

An Analysis of Physical Appearance in Al Quran Al-Karim

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Abstract

Al-Quran is a compilation of Allah s.w.t.'s words which covers all fields of science, which engages scientists at continuously studying the contents of the Qur'an. This rigor at exploring the knowledge contained in the Qur'an remains endless has provided numerous discoveries of various disciplines in knowledge, including in the field of communication. This is because the written Quranic verses is one form of communication. As such, this qualitative paper analyzed Quranic verses with an aim to study one of the channels of nonverbal communication found in the Qur'an, which is physical appearance. This study analyzed and extracted the Quranic verses which are related to physical appearance, besides describing its meanings that are interpreted through the Quranic verses. This study found out that the physical appearance as mentioned in the Qur'an is in the following forms, namely (1) appearance, which shows glory and humiliation, beauty and ugliness, strengths and weaknesses and hairstyles; form (2), which refers to the clothing that does not only cover the aurat but also serve as an identity and status recognition as well as a membership of Heaven and Hell. In addition, form (3) refers to a variety of colours, namely white, black, green, yellow, blue and red. While form (4) is accessories, such as furniture, gems, vessels and jewelries which are made of gold, silver and crystal. Next, form (5) refers to appearance based on age i.e. infant, child, young, adult and elderly. This study proves the existence of nonverbal communication – physical appearance, which is clearly stated in al-Quran al-Karim.

Keywords: Communication, Non-verbal Communication, Physical Appearance, Non-verbal Al-Quran, Decoration in Al-Quran, Clothing in Al-Quran, Physical Appearance in Al-Quran, Appearance in Al-Quran.

1. Introduction

Communication is the sharing of information between the sender (or source) to the receiver (Zulkifli Abdullah, 1999). Rosenblatt (1983) argues that communication is the way in which a person presents an exchange of ideas, views, information, relationships that carries a purpose through the use of symbols or signals in order to achieve a goal. Mansor Ahmad Saman et al. (1984), states that communication is a process of channelling, transmitting and sharing ideas, values and attitude with others. This nonverbal communication is closely related to human life (Mohd Ala-Uddin Othman, Zawawi Ismail, Che Mohd Zaid, Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, Nordin Halias, Zailani Jusoh, & Mohd Shahrizal Nasir, 2021). Communication can take the verbal and nonverbal forms (Floyd, 2009). According to Asmah Omar (1988), verbal communication is communication that uses spoken language. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, is the process of conveying meaning which is a message without the use of voice (Yanti Setianti, 2007). According to Hasuria Che Omar, Rokiah Awang, Syed Zainal Ariff Syed Jamaluddin and Noriah Mohamed (2009), nonverbal communication is similar to facial expressions, body gestures which is also found in narrative literature as in multimedia narrative texts. Nonverbal language is specifically associated with wordless communication or involving non -linguistic symbols that do not largely have any formal structure such as kinesic, haptic, proxemic, and chronemic. It also involves structured non-verbal symbols i.e. punctuation marks such as question marks, commas, periods and so on in the text (Hasuria Che Omar et al., 2009). It is important to practise nonverbal communication because it can motivate and inculcate interest while changing a person's behavior to be more positive (Mohd Ala-Uddin Othman, Zawawi Ismail, Che Mohd Zaid & Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, 2020).

2. Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is one of the channels in non-verbal communication (Floyd, 2009). According to al Za'bi (2005) and Mcroskey & Richmond (2000), physical appearance refers to a person's external physical such as body shape, clothing, hair, accessories, artifacts or objects worn. Body hygiene, dental care, cutting nails, well-trimmed mustache and beard and clothings which are

neat, clean and appropriate are among the characteristics of good physical appearance (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, Ab Halim Tamuri & Mohd Izham Mohd Hamzah, 2012).

Richmond and McCroskey (2000) state that physical appearance is the first thing that is looked at and judged upon. This initial assessment will influence the interest and form of communication towards a person. According to Knapp and Hall (2009), clothing and accessories worn by a person carry hidden messages such as age, race, living standards, education and personality.

