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## Kinesics As A Form of Non Verbal Communication: A Textual Analysis Of The Holy Quran

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**Abstract:** Al-Quran is a holy book revealed to the Moslems as a guidance. The revelation is very comprehensive, covering all aspects of life. As such, it is no wonder that to date, it has attracted a lot of interests from scholars who have tirelessly been analyzing the contents of the book to gain better understanding of it. One discipline that has widely been investigated is communication, specifically non verbal. This article is written based on a qualitative study undertaken to understand one component of non verbal communication, that is, kinesics. The study was conducted using content analysis method whereby verses in the Quran were analysed to examine the use of kinesics as a form of communication. The findings revealed that in al Quran, kinesics can generally be categorized into four namely 1) arm movements 2) head movements 3) leg movements, and 4) body postures including sitting down, lying down, bowing, and prostration. The study has proven the presence of kinesics as a form of non verbal communication as clearly explicated in Al-Quran.

**Keywords:** communication, nonverbal communication, kinesics, gestures in al-Quran, body language

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### INTRODUCTION

Communication, according to Little (as cited in Vikram Bisen, 2009, p.2) can be defined as "the process by which information is transmitted between individuals and/or organizations so that an understanding response results". It is an important skill to be learned and acquired by all as the ability to communicate well and effectively will bring about many positive outcomes to personal and professional life. Among the benefits include building good relationship with others, and creating positive environment to live in. Communication can take place in two different forms namely verbal and non verbal (Floyd, 2009). It does not matter which forms are used so long as it enables ideas, and information to get conveyed to other parties.

Verbal communication, according to Asmah (1988), is a form of communication that uses language to send messages. This is the most common form of communication that takes place. Meanwhile, non verbal communication as defined by Yanti, (2007) is a process of conveying messages without the use of language. As non verbal communication is one form of human behavior, it can influence a person's actions, thoughts, perceptions, feelings towards objects, ideas, situation or value (Che Mohd Zaid, Zawawi Ismail, Mohammad Ibrahim Al Jarrah, Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, Mohd Ala-uddin Othman, and Abdul Wahid Salleh, 2019). Therefore, it is mostly used to convey emotions, needs, intentions, attitudes, and thoughts. It is sometimes more important than verbal communication. The impacts of non verbal communication are great as it is capable of influencing the quality of performance in an individual (Mohd Ala-Uddin Othman, Zawawi Ismail, Che Mohd Zaid, Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, 2020 ). However, Knapp (2002) states that in terms of the functions of both verbal and non verbal communication, the former is meant for communicating ideas while the latter (non verbal) is used to deliver messages through emotions. However, since the study is interested in non verbal communication, therefore the focus of the rest of the article is mainly on non verbal especially those related to kinesics.

## KINESICS

Various definitions are used to describe what kinesics is. Floyd (2009), for example, states that kinesics is commonly referred to as body language. Similarly, Mc Auley (1992) and Richmond dan Mcroskey (2000) define kinesics as the way a person walks, stands, and other types of body movements.

Nordin (2016) states that body movements have their own messages which can be interpreted differently depending on the cultures. Ellis (2009) believes that the success or failure of any communication relies heavily on the body language projected in front of the public. Because of this, numerous studies that have been conducted show that one's body language can either enhance or distort the messages one intends to convey. Similarly Kelly (2007), states that body language acts as a way to enhance messages delivered as well as to grab audience attention to listen to the speech. In addition, it also functions as a way to reduce anxiety, nervousness and stress during a speech.

Kinesics comes in different forms, one of which is posture (Nordin, 2016). Posture refers to the way a person holds his body when moving or even sitting still (Usamah, 2010). It can be interpreted in a number of ways depending on the position such as friendliness, hostility, power and humility (Zamri, 2007).

Aside from having different types, kinesics also plays different functions. In describing the functions, Ekman and Friesen (1969) divide them into five roles: emblems, affective displays, regulators, adaptors, and illustrators.

1. Emblems which refers to non verbal movements substituting words such as sign of "V" to mean victory or "thumb up" to mean good.
2. Affective displays refer to the emotions and feelings expressed through facial expressions such as happiness, anger, fear and sorrow.
3. Regulators are used to ensure the "flow of interaction" among interlocutors is organized.
4. Adaptors are kinesics behavior that used to alleviate stress. Some examples include nail biting, and playing with an object.
5. Illustrators refer to the gestures "that are used illustrate illustrate the verbal message they accompany" (Hans & Hans, 2015, p. 47). One example of an illustrator is the use of gestures to describe the physical appearance of an object such as shape and size.

## KINESICS IN THE QURAN

In the Holy Quran, there are numerous cases that refer to non verbal language namely kinesics to highlight certain issues. Some of the examples of kinesic movements include arm movements, head movements, limb movements, and postures.

