

# Facial Expressions as Non-Verbal Communication in the Arabic Corpus: A Semiotic Approach

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**Abstract**—This linguistic study takes an analytic semiotic approach to non-verbal communicative symbols, particularly the symbolism of the face in the Arabic corpus. This corpus includes the holy Quran, the noble Hadith, and Arabic poetry, proverbs, and dictionaries. The ‘face’ reflects multiple semantic expressions in different contexts, forming both positive and negative meanings and necessitating the clarification of their semantic and artistic functions. The aim was to identify the connotations of facial expressions in communicative uses by investigating the word ‘face’ and tracking its occurrences in the corpus. The positive and negative meanings of face as a term are also analyzed, as it comprehensively conveys meanings and symbolic connotations which express human states and emotions. The phenomenon is worth studying to reveal the symbolism of the ‘face’ and the diversity of its connotations, and to demonstrate its impact on the recipient. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted by tracking the symbol of the ‘face’ in Arabic texts as a tool for communicative action, identifying its occurrences in Arabic corpora, describing and analyzing them to uncover the meanings and ideas conveyed by this symbol, and drawing conclusions about its various effects on the recipient. One key finding was the extensive functional scope of the word face, which encompasses a range of human experiences and emotions, primarily because the face carries various expressions reflecting the inner depths of the soul, making it the first thing perceived and the primary feature through which expressive cues are read.

**Index Terms**—Arabic corpus, non-verbal communication, face, semiotics

## I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. The Concept of Communication

Linguists define the concept of communication by stating that ‘to reach’ or ‘to connect’ signifies a process of linking. The term ‘connection’ is the opposite of estrangement. When something is connected to something else, it remains uninterrupted, and when something reaches something else, it arrives at or attains it. Linguistic studies indicate that language is not limited to the verbal (spoken) aspect alone but also extends to various forms of non-verbal (silent) communication. Accordingly, researchers have classified communication into two main types: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication involves spoken words and vocal symbols in interactions between individuals or groups (Abu Isba’a, n.d.), while non-verbal communication is the conveyance of messages through body language and various behavioral channels. The latter includes a range of explicit behaviors, such as facial expressions, body movements, vocal variations, hand gestures, body posture, and the spatial distance between individuals during interaction (Qadri, 2016).

### B. The Face as a Mirror of the Soul

The face is fundamental to human communication as it conveys various expressions that reflect the inner self. It is the first feature observed and the primary aspect through which nonverbal expressions are interpreted. Through facial expressions, the recipient can perceive the emotions and intentions of the sender. The face serves as a representation of human identity in the eyes of others, revealing thoughts and sentiments that may otherwise remain concealed. As such, the face is an individual’s most visible and expressive feature (Ibn Faris, 1979), as it vividly reflects psychological states and serves as the primary medium for emotional expression (Al-Ansari, 2005). As the mirror of the self, the face represents identity and character, often being used metaphorically in Arabic to signify the self and one’s intention. Given its prominence, the face has also been associated with positive concepts such as honor, leadership, and dignity, as well as precedence, esteem, and modesty. Conversely, it can also signify negative attributes inherent in human nature. The face

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reveals a person's inner character and betrays their hidden thoughts, reflecting states of goodness or evil. Hence, it has been metaphorically linked to prosperity and abundance, as well as to poverty and hardship. It can symbolize generosity or miserliness, truthfulness or deception, contentment or anger, love or hatred, and beauty or ugliness (Al-Razi, 1420 AH). In Arabic literature, the face carries rich symbolic meanings, appearing in prose, poetry, the Quran, Hadith, and Arabic proverbs. It serves as a metaphor for a spectrum of human emotions, ranging from positive connotations—associated with beauty, tranquility, and happiness—to negative connotations, linked to alienation, anxiety, distress, and fear. The face, therefore, is a central motif in Arabic linguistic and literary traditions, encapsulating the depth of human experience through its expressions.