The choice of colour, clothing, hairstyle and other physical appearance factors serves as one form of nonverbal communication. Studies on colours have found that different colours give birth to a variety of modes either to the communicator or the audience. From a psychological point of view, colours also cause reactions, interpretations and judgments against a person.

According to Nordin Halias (2016), there are four roles of physical appearance:

- a) Physical appearance is the first message received.
- b) The message conveyed by physical appearance has a strong influence in determining the willingness or reluctance to communicate with someone.
- c) The message of appearance has an influence in determining how communication is likely to be conducted.
- d) The message of appearance is used to make initial judgments about others.

3. Physical Appearance in Al-quran

Appearance

Appearance is one of the important non-verbal communication for physical appearance. Satan was the first creature to draw comparisons of appearance when he distinguished the nature of his creations which were created from fire as nobler and better than Adam a.s. who was created from soil (Ibn Kathir, 1983). Allah s.w.t. explains the arrogance of Satan in his words which means “I am better than him, you created me from fire while him you created from dust” (*al-A'raf* 12).

Beautiful and ugly appearances have a profound effect on human communication. Son of the Prophet Adam a.s., Qabil was willing to kill his brother, Habil in his pursuit of his beautiful partner (Ahmad, 2003). To this day, the assessment of human external appearance has a profound effect on one's attitudes and perspectives on others.

Appearances that appear strong or weak are also important in nonverbal communication. Allah s.w.t. describes the selection of Talut as the military leader during his time as due to his advantages in terms of knowledge and physical strength as mentioned by Allah s.w.t.: “He endowed him with vast knowledge and a mighty body” (*al Baqarah* 247).

Some commentators state that the meaning of *bastatan fi al-jism* is height, beauty and strength. It is said that Talut was the most beautiful person among the Children of Israel. Al-Fakhr al-Razi (1995) argues that Talut's advantage in terms of height and physical strength is intended to illustrate the role of external physical appearance as an assessment to the enemy.

The beauty of the surface creates admiration for those who see it. Allah s.w.t. describes the admiration of the hypocrites when viewing in his words which means: “And when you see their bodies you are amazed” (*al-Munafiqun* 4). Al-Fakhr al-Razi (1995) states that hypocrites like Abdullah bin Ubai, Mughith bin Qais and Jadd bin Qais have beautiful and attractive bodies and appearance that impress others who see them.

The beauty of the Prophet Joseph. who is narrated in the Qur'an has caused Zulaikha to be at awe with the Prophet and has caused the women who were initially assembled by Zulaikha to slit their fingers (Ibn Kathir, 1983).

In the Qur'an, there is an indirect mention in two verses about hair, namely in surah Maryam which means: “O my Lord, indeed my bones are weak and my head is gray” (*Maryam* 4) It is in this verse where Allah swt. mentions the hair of the Prophet Zakaria a.s. who has turned gray. His gray hair indicates his elderly age (Ahmad, 2003), which is a non-verbal indication of an elderly person who is identified through his gray hair. While in surah *al-Fath*, Allah s.w.t. says: “In a state of shaving the hair of the head and cutting it” (27). In this verse, Allah s.w.t. mentions about shaving and shortening hair where in certain situations, a person is known by the appearance of his hair. The above situation describes a person who worships Allah s.w.t.

Clothing

Clothing is the most noticeable piece of ornament that describes a person's physical appearance. It can describe his background, race, occupation, economic and social status. The Qur'an describes the importance of clothing in several verses such as the story of Adam and his wife, Eve who both were stripped off their clothes to expose their *aurat* after eating the forbidden fruit in Paradise. They were unable to see each other so they looked for something to cover their genitals.

This situation is described by Allah s.w.t. in His verse which means: “When they both tasted the fruit of the tree, their aurat appeared to them, and they began to cover it with the leaves of paradise” (*al A'raf* 22).

Clothing can also be an introduction to a particular race, religion, culture, profession or individual. Allah s.w.t. orders the believing women to cover their *aurat* in His words which means: “O Prophet, say to your wives and the wives of the believers:" Let them wear the hijab all over their bodies”. That is so that they are more easily recognizable, therefore they are not disturbed. (*al-Ahzab* 59). It is understandable that the garment that covers the *aurat* is a form of identification of the believers.