### 1. Hand Movement

Hand movements are frequently described in the quran. These include, moving the hands back and forth in circular motion, finger (nail) biting, slapping, mouth covering, hand shaking, and inserting fingers into ears.

#### 1.1 Hand movements

##### 1.1.1 "Ungiving" hands

Allah swt reminds the believers about characteristics of parsimonious people through the following verses: Quran Translation: *The Jews say: "Allah's hand is tied up." Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay, both His hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth. But the revelation that cometh to thee from Allah increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. Amongst them we have placed enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgment. Every time they kindle the fire of war, Allah doth extinguish it; but they (ever) strive to do mischief on earth. And Allah loveth not those who do mischief.* (Surah al-Ma'idah: 5:64)

According to Ibn Kathir (1994), the Jews accuse Allah SWT of being parsimonious just like they accuse Allah of being destitute. In fact, the phrase "*Yadullah maghlulah*" they uttered which literally carries the meaning of Allah's hands were tied. This, however, was disputed by Ibn Abbas. He claimed that the Jews did not mean to say that Allah's hands were literally tied but rather to show that Allah was not generous to His creations, which was against the nature of all merciful and forgiving Allah.

Similarly, Ibn 'Asyur (2000) explains that the Jews describe Allah SWT as parsimonious because the Arabs usually equate hands with the act of giving. This is clarified by the following verse:

Quran Translation: *Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.* (Surah al-Isra', 17:29).

This is another verse that was purposely used to exemplify the movement of hands, as if the hands are tied, (thus preventing Man from being generous), in describing parsimony.

##### 1.1.2 Twisting and turning hands

This movement, twisting and turning hands, reflects a sense of great remorse, even in the absence of words. This is depicted in the following verse:

Quran Translation: *So his fruits (and enjoyment) were encompassed (with ruin), and he remained twisting and turning his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very*

foundations, and he could only say, "Woe is me! Would I had never ascribed partners to my Lord and Cherisher!" (Surah al-Kahf, 18:42)

### 1.1.3 Finger biting

Finger biting symbolizes the feeling of great sorrow, disappointment, and remorse felt by the person inflicted with it. The following verse describes the case.

Quran Translation: *The Day that the wrong-doer will bite at his hands, he will say, "Oh! would that I had taken a (straight) path with the Messenger!"* (Surah al-Furqan, 25:27)

### 1.1.4 Slapping/ Hitting the face/ Patting the face

This gesture was made by the wife of Prophet Abraham to manifest the feeling of bewilderment). This gesture was commonly made by Arab women as a sign of defiance (Ibn 'Adil, nd.). Allah SWT describes the behavior in the following verse:

Quran Translation: *But his wife came forward (laughing) aloud: she smote her forehead and said: "A barren old woman!"* (Surah al-Zariyat, 51:29)

### 1.1.5 Covering one's mouth with a hand

According to Sayyid Qutb (1992), the act of covering one's mouth with a hand reflects deceit, uncertainty, and hatred in the most despicable manner. This action is mentioned in the following verse

Quran Translation: *Has not the story reached you, (O people!), of those who (went) before you? - of the people of Noah, and 'Ad, and Thamud? - And of those who (came) after them? None knows them but Allah. To them came messengers with clear (signs); but they put their hands up to their mouths, and said: "We do deny (the mission) on which ye have been sent, and we are really in suspicious (disquieting) doubt as to that to which ye invite us."* (Surah Ibrahim, 14:9)

### 1.1.6 Shaking Hands

Shaking hands symbolizes one's intention to uphold truth or to make good on a promise. The prophet teaches his followers the proper way to shake hands, ie by placing one's hand over the hand of the party making the promise.

Quran Translation: *Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah: the hand of Allah is over their hands: then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfils what he has covenanted with Allah,- Allah will soon grant him a great reward.* (Surah al-Fath, 48:10)

In the verse, Allah's hand is symbolically used to signify the fact that the promise made to the prophet is as good as the promise made to Allah. In other words, it is as if the person is making the promise to Allah. Surely, Allah is clear from the attributes of his creation and from resembling them.

## 1.2 Finger movements

### 1.2.1 Inserting fingers into ears

Inserting fingers into one's ears can be interpreted in two different ways. One is a sign of cowardice while the other is used to symbolize an act of resentment. This is based on the message in the following verse:

Quran Translation: *Or (another similitude) is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky: In it are zones of darkness, and thunder and lightning: They press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap, the while they are in terror of death. But Allah is ever round the rejecters of faith!* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:19)

In the above verse, Allah SWT describes the fear faced by the hypocrites when listening to the verses in the Quran which is supposed to serve as reminders to being. They would behave in a similar manner whenever lightning struck and loud thunder rolled ie by inserting their fingers into the ears. This shows that they were unwilling to heed to the reminders from Allah. Thus this is seen as an act of resentment.