### C. Research Gap

To the best of our knowledge, there is no specialized study that explicitly explores the symbolism of the face and its diverse meanings in the Arabic corpus, and none has systematically examined the uses of the face in Arabic texts in general. However, some studies have addressed the face as part of bodily attributes and non-verbal communication, particularly in the poetry of specific poets, such as Al-'Abbas ibn al-Ahnaf (Tabakhi, 2022) and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (Ghaybi et al., 2021). Other studies have focused on the face in the Prophetic Hadith (Arar, 2009), body language in general (Zanjir, 2004), or more specifically, body language in the poetry of the Sa'alik (Qadira, 2013) and Abu Nuwas ('Abd et al., 2024). Another study explored aspects of non-verbal communication and its semantic role in al-Hariri's Maqamat (Rahmani et al., 2023). While previous studies intersect with our research in their discussion of non-verbal communication within specific samples related to a particular source, these have limited the significance of the face to a subheading that does not fully encompass its symbolism. In our study, we aim to reveal the symbolism of the face and document its uses and meanings in the Arabic corpus by showcasing diverse and comprehensive representative examples. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, we analyzed and classified these examples based on the meanings that necessitated the use of the face in Arabic texts, as well as its impact on the recipient. The research questions were as follows:

- How has the Arabic corpus employed the (face) symbol as a means of non-verbal communication?
- What meanings and connotations did the symbolism of the face convey in the Arabic corpus?
- How can we benefit from facial language in conveying our ideas to others on one hand, and in interpreting its meaning in the other party during the communication process on the other hand?
- What are the different effects conveyed by facial language in the Arabic corpus in general?

## II. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS OF THE FACE

In order to effectively achieve the objectives of this study, we categorized the semantic connotations associated with the face into positive and negative implications, based on the context in which the word 'face' (wajh) appears in selected samples from the Arabic corpus, as in the following.

### A. The Positive Connotations of the Face

An examination of the Arabic corpus reveals how the face has been utilized with various positive connotations in different contexts. The faces of Arab senders often act as a means of concealment by avoiding a direct expression; instead, the sender resorts to figurative language within the context, creating a captivating form of expression. This approach reveals the Arabic tongue's capacity for creativity and non-verbal communication within society. Rather than solely relying on direct language (or direct communication), Arabic speakers prefer to adopt symbolism to convey their meanings, wrapping them in layers of artistry and beauty. In this study, the positive meanings identified within selected models from the Arabic corpus are presented in the following sections.

#### (a). Beauty and Elegance

Beautiful faces captivate the human soul, because beauty brings joy to the heart and pleases the viewer with its charming features, making it difficult for the eye to turn away. The Arabic corpus is rich with references to facial expressions that indicate how beauty and elegance influence the observer. Poetry, in particular, is abundant with descriptions of facial beauty, as seen in the works of Abu Nuwas (2010), Al-Abshihi (2003), Al-Maghribi (1997), Al-Mutanabbi (2023), and Ibn Zaydun (1994). An example of this can be found in the poetry of Al-Abbas ibn Al-Ahnaf, who praises his beloved's beauty, emphasizing that not only does her charm surpass all others but is renewed each morning (Al-Ahnaf, 1954): 'She is perfect, and beauty is perfected in her face/ Every beauty besides hers is impossible/ For people, the crescent appears once a month/ But in her face, I see a new crescent every morning'. In prose, Arabic expressions also convey this idea of beauty and elegance. For instance, an old Arabic proverb states: 'More radiant than two earrings with a beautiful face between them' (Al-Maydani, n.d.). Additionally, in classical Arabic, a handsome person is described as 'wasim' (Al-Jawhari, 1987). Similarly, 'qasim' means 'a person with a handsome face' (Al-Anbari, 1992), and 'muqassam al-wajh' refers to someone with well-proportioned and striking facial features. This theme continues in Arabic proverbs and popular sayings. One well-known expression states: 'Your face or the moonlight?' (Al-Zughoul, 2016), which is used to compliment someone's beauty, comparing their radiant face to the glowing light of the moon, a timeless symbol of beauty and brilliance in the night sky.

(b). *Joy and Good Rejoicing*

Among the expressions found in the Arabic corpus is the expression of joy and rejoicing through facial features. Allah says: ‘Some faces that day will be radiant, laughing, rejoicing’ (Abasa: 38–39). The meaning of ‘laughing and rejoicing’ is a person who is happy and joyful, having known the reward and bliss that await them, as well as the honor bestowed upon them by Allah (see: Al-Qurtubi, 1964; Al-Tabari, 2000; Ibn Kathir, 1419 AH). This joy is also expressed by radiant faces (Al-Insan: 11). The face of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was most frequently described as joyful, and it is narrated that ‘the features of his face (asareer wajhih) were bright and shining’ (see: Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). Part of the meaning of joy is also expressed in the ‘welcoming, cheerful face’ as this open expression grants calm, comfort, happiness, and provides a sense of security and reassurance (Lashin, 2002).

