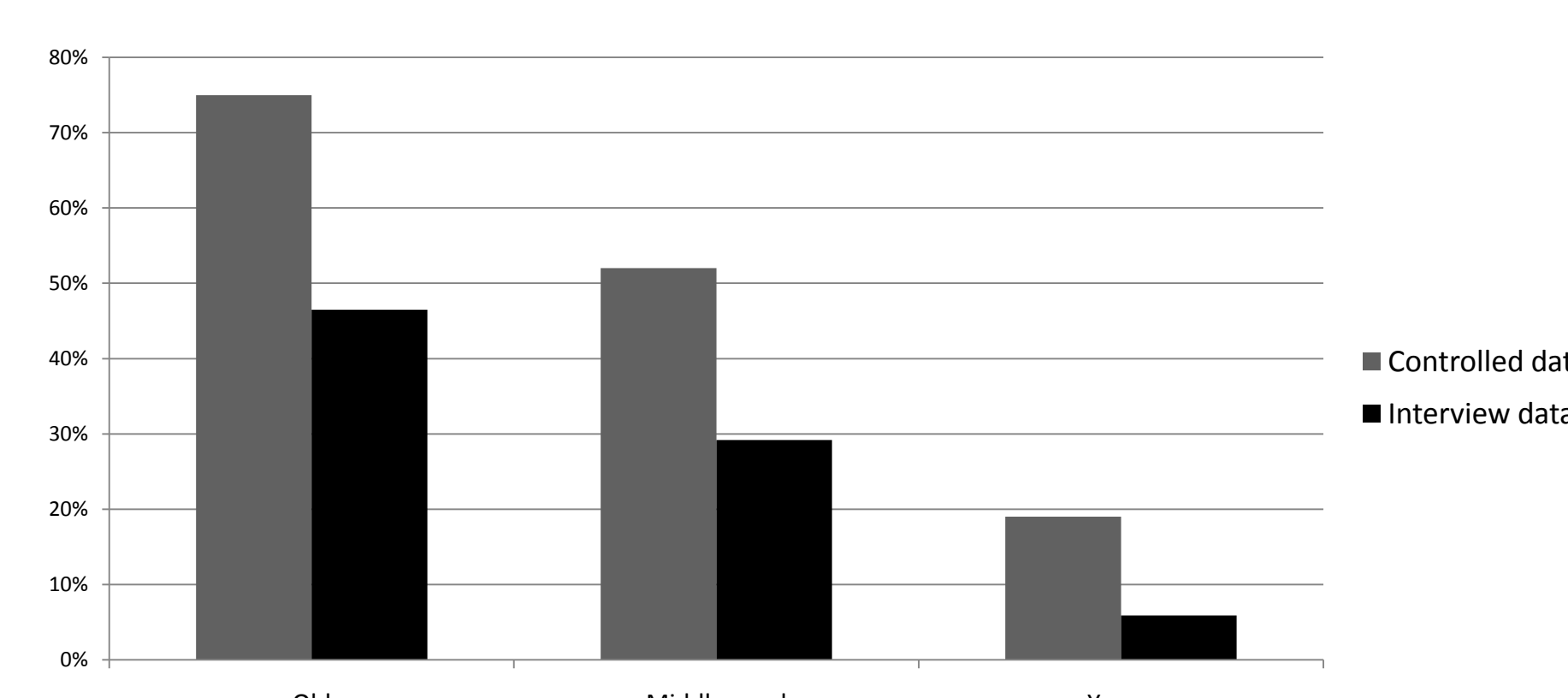
The realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] by all informants



Realisation of (s) by ethnic groups



The realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] in primary and secondary emphasis in the Ajami group by age



The degree of the realisation of /s/ and /s^ʕ/

Group	Realisation of plain /s/	Realisation of /s/ in secondary emphatic contexts	Realisation of /s/ as [s ^ʕ] in primary emphatic contexts	Realisation of /s ^ʕ /
MN	100% [s]	100% [s]	75% [s ^ʕ] 25% [s ^ʕ] ^m	100% [s ^ʕ]
FN	100% [s]	100% [s]	100% [s ^ʕ] ^m	100% [s ^ʕ]
MA	100% [s]	52% [s] 38% [s ^ʕ] 10% [s ^ʕ] ^m	81% [s ^ʕ] 19% [s ^ʕ] ^m	100% [s ^ʕ]
FA	100% [s]	74% [s] 8% [s ^ʕ] 18% [s ^ʕ] ^m	25% [s ^ʕ] 75% [s ^ʕ] ^m	100% [s ^ʕ]

Conclusion:

- The fact that Arabic emphatics are realised as their de-emphasised cognates in Farsi could controversially be the reason behind the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ]. It could be that when the first generation of Ajamis attempted to speak Arabic, they were not sure whether certain Arabic words had a phonological /s/ or /s^ʕ/, and in order to avoid realising sounds in accordance to the Farsi sound system, they exhibited hyper-articulation, which is the process by which instead of realising /s^ʕ/ as [s] as a Farsi speaker might do, a Kuwaiti Ajami would realise KA /s/ as [s^ʕ], but only in a certain perhaps conducive environments (in the vicinity of /r/ and /g/).
- /r/ and /g/ involve back articulations (tongue retraction and predorsum lowering in the case of /r/), which may contribute to the pharyngealised [s^ʕ]. What is interesting though is that this realisation is only exhibited in Ajami speech.
- Najdis believe that the realization of (s) as [s^ʕ] out of the context of primary emphasis spread is 'not Kuwaiti'.
- Young Ajamis exhibit the lowest use of [s^ʕ] and also believe that this feature reflects the speaker's ethnic background.
- Young Ajamis believe that their parents' use of [s^ʕ] is 'embarrassing'.
- The Old Ajamis believe that their use of [s^ʕ] is only a reflection of co-articulation.
- Since the realisation of /s/ as [s^ʕ] is less frequent in the speech of young Ajamis, it is believed that this feature is going to disappear from the Kuwaiti dialect when not occurring as a result of primary emphasis spread.

References:

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