### 1.2.2 Finger biting

The following verse in the Quran explains the act of finger biting

Quran Translation: *Ah! ye are those who love them, but they love you not,- though ye believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, "We believe": But when they are alone, they bite off the very tips of their fingers at you in their rage. Say: "Perish in you rage; Allah knoweth well all the secrets of the heart."* (Surah Ali Imran, 3:119)

According to al-Qurtubi (2006), finger biting symbolizes an act made by a person who is infuriated with an event which he could no longer do anything to prevent or even control. Sayyid Qutb (1987), however, describes this as an indication of one's internal state, when a person attempts to conceal something in his heart. This will be projected in his facial expressions which show disappointment and rage.

## 2. Head movements

Another type of kinesics described in the Quran is head movements. There are different types of head movements including lifting it upwards, shaking and nodding.

### 2.1 Lifting head upwards

al-Razi (2000) defines the word *al-iqnaa'* as lifting the head while gazing in despair when a person is facing hardships. The following verse describes the movement in detail.

Quran Translation: *They running forward with necks outstretched, their heads uplifted, their gaze returning not towards them, and their hearts a (gaping) void!* (Surah Ibrahim, 14:43)

## **2.2 Shaking head/ turning head aside**

This movement is used to explain the behavior of the hypocrites. This is used to describe the situation when they were requested by the believers to see the prophet SAW, so that he could seek forgiveness from Allah for them. The hypocrites however, turned down the request, by turning their heads aside.

Quran Translation: *And when it is said to them, "Come, the Messenger of Allah will pray for your forgiveness", they turn aside their heads, and thou wouldst see them turning away their faces in arrogance.* (Surah al-Munafiqun, 63:5)

Al-Mawardi (n.d) states that they turned their heads aside, and also turned their faces away from the speaker. All these indicate that they were enraged. In addition, he explains further that the act of shaking one's head without even looking at the speaker is used to describe someone who is very arrogant, and is suspicious of others.

## **2.3 Nodding**

The gesture was explained in the following verse:

Quran Translation: *"Or created matter which, in your minds, is hardest (to be raised up),- (Yet shall ye be raised up)!" then will they say: "Who will cause us to return?" Say: "He who created you first!" Then will they wag their heads towards thee, and say, "When will that be?" Say, "May be it will be quite soon!"* (Surah al-Isra', 17:51)

Qatadah berpendapat mereka mengangguk-anggukkan kepala ke atas dan ke bawah dalam keadaan mempersenda dan mempermainkan

Qatadah believes that, the act of nodding the head is used to show that the person doing it, is making fun of others as well as belittling them. (Ibn Kathir, 1994).

## **3. Leg movements**

### **3.1 Leg movements**

Leg movements represent the act of drawing attention to oneself. This is normally done by women who are attention seekers by donning accessories on their ankles, so that others will notice their presence. This is a forbidden act as it allows vices to spread as it entices men into committing sinful acts through imagination.

The following verse explains the movement in detail:

Quran Translation: *And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain bliss.* (Surah al-Nur, 24:31)

Sayyid Qutb (1992) explains that the verse was revealed to prevent pious women from making movements that reveal adornments and accessories thus exposing their modesty and humility. These movements will arouse sexual desires in men.

### **3.2 Placing an object beneath the sole/ foot**

Placing an object under one's sole is a portrayal of insults/ humiliation. What this means is that the person/ object that is being stepped on is being insulted. This is used to portray the conditions of the non believers in the Hell.

The following verse describes the gesture:

Quran Translation: *And the unbelievers will say: "Our Lord! Show us those, among jinns and men, who misled us: We shall crush them beneath our feet, so that they become the vilest (before all)."* (Surah Fussilat, 41:29)

The verse explains how the non believers are treated in Hell. They requested that Allah brings them those who have led them astray so that they could seek revenge on the person for misleading them. They intended to step/ stamp on them with their own feet.

The expressions "for us to step on them" and *al-asfalin* are used in the verse to place the sinners who misguided them at rock bottom, a worse position than they are themselves (Ibn 'Asyur, 2000).

## **4. POSTURE**

### **4.1 Standing**

A number of verses in the Quran discuss the act of standing up. This simple act carries different meanings depending on the contexts. The meanings could vary from standing for truth, or standing when performing prayer. However, it may also be associated with the feeling of indecisiveness. Another meaning is when the word is used to describe the feeling of bewilderment.

Some of the verses show that the messages are simple and easy to understand (Usamah, 2010). While in other verses, the meaning has to be inferred based on the context.

A verse in the Quran describes how standing is used:

Quran Translation: *Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the thought): "Our Lord! not for naught hast thou created (all) this! Glory to thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of the fire."* (Surah Ali Imran, 3:191)

Standing is a gesture to show obedience to Allah's command in performing prayers Ibn Kathir (1983). However, in the above verse, it is not the act of standing that is important, rather what is more important is being obedient to Allah. If a person's condition does not permit, then he can pray while sitting down or even lying down so long as he performs his religious duties faithfully.