In poetry, many Arabic collections express the radiant, joyful face, which is accompanied by the smiles that often accompany a joyful expression. One example is from Abu Nawas, who describes the face of his patron as having a radiance that brings peace to the soul (Abu Nawas, 2010): ‘You are protected from what you secretly rejoice in by the laughter of a face that does not disappoint you, shining brightly.’ It is also said: ‘A radiant man is one with a smiling, beautiful face’ (Ibn Sidhah, 1996). A popular saying states: ‘His face is always smiling’ (Al-Zughoul, 2016), referring to someone whose face is constantly smiling, full of vitality and cheerfulness.

(c). *Radiance*

By al-diyaa (radiance), we refer to the light that emanates from a person’s face as a reflection of the reward and bliss they experience. This concept is often expressed in Arabic through the phrase ‘bayād al-wajh’ (brightness or whiteness of the face), which conveys not only physical beauty but also inner tranquility and serenity. As stated in the Qur’an: ‘those whose faces will be bright’ (Al Imran: 107). According to Al-Qurtubi (1964), the brightening of the face signifies its illumination through divine grace. This meaning extends to the comparison of the face with the moon. When al-Baraa was asked whether the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) face resembled a sword, he responded, ‘No, rather it was like the moon’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH), emphasizing the intensity of its radiance.

In Arabic lexicons, the notion of al-diyaa as related to the face is linked to expressions such as ‘talala’a’ (to sparkle or shine) — e.g., ‘Someone’s face sparkled’ (al-Anbary, 1992) — and also to verbs like ‘ashraqa’ (to shine), ‘azhara’ (to brighten), ‘abaa’ (to glow), and ‘saraja’ (to illuminate), as in the phrase: ‘May God make his face bright and radiant’, all metaphorical of joy, grace, and vitality.

In classical Arabic poetry, poets often portrayed the luminous face as pure and unblemished, radiating with brilliance and light, and likened it to stars for its shine (Ibn Aby Husayna, 1956; al-Du’aly, 1964; Ibn Al-Ward, 1966; Al-Shanfary 1991; Turfah ibn Al-Abd, 2002; Ibn al-Khayyat, 1377 AH). In prose and proverbs, the concept persists in colloquial expressions, such as the popular Arab saying: ‘His face is luminous’ or ‘You can see the light shining from his face’ (Al-Zaghul, 2016), referring to a person whose face appears radiant and joyful, a reflection of deep happiness, vitality, and optimism.

(d). *Affection and Clarity*

The face is often used when a person is inwardly pure; his facial features become clear and serene. When the soul is pleased and welcoming, facial expressions naturally reflect satisfaction and approachability. In Arabic literature, this clarity and receptiveness are frequently conveyed through facial expressions (Nukhbat min al-Ulamaa, 2012). In Arabic poetry, numerous examples explore this theme (al-Ahnaf, 1954; al-Bahily, 1982). One such verse is attributed to ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, who expresses inner purity and love through the clarity of facial expressions, ‘The clarity of water is reflected in his face, and thus the water appears pure through the purity of his face’ (Ibn Abi Talib, 2005). Here, the purity in his face seems to give the water its clarity, not the other way around — as if the purity in his face is the original source, and the water draws its clarity from him. Classical Arabic writings also often connect affection and inner clarity with a cheerful and welcoming face, which signals openness and emotional availability (Uwaydah, n.d.). Similar expressions of respect, warmth, and cordiality are found in idioms like ‘He extended (basatah) his face toward him’—a metaphor for showing kindness and welcome (Ibn Jaafar, 2003).

(e). *Bliss*

One of the positive connotations conveyed by facial features is the abundance of bliss and prosperity reflected in a radiant, well-nourished face. As stated in the Qur’an: ‘You will recognize in their faces the radiance of bliss’ (Al-Mutaffifin: 24). This ‘radiance of bliss’ (naḍrat al-na‘īm) is described as the joy, freshness, and luster associated with comfort and luxury (see: Al-Zamakhshari, 1407 AH; Al-Baydawi, 1418 AH). Ibn Kathir (1419 AH) interprets it as ‘a description of elegance, dignity, joy, tranquility, and status, which they enjoy in their state of great bliss.’ Similarly, Sayyid Qutb (1980 CE) noted that ‘radiance flows over their faces and features’. These radiant faces are described as cheerful, content, and blessed (Al-Alusi, 1415 AH). Arabic lexicons affirm this meaning, as expressions like ‘nadir al-wajh’ (radiant-faced) are used to denote grace, joy, and beauty (Ibn Faris, 1979 CE). Likewise, the phrase ‘a man with a bright face’ refers to one whose face reflects signs of prosperity and happiness (see: Al-Azhari, 2001 CE; Al-Zabidi, n.d.).

