

The Persian Language

Persian is spoken today primarily in Iran and Afghanistan, but was historically a more widely understood language in an area ranging from the Middle East to India. Significant populations of speakers in other Persian Gulf countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates), as well as large communities in the USA.

Farsi is the national language of Iran. It is also referred to as Persian, although there are many who object to the use of the name Farsi to denote the Persian language. It is spoken by roughly half the population of Iran (about 25,000,000). The literary language is virtually identical in Iran and Afghanistan, with minor differences. Zargari may be a dialect used by goldsmiths. This Indo-European language has close to 30,000,000 total speakers.

Total numbers of speakers is high: over 40 million Farsi speakers (about 50% of Iran's population); over 7 million Dari Persian speakers in Afghanistan (25% of the population); and about 2 million Dari Persian speakers in Pakistan.



Modern Persian uses a modified version of the Arabic alphabet (see below). After the conversion of Persia to Islam, it took approximately one hundred fifty years before Persians adopted the Arabic alphabet as a replacement for the older alphabet. Previously, the Persian language (Middle Persian or Pahlavi at that time) used two different alphabets: a modified version of the Aramaic alphabet, and a native Iranian alphabet called *Dîndapirak* (literally: religion script).

Despite their shared alphabet, however, Persian and Arabic are entirely different languages, from different linguistic families and with different phonology and grammar.

Persian adds four letters to the Arabic alphabet for its use, due to the fact that four sounds that exist in Persian do not exist in Arabic. Additionally, it changes the shape of another two. Some people call this modified alphabet the Perso-Arabic alphabet. The additional four letters are:

sound	shape	Unicode name
p	پ	Peh
(ch)	چ	Tcheh
(zh)	ژ	Jeh
g	گ	Gaf

The letters different in shape are:

sound	original Arabic letter	modified Persian letter	name
k	ك	ک	Kaf
j and i:, or rarely a:	ي OR ی	ی	Yeh

There are many loanwords in the Persian language, mostly coming from the Arabic, English, French, and Turkic languages. Also, the words that have originated in the languages spoken in the region before the Arab invasion are usually changed in the pronunciation.

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