The following verse illustrates another meaning of standing, whose meaning needs to be inferred carefully.

Quran Translation: *And the Horn will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth will fall dead except whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown again, and at once they will be standing, looking on.* (Surah al Zumar, 39:68).

This verse describes the condition of mankind on the Day of Judgement whereby they are resurrected, and standing in disbelief.

#### **4.2 Sitting down**

The word "sit" and its derivations is mentioned 21 times in the Quran. The word itself can carry different connotations, both positive and negative. While it can be used to describe positive behaviour such as someone performing good deeds and possessing strong will power, and showing perseverance. On the hand, it can also carry negative connotation such as, sitting with the hypocrites, doing something half heartedly, or a sign of destitution.

The following verse in the Quran describes the movement in detail:

Quran Translation: *Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth...* (Surah Ali Imran, 3:191)

Ibn 'Ajibah (2002), explains that the believers are always in remembrance of Allah regardless of their conditions or the situations they are in .

#### **4.3 Lying down**

Lying down carries different connotation based on the contexts. At times it has positive connotations such as a movement which is made while performing prayers. This is described in the following verse:

Quran Translation: *When ye pass (congregational) prayers, celebrate Allah's praises, standing, sitting down, or lying down on your sides; but when ye are free from danger, set up regular prayers: For such prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times.* (Surah al-Nisa', 4:103)

In addition, lying down is used to either show the state of exhaustion, or sometimes relaxation as described below:

Quran Translation: *When trouble toucheth a man, He crieth unto Us (in all postures)- lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We have solved his trouble, he passeth on his way as if he had never cried to Us for a trouble that touched him! thus do the deeds of transgressors seem fair in their eyes!* (Surah Yunus, 10:12)

However, in general, lying down is a manifestation of weakness and frailty - lack of physical strength.

#### **4.4 Bowing down**

Another example of kinesics found in the Quran is bowing down (*rukuk*). Ahmad (2003) states that bowing is a sign of respect and warm welcome towards others. It is practiced in many eastern cultures such as Japanese and Korean. Although *rukuk* is normally defined as an act bowing down, the words are not exactly synonymous with each other. *Rukuk*, in Islam, is only performed during prayers and is slightly different from the normal bowing. To be specific, *rukuk* is bending the upper part of the body in a 90 degree position.

The following verse in the Quran provides evidence of the use of kinesics in the form of bowing down.

Quran Translation: *And be steadfast in prayer; practise regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:43)

#### **4.5 Sujud.**

Prostration is a gesture that indicates modesty, humility, obedience and great respect for others (Ahmad, 2003).

This is based on the following verse in the Quran:

Quran Translation: *But celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and be of those who prostrate themselves in adoration.* (Surah al-Hijr, 15:98)

These are some examples pertaining to kinesics or body movements that are found in the Holy Quran. They are used as evidence to support the need for humans to develop clear understanding of the functions of kinesics as depicted in the Quran. This also indicates that Allah SWT recognizes non verbal language as a form of communication among human beings. Thus we should not restrict our communication to verbal only. It can be complemented with non verbal too as at times non verbal communication can convey the message better and more effectively. The importance of non verbal communication is given a special mention in the Quran in the following verse. *"That Day shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to us, and their feet*

*bear witness, to all that they did.*" (Surah Yasin, 36:65). What this verse describes is that on the day of judgment, it is our body parts that become the witness to our deeds performed in this world.

## CONCLUSION

The quranic verses analysed in the study contain numerous examples of the use of non verbal communication. This shows that kinesic language such as gestures and body movements are an important aspect of communication as they are used to represent different meanings and interpretations. The fact that non verbal communication is closely embedded in our society and is explicitly mentioned in the Quran requires special attention and needs to be taken seriously. Based on the analysis, it can be proven that kinesics explicated in the Quran should not be interpreted and understood literally. Rather, the meaning behind each movement should be interpreted in its true sense depending on the context of the verses. What is more important is for the Moslems to analyse and contemplate on each of the meanings carefully so that the information intended to be conveyed reaches its target readership. The mastery of the Quranic language verbal and nonverbal should complement each other to enable the Moslems to better understand basic Islamic texts (Che Mohd Zaid, Jumadil Saputra, Zawawi Ismail, Mohd Ala-uddin Othman, Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, Nurul Ain Chua Abdullah, 2020). Perhaps, future studies should be conducted to analyse different aspects of non verbal communication, such as kinesics, and haptics in order for readers to have better understanding of the Holy Quran so that messages in it are understood and practiced in our daily life. Only through this, the beauty of quran is appreciated.

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