(f). *Elevated Status*

One of the semantic connotations associated with the symbolism of the face is elevated status; for example, ‘a wajih man’ is a man of prestige and high social standing. The expression ‘wujuh al-balad’ refers to the notables of a town (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH; Al-Fayruzabadi, 2005 CE). Similarly, the expression ‘wujuh al-qawm’ signifies their leaders (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). It is also said: ‘Someone is the wajh of his people’, denoting a person of leadership and standing (Al-Asfahani, 1412 AH). Additionally, the expression ‘lahu wajh fihim’ denotes someone who holds a significant position or esteem among them (Al-Anbari, 1992). Arabs also use the color white (bayad) to denote purity, generosity, and goodness. When whiteness is attributed to the face, it signifies the pinnacle of honor, nobility, and virtue. This symbolism is often reflected in Arabic poetry; a poetic example is found in the verse by Thabit (1994): ‘They are white-faced, of noble lineage’. Here, the poet employs the imagery of the white face as a metaphor for their elevated status and esteemed social rank.

(g). *Dignity and Awe*

Dignity and awe are often manifested in men’s faces and their expressive features, particularly as depicted by poets who have portrayed the face as an embodiment of majesty and reverence (Al-Buhturi, 1964; Ibn Khaqan, 1320 AH; Al-Barquqi, 2012). A vivid example appears in Al-Mutanabbi’s praise of Sayf al-Dawla: ‘Your face wears a smile, and your lips glow with joy.’ This verse captures the image of a leader who smiles in the darkest hours of combat, standing firm as others flee. His radiant face amid the chaos of battle symbolizes awe-inspiring courage, unwavering resolve, and absolute fearlessness. Ibn Zaydun similarly praises Al-Mutamid ibn Abbad, saying: ‘A radiant face with sharp resolve, as pleasing as the edge of a polished sword’. The smiling or radiant face symbolizes a man of determination and strength—like a sword, beautiful in form yet sharp in function.

(h). *Uprightness*

Uprightness is one of the meanings alluded to by the symbol of the ‘face’ in Arab cultural corpus. It frequently appears in the Qur’an (see, for example, An-Nisa: 125; Al-A‘raf: 29; Luqman: 22; Aal Imran: 20; Yunus: 105) as well as in Hadith (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH). It is closely associated with the face of the Prophet and the faces of the believers, in whom the signs of uprightiness are visibly present (Al-Fath: 29), particularly those who pray frequently, as explained by Al-Zamakhshari (1407 AH), Al-Qurtubi (1964 CE, 16/293), and Al-Baydawi (1418 AH). This spiritual uprightiness is believed to manifest outwardly, such that their faces radiate light—a reflection of their inner values and moral integrity (Al-Shaarawy, n.d.).

One of the manifestations of a servant’s uprightiness is ‘submitting one’s face to God,’ which means showing humility in obedience to Him and complete surrender to His will. Allah says: ‘Yes, whoever submits his face to Allah...’ (Al-Baqarah: 112), with the meaning of making it purely and wholly for Allah (Al-Zamakhshari, 1407 AH). The ‘face’ is specifically mentioned because it is the most honored and visible part of a person, the center of sensory perception, and the place where dignity and humility are revealed. In Arabic tradition, the face often represents the whole person (Al-Qurtubi, 1964 CE; Al-Shawkani, 1414 AH; Al-Tabari, 2000 CE; Al-Sabuni, 1997 CE).

(i). *Dignity*

The face is considered the most distinguished and honored feature of the human being. Accordingly, Prophetic traditions have emphasized the importance of preserving the dignity of the face. Among these teachings is the prohibition against striking the face, as evidenced by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.; Al-‘Ayni, n.d.). This is out of respect for the face, as it contains the features that reflect a person’s beauty and character (Lashin, 2002 CE). Dignity is also expressed through the phrase ‘the water of the face’ (maa al-wajh), which conveys this symbolic meaning. Arabic lexicons emphasize this implication, as in: ‘He did this to preserve the water of his face’. Here, ‘the water of the face’ signifies dignity and modesty (Omar, 2008 CE). The term ‘horr al-wajh’ (the noble face) is also used to describe someone generous and honorable (Ibn Sidah, 1996 CE). Classical Arabic poetry also affirms this meaning, using ‘the water of the face’ to express dignity (Ibn Nubata, n.d.; Reinhart, 1432 AH; Ibn al-Khayyat, 1377 AH). The opposite expression, ‘he spilled the water of his face’, indicates a loss of dignity and is used when someone acts or speaks without shame (Ibn Jubayr, 1980 CE). Popular proverbs also reflect this concept, highlighting the symbolic power of the face in expressing dignity. For instance, the expression ‘bi-bayyid al-wajh’ (Zughoul, 2016 CE) — literally ‘he whitened the face’ — is used to praise someone whose actions have honored them in the eyes of others.