The Qur'an also tells about the clothes and ornaments which are the clothes of the members of Heaven. It describes their enjoyment, happiness and joy in Allah's s.w.t.'s paradise as He says: “Their clothes are silk” (*al-Hajj* 23).

Allah s.w.t. also mentions about the clothes of the people of Hell which describes their misery, sufferings and misfortune as He says: “Then the disbelievers will be made for them clothes from the fire of Hell” (*al-Hajj* 19).

A person's credibility is also evident through the cleanliness of his clothes. Rasulullah p.b.u.h. was very fond of cleanliness, the cleanliness of his of clothing. He also placed importance of cleanliness as part of Faith (al-Ghazali, n.d). Allah s.w.t. commanded the Prophet p.b.u.h. to dress clean, saying: “And clean your clothes” (*al-Muddathir*: 4). Islam strongly encourages the Muslims to dress beautifully, especially when attending the mosque. This matter is explained by Allah which says, “O children of Adam, wear your beautiful clothes every time you enter the mosque” (*al A'raf* 31).

Clothing and external appearance can influence others as well as project self-confidence and reflect a person's credibility when communicating (Mohd Ala-Uddin Othman, 2020).

Colour

Allah s.w.t. provides colour as a form of pleasure to humankind. It is also one of the elements of identifying something. For example, a tanned person may come from an Asian country, a dark-skinned person may be an African, a white person may come from Europe, etc. This shows that sometimes colour is associated with the cultural and civilizational aspect of a nation.

- a. Variety of colours. Allah s.w.t. created human beings into different skincolours, to suit their environment, weather, and diet. This is to prove the greatness of Allah s.w.t. as He says: “and among the signs of his power is He who created the heavens and the earth and different your language and the color of your skin. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who know” (*al-Rum* 22). It is through the diversity of human skincolour that made it easier to identify different races or tribes. This is the exact purpose for which they were created into nations and tribes as explained by Allah s.w.t. which means: “O mankind, indeed we created you from male and female and We made you into nations and tribes so that you know one another.” (*al-Hujurat* 13).
- b. White and black. White symbolizes clarity while black gives its opposite meaning. Allah s.w.t. says: “Eat and drink until the white thread becomes clear to you from the black thread.” (*al-Baqarah* 187). This verse explains about the initiating time of fasting, that is, after dawn. White can also mean joy and happiness while black can mean sadness and misfortune. Allah describes the state of faces among the members of Heaven as radiant white, filled with joy and happiness on the Day of Judgment while the faces of the members of Hell as black and gloomy, filled with sorrow and misfortune. This situation is described by Allah s.w.t.: “On that day there will be a bright white face and there will be a gloomy black face” (*Ali ‘Imran* 106).
- c. Green. This is the color of natural environment which includes trees and plants. In fact, green is synonymous with the colour of nature. In the Qur'an, the colour green is mentioned to describe the beauty of Allah's creation through plants and to glorify the power of Allah s.w.t. at creating objects. This can be seen in Allah s.w.t.'s words, which means: “Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky and the earth becomes green?” (*al-Hajj* 63). Allah s.w.t. describes the beauty of the green carpets and garments of the members of Heaven. These are special garments that describe their beauty and status as members of Heaven. Allah s.w.t. describes their state as being on a beautiful carpet in Paradise, that says: “They will recline on pillows and a beautiful green carpet” (*al-Rahman* 76). Allah s.w.t. also mentions the silk garments worn by the dwellers of Paradise in His words, which means: “And they wore green garments of fine silk and thick silk” (*al-Kahf* 31).
- d. Yellow. The colour yellow describes the situation and identification of something. In the Quran, yellow indicates elegance and beauty that is pleasing to the eye. Al-Zamakhshyari