(j). *Purity and Innocence*

The face is used as a symbol of purity and innocence in certain Arabic contexts. One such example is a narration reported by Anas ibn Malik, describing the final illness of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He states: ‘The Prophet lifted the curtain of his room and looked at us while standing, and it was as if his face was a page from the Qur’an. Then he smiled with joy’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH). The comparison of the Prophet’s face to a page from the Qur’an conveys a striking image of radiant beauty, clarity of complexion, and spiritual purity (Al-‘Ayni, n.d.), as both the Qur’anic page and the face are united in purity and luminous elegance.

In classical Arabic literature, the face is frequently associated with nobility and inner refinement. For instance, Imru Al-Qays praises a tribe by saying: ‘The garments of the Banu Awf are pure and spotless, and their faces are bright as

guiding lights for travelers' (Imru Al-Qays, 2004). By describing their clothes as pure, he implies their freedom from disgraceful behavior, and by calling their faces radiant, he either refers to their moral purity, physical beauty, or both (Al-Al-Qurtubi, 1964). As Al-Musta'simi (n.d.) states, they are 'free from all defilements and flaws'. In this tradition, expressions like 'the water of the face' or 'the glow of the countenance' often denote chastity, purity, and honor (Ibn Khallikan, 1900).

(k). *Modesty and Shyness*

Modesty and shyness are among the most visible expressions that appear in facial features. The Arabic literary tradition has preserved some of the most beautiful portrayals of this association between the face and the emotion of modesty. An example of such aesthetic imagery appears in the poetry of Al-'Abbas ibn Al-Ahnaf (1954): 'She who captured your heart is a maiden, wide-eyed, covering her face with her arm'. This gesture—where the face is partially hidden by the arm—signifies shyness and modesty, which serve to enhance the beloved's beauty, charm, and allure. The Arabic tradition also contains many idiomatic expressions that link the face to modesty. For instance, 'His face softened' is used as a metaphor for feeling shy, while 'So-and-so is brave of heart but timid of face' means that a person is courageous but modest (Al-Zabidi, n.d., 25/355; Al-Yaziji, 1905). In contrast, other idioms reflect a lack of modesty and the degradation of dignity, such as: 'He spilled the water of modesty from his face' (Ibn Jubayr, 1980), or 'He is thick-faced'—meaning shameless (Ibn Faris, 1979; Al-Azhari, 2001).

(l). *Amazement*

There is no image more expressive than facial expressions when it comes to conveying amazement. One of the most powerful symbolic examples appears in the Qur'an, where Allah says: 'So his wife came forward with a loud cry, struck her face, and said, "[How can I have a child] when I am a barren old woman?"' (Adh-thariyat: 29). The phrase 'struck her face' indicates that she placed her hand on her forehead out of astonishment. In classical Arabic, *sakk* means to strike or slap. It has also been interpreted as gathering the fingers and striking the forehead with the palm (Al-Tabari, 2000). This is a physical gesture that strongly signals shock or amazement. A similar expression of astonishment appears in the poetry of al-Hudhlul ibn Kaab al-Anbary, describing his wife's reaction upon seeing him grinding grain for guests (Sharrab, n.d.): 'She said, and struck her face with her right hand/ "Is this my husband, bending over the millstone?"/ I said to her, "Do not be surprised—you'll understand my endurance when warriors surround me"'. This poetic exchange illustrates the woman's astonishment at seeing her husband engaged in a domestic chore—grinding grain for guests—something she perceives as unbecoming of a man. Her reaction reflects social expectations around gender roles and labor. The husband, however, calmly responds, asserting that his capacity for endurance should not be judged by such a scene. His true strength, he explains, is revealed in the intensity of battle, when he stands firm while surrounded by warriors. In these examples, striking the face appears as a traditional and inherited gesture among women to express surprise or disbelief and this behavior is still observed today in some cultures, in which women slap their faces or foreheads in moments of emotional shock or astonishment.

B. *The Negative Connotations of the Face*

The Arabic corpus is rich in negative connotations associated with the symbolic use of the face to express a wide range of meanings, such as inner anger, emotional exhaustion, fear, sadness, spiritual pain, and related sentiments that convey unease, physical fatigue, aversion toward the intended goal, dissatisfaction, betrayal, and discontent. All these and more are often reflected through facial expressions. In our study, we observed numerous such connotations, summarized in the following negative meanings.

(a). *Anger*

The Arabic corpus documents expressions of this negative emotion primarily in contexts where the Prophet (peace be upon him) expressed anger in response to matters of religion. The state of anger could be read from the Prophet's face, even when not explicitly stated in words. Examples include expressions such as: 'his face changed, his face turned red, the face of the Messenger of Allah changed color, his cheeks turned red, anger was seen on his face, he became angry until the anger was known from his face' (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH). One example of this is when the Prophet's face changed color in anger due to a man's insolence, as reported in Al-Bukhari (1422 AH) and Al-Musnad al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (n.d.). The facial color change here reflects the Prophet's reaction, and its association with anger restricts the interpretation of this change to that specific emotional state.

In Arabic poetry, the symbolism of the face to denote anger also appears, for example, when 'Umar ibn Abi Rabiah describes a woman named Tuktam, whose face showed signs of anger: 'By my life, I clearly saw on Tuktam's face the signs of frowning and anger when we met' (Umar ibn Abi Rabiah, 1992). Arabic lexicons also attest to this symbolic association. For instance, the phrase 'He came with a flushed face' was used to describe someone who is angry (Al-Jawhari, 1987; Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH).

(b). *Worry and Distress*

The Arabic corpus is rich with facial symbolism that conveys worry and distress. Such symbolism appears in various Qur'anic contexts, often describing the reactions of disbelievers to particular events or situations (e.g., Al-Zumar: 60;

Abasa: 40). One notable example is the verse: ‘Their faces will be covered, as it were, with pieces of the night—utter darkness. Those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein forever’ (Yunus: 27). This verse has been interpreted to mean that their faces were covered with the darkness of the night, as if shrouded due to their deep sorrow and sense of loss, a figurative expression for the inner gloom and despair that manifests outwardly through facial darkness (Ibn Faris, 1979 CE). Another example can be seen in reference to the sorrow experienced upon the birth of a daughter, where the darkening of the face symbolizes grief and disappointment: (Al-Nahl: 58) The Arabs would say, ‘his face darkened with grief and sadness’ (Al-Qurtubi, 1964 CE). According to Al-Shanqiti (1995 CE), ‘the intensity of sadness and depression causes the face to darken’. This symbolic association between facial color and emotional states is also evident in the Prophetic tradition.

(c). *Fatigue and Emaciation*

In Arabic discourse, facial expressions are often used as symbols to indicate fatigue and emaciation—that is, weakness—in various contexts. However, they are most commonly associated with the color yellow. This color carries multiple connotations depending on the context. It may relate to a person’s physical health, where a yellowish face indicates illness or physical weakness. It may also have psychological implications, as a yellow face can express extreme fear or anxiety. In some cases, the expression may carry spiritual meaning, understood through context as a sign of sadness or distress reflected on the face—especially in Arabic poetry (Al-Shanfara, 1991; Al-Azhari, 2001; Al-Sayyab, 2017). Al-Tihami also illustrates this emotional and physical association in his poetry (Al-Tahami, 1982): ‘I still remember her face turning yellow from the pain of separation’. The expression ‘his face was expressionless (sahim)’ is also used to denote weakness and exhaustion (Diwan al-Hudhaliyyin, 1965; Al-Yusi, 1981). The term ‘eclipse’ is also used in this negative sense; for example: ‘there is an eclipse on his face’ means there is a yellowish discoloration and change. A ‘kasif’ man (literally: eclipsed) is someone whose color has changed and become weak due to sorrow (Al-Azhari, 2001). These expressions may also be associated with the color black, indicating facial pallor due to illness or grief. This is referred to as ‘sufaa’, which appears as darkness on the cheeks of a pale woman. A dove is also called ‘safaa’ because of the dark markings on its neck (Al-Jawhari, 1987).

(d). *Humiliation and Disgrace*

The face was used as a symbol to indicate humiliation and disgrace in Arabic discourse. In certain Arabic contexts, the face is used metaphorically to convey this meaning—such as the submissive and humbled faces described in the verse: ‘Some faces that Day will be humbled. Laboring, weary’ (Al-Ghashiyah: 2). That is, the faces of the disbelievers will be humiliated, having not worked for the sake of God in this world, so they are made to labor in the fire. This meaning also appears in the context of the face losing its dignity due to excessive asking and begging. As narrated from ‘Abd Allah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A man will continue asking people until, on the Day of Judgment, he will come with no flesh left on his face’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.).