- (1995) describes the words of Allah, which means: “Moses replied: ‘Indeed, Allah said that the cow is a yellow cow, which is dark yellow in color and pleasing to the beholder’ (*al-Baqarah* 69). The colour dark yellow attracts people's attention. Ibn 'Asyur (2000) identifies the colour as “pleasing to the eye” where he explains that a person's perception towards the colour of dark yellow cow makes them truly appreciate the beauty of such view because of its beautiful colour. The colour yellow also indicates fading and loss of life for plants. Allah s.w.t. describes this phenomenon in: “And indeed if We send the wind to the plants then they see (the plants) become yellow (dry)” (*al-Ruum* 51). This verse explains about the Mighty Allah s.w.t. at bringing to life and ending creatures as well as resurrecting them in the Hereafter.
- e. Blue. There is only one verse in the Qur'an that mentions the colour blue. It indicates fear, accident and sadness (Ahmad, 2003). Allah s.w.t. describes the resurrection of the sinners in the Hereafter where their faces are blackish blue in His words: “And we will gather on that day the sinners with dark blue faces” (*Taha* 102).
- f. Red. Allah s.w.t. describes the colour red as majestic and powerful in His words, which means: “And between the mountains there are white and red lines of various colors and there is also a thick black” (*Fatir* 27). The beauty of an object and putting the colour in its right place is one of the signs of the Creator's Wisdom.

Jewelry and Accessories

Jewelry is strongly connected with the physical appearance. It is capable of making someone or something look more beautiful and exquisite. Al-Fakhr al-Razi (1995) defines jewelry as one of the forms of health, beauty, clothing, livestock, furniture and property. Ibn 'Asyur (2000) adds that jewelry is anything that human beings adorn onto themselves, which is beautiful in the sight of others such as jewelry, diamonds and large houses. Allah s.w.t describes about adornment in a verse, which means: “Made beautiful in (the view of) human beings is love for anything that is desired, namely: women, children, riches of many kinds of gold and silver, horses of choice, livestock and paddy fields. That is the pleasure of life in the world, and with Allah is a good return” (*Ali 'Imran* 14). Among the ornaments mentioned by Allah s.w.t. in the Quran are:

- a. Tools and furniture. Allah s.w.t. mentions about home furniture in Heaven that resembles home furniture in this world. These home furniture and appliances reflect culture and

civilization. Every civilization and culture has its own characteristics in manufacturing its equipments and furniture that its arrangement is influenced by its environment (Che Mohd Zaid, Zawawi Ismail, Mohammad Ibrahim Al Jarrah, Mohammad Rusdi Ab Majid, Mohd Ala-uddin Othman & Abdul Wahid Salleh, 2019). There are several verses that mention utensils in the Quran such as plates, glasses, kettles which are made of gold and silver. These verses are His words, which means: "distributed to them plates of gold and glasses (*al-Zukhruf* 71), "Distributed to them glasses containing wine from the flowing river" (*al-Saaffaat* 45), "Which are glasses made of silver that they have measured as best" (*al-Insan* 16) and "By carrying glasses, kettles and drinks taken from running water" (*al-Waqi'ah* 18). While furniture such as beds (*Surur*) and decorated beds (*al-Ara'ik*) are mentioned in the al-Quran where Allah s.w.t says: "They sit on the beds while looking" (*al-Mutaffifin* 35) and "On thrones greatness face to face" (*al-Saaffaat* 44).

- b. Gems, gold and silver bracelets. There are three words that refer to these precious gems – human jewelry, that is *lu'lu* 'which means pearls, coral refers to gemstones, which are created from a type of sea animal and *yaqut* which is a gem in red colour. Apart from these three gems, Allah s.w.t. also states about gold bracelets, worn by the members of Heaven. He says: "As if the angels were rubies and coral" (*al-Rahman* 58), "In it, they were adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls" (*Fatir* 33) and "And put on them bracelets made of silver" (*al-Insan* 21). All these, be it ornaments in the form of home appliances, furniture, gems, or gold and silver bracelets as revealed by Allah s.w.t reflect the luxury of the residents of Heaven who live in full enjoyment and happiness.

Age rating and appearance. Since the beginning of its creation, the human body starts with the fetal stage, where it is then born from the mother's womb as stated in the Qur'an. It then progresses into the stage of breastfeeding, followed by infancy, childhood, adolescence, teenagehood before coming to the age of maturity and inching towards old age and senility. By experience, it is clear that a person's appearance is identified by his age.