This figurative use of the face also appears in poetry (Al-Hashimi, n.d.; Dik al-Jinn, 2004), where the loss of ‘the water of the face’ is linked to disgrace and dishonor due to persistent begging (Al-Sharif Al-Murtada, 1997; Al-Hanbaly, n.d.). Salih ibn Jinah said (Al-Yusi, 1981): ‘If the water of the face dries up, so does one’s sense of shame/ And there is no good in a face when its water is gone’. In Arabic dictionaries, it can also be seen that classical Arabic contains expressions related to the face to convey this meaning. For instance: ‘Akhlaqa wajhahu’ means ‘he humiliated his dignity’ (Al-Saghani, n.d.), and ‘He dried out the water of modesty from his face and threw off the veil of shame’ (Al-Yaziji, 1905). In popular proverbs, this meaning is reflected in expressions such as: ‘Bissawwid al-wijh,’ ‘Sawayyid wijh,’ and ‘Tili biswad al-wijh’ (Al-Zughoul, 2016), where these sayings express shame or dishonor brought upon someone.

(e). *Frowning and Grimness*

In Arabic contexts, the ‘face’ is also used to indicate frowning and grimness. This is exemplified in the description of faces as basirah (Al-Qiyamah: 24). Al-Zamakhshari (1407 AH) interprets basir as someone frowning severely. These are the faces that are very grim, withdrawn, and miserable—shielded from hope due to their sins (see: Qutb, 1980). This meaning is also conveyed metaphorically with the term mukfahir (Ibn Sidah, 1996).

Additionally, the term kalih is used to describe frowning faces (Al-Mu’minun: 104). Linguists interpret kuluh as a grimace accompanied by frowning (Al-Qurtubi, 1964). Al-Shanqiti (1995) explains that a kalih face is one twisted by grimness and tension, with bared teeth from the severity of the frown. Al-Razi (1999) notes that jahm al-wajh means a kalih face. Abu Hayyan (1420 AH) also defines kuluh as the scowling of the face and its contraction, that is, frowning.

Dictionaries contain expressions related to this meaning, such as: ‘Qattaba wajhah taqtiban’, meaning ‘he frowned and became angry’ (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). In proverbial wisdom, the phrase ‘wajh kasif’—a sullen or gloomy face—is used to describe a frowning, stingy person: ‘Do you frown your face and withhold your wealth?’ (Al-Maydani, n.d.). Folk proverbs also reflect this concept. One example is: ‘His face doesn’t even smile at hot bread’ (Al-Zughoul, 2016), indicating someone who is perpetually frowning and joyless.

(f). *Ugliness*

Ugliness may refer to both the physical and tangible lack of beauty in one’s face. Al-Tabari (2000) notes that the Qur’an characterizes these faces as ugly, revealing their hatred through frowns, scowls, anger, and emotional agitation. They

reject what they hear, and their internal hostility nearly turns into an outward rage against those who recite the Qur'an due to the evil and hatred within them (Al-Sha'rawi, n.d.). This notion also appears in prophetic tradition. It is mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which says: 'May their faces be disfigured (shahat al-wujuh)'—(Muslim, n.d.). The phrase *shahat al-wujuh* means 'their faces became distorted,' or in other words, 'ugly' (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). Another expression used to describe one who shamelessly reveals their ugliness is '*saafir al-wajh*' (one whose face is exposed), referring to someone who openly displays moral or social impropriety (Ibn Ja'far, 2003). Classical Arabic sources describe *shatim al-wajh* as one with a harsh, offensive appearance—'a face that invites insult due to its harshness and unpleasantness' (Al-Anbary, 1992; Ibn Sidah, 1996; Al-Farabi, 2003). Similarly, *mushawwah al-wajh* means 'disfigured or deformed face' (Al-Anbary, 1992), a description frequently found in classical poetry (Al-Du'ali, 1964; Al-'Askari, n.d.). For example, one poet states (Al-Maydani, n.d.) 'I see a face whose form God disfigured, cursed is that face, and cursed its bearer'. In proverbs, the expression 'The face of the slanderer is the ugliest' is cited, referring to one who brings insults or offensive words from others. It implies that a slanderer bears a face more contemptible than the slander itself (Al-Maydani, n.d.). In popular culture, a folk saying declares: 'His face is like the corn monkey' (Al-Zaghoul, 2016), humorously describing someone whose facial features are unattractive or off-putting. The phrase 'corn monkey' refers to a creature perceived as unappealing in appearance.

(g). *Hypocrisy*

In Arabic discourse, the term 'face' has been metaphorically employed to indicate hypocrisy. Expressions like 'the face of the day' suggest clarity and honesty, whereas 'the face of the night' symbolizes deceit and hypocrisy. The Arabic term *tho al-wajhain* ('two-faced') also serves as a metaphor for a hypocrite—one who sows discord by presenting different faces and speech to different groups (Lashin, 2002). This is reinforced in the hadith where the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Indeed, the worst of people is the one with two faces—he comes to some with one face and to others with another' (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.). Al-'Ayni (n.d.) clarifies that this does not literally refer to two physical faces but is, rather, a metaphor for contradictory behavior and duplicity. This metaphor has been preserved in Arabic poetry (Ibn al-Jahm, n.d.; The One-Eyed Ash-Shayni, 1999; Al-Abshihi, 2003). A similar sentiment is echoed in a popular proverb: 'In front of you, a mirror; behind you, a sickle' (Al-Zaghoul, 2016), describing a person who presents an honest and pleasing appearance face-to-face.

(h). *Rejection and Aversion*

In the Arabic corpus we analyzed, we saw employed the symbol of the face to convey the notion of rejection and aversion, often drawing on nonverbal body language. The expression '*ashaha bi-wajhihi*' (he turned his face away) is used to indicate deliberate avoidance or turning away. Lexicographical sources confirm this meaning as a form of nonverbal communication, stating: 'We say: I spoke to him and he turned his face away, meaning he showed aversion' (al-Zamakhshari, 1998; Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). This is a description of a physical gesture that indicates disapproval or intentional avoidance. It is also reported in descriptions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that when he became angry, he would turn away and avert his face (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH; Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH). This nonverbal figurative usage is found in poetry (Al-Ahnaf, 1954; Al-Shafi'i, n.d.), as well as in the verse by 'Umar ibn Abi Rabyah: 'She turned away and said: 'Liar! and frowned— My soul be a ransom for the one who turns away with scorn'. The phrase 'she turned away' is a metonym for aversion.

(i). *Hatred*

The Arabic corpus—particularly in the Prophetic tradition—preserves many instances in which the face serves as a nonverbal symbol for expressing hatred. It is reported that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) saw clouds or heard the wind, signs of unease and displeasure would appear on his face. This symbolic use of the face also appears in proverbs. One such proverb states: 'The face of your enemy reveals his intentions,' similar in meaning to the expression 'Hatred is shown through the eyes' (Al-Maydani, n.d.), which highlights the expressive role of the face in conveying inner resentment and hostility, especially in adversarial contexts.

(j). *Wandering (Loss of Direction)*

The Arabic linguistic corpus occasionally employs the symbol of the face as a metaphor for a state of disorientation or wandering. This symbolic use is evident in expressions such as 'falling on one's face', which denotes deviation from guidance (Al-Tabari, 2000), as illustrated in the Qur'anic verse: 'Is he who walks fallen on his face more rightly guided than he who walks upright on a straight path?' (Al-Mulk: 22). This bodily expression metaphorically represents misguidance in this life and, as such, the misguided will appear in the afterlife in a physically humiliated state—fallen on their faces—underscoring their spiritual loss. A related expression in Arabic is 'he wandered aimlessly' (*hama ala wajhih*), which indicates someone who has lost their sense of direction or purpose (Al-Zughul, 2016). In proverbial usage, the expression 'the world has tightened around his face' (*idyaqqat al-dunya bi-wajhih*) (Al-Zughul, 2016) is used to describe someone overcome with despair, unable to find a way forward. Here, the face is employed metonymically to represent the self and internal emotional state, particularly when facial expressions convey suffering, confusion, or hopelessness.

### III. CONCLUSION

This practical linguistic investigation into non-verbal communication emphasizes the significance of symbolic meanings attributed to the face in Arabic linguistic heritage. The study focused on how contextual factors prompt the use of specific bodily gestures or expressions and explored the interplay between external physical signals and internal psychological, emotional, and ideological states. Accordingly, we found the Arabic corpus to be rich in positive connotations associated with the symbolic use of the face to express a wide range of meanings, such as beauty and elegance, joy and rejoicing, radiance, affection and clarity, bliss, elevated status, dignity and awe, uprightness, dignity, purity and innocence, modesty and shyness and amazement through facial features. However, negative connotations were also found in the Arabic corpus to express a wide range of meanings, such as inner anger, emotional exhaustion, fear, sadness, spiritual pain, and related sentiments that convey unease, physical fatigue, aversion toward the intended goal, dissatisfaction, betrayal, and discontent. All these and more are often reflected through facial expressions. In our study, we observed numerous such connotations.

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