- a. Breastfeeding and infancy. At this stage, which is in the first two years after birth, the human physical appearance is fragile. His mobility is also limited; he cannot walk nor run. Nutrition at this stage is only through breastfeeding or soft foods. Most of the time, he is in a baby cot or laid down on a mattress before being able to crawl and then walk. The term used by the Quran, describing the stage of infancy is *Shabiyya*. This can be observed through the words

of Allah s.w.t., which means: “They said, ‘How are we going to talk to a child who is still in the cradle?’” (*Maryam* 29) and “His mother conceived him in a state of increasing weakness, and nursed him within two years” (*Luqman* 13).

- b. Childhood stage. At this stage, children are usually active, playful and ready to learn various things. The term ‘child’ refers to children who are over two years old and have not yet reached puberty. Several terms are used by the Qur'an to refer to children, namely, *ghulaam*, *al Athfaal*, and *al Wildaan*. The word *ghulam* can be found in the following words of Allah s.w.t: “So they both walked until when they met a child, the khidir killed him” (*al-Kahf* 74). The word *al-atfaal* is found in the verse which means: “And when your children have reached puberty, then let him ask permission like those before they asked permission” (*al-Nur* 59). While the word *al-wildan* is found in the verse, which means: “They are surrounded by children who remain young” (*al-Waqi'ah* 17).
- c. Youth. It is an age between puberty to somewhere around thirty-three years (al-Fakhr al-Razi, 1995). There are two terms that refer to youth in the Qur'an, namely the word *Fataa* and its fractions are *fityah*, *fityan*, *fatayaat* and the word *balagha Asyuddah*. For example, the word *fityah* is found in the words of Allah s.w.t., which means: “Surely they are young men who believe in their God” (*al-Kahf* 13). The word *balagha Asyuddah* is found in the verse, which means: “When he was old enough, it is We who gave him wisdom and knowledge” (*Yusuf* 22.)
- d. Adulthood. This age starts from mid-thirties to mid-forties where the age peaks in terms of bodily stability and maturity of mind. This stage is described by Allah s.w.t. in a verse, which means: “Until when he is an adult and reaches the age of forty years” (*al-Ahqaf* 15). According to Ahmad (2003), what is meant by forty years in the verse is the mid thirty of age to the mid forty of age.
- e. Old age. This age starts from the mid forty until death (Ahmad, 2003). Usually the limbs at this stage are not very active and begins to lose its strength. Some limbs are dysfunctional, the hair turns gray, abilities such as thinking, hearing and seeing become reduced with a possibility of inability to move. There are four expressions in the Qur'an that refer to this stage namely, *al-Kibar*, *syai Khan kabiran*, *Arzali al 'Umur* and *'Ajuuz*. The word *al-Kibar* is stated by Allah swt in a verse, which means: “If one of the two (parents) or both reach old age” (*al-Isra'* 23). The phrase *Syai Khan Kabiran* is mentioned in the verse, which means:

“indeed he had a father who was old” (*Yusuf* 78). The phrase *Arzali al Umur* is found in the verse, which means: “And there are some of you whose age is extended to old age so that he no longer knows anything that was previously known” (*al-Hajj* 5). While the word *'Ajuuz* is found in the verse, which means: “Except an old woman (his wife who is) with the people who live” (*al Syu'araa* 171).

4. Conclusion

The discussion on physical appearance in the Qur'an as one of the channels of non-verbal communication proves that this type of communication is an important field of knowledge, which is closely related to human beings. The above study also shows that the physical appearance as expressed in the Qur'an does not only need to be understood literally but also read through its implicit meanings, which can be understood from the conveyed non-verbal messages. The Qur'an discusses in great detail on the concept of nonverbal communication and provides many examples that researchers may not discover through field studies. There are many other non-verbal communication channels that can be studied and understood of its the meaning in the Qur'an such as kinesics, chronemics, haptics, facial expressions and ocular that need to be endeavoured through scientific research in order to uncover the Mighty al-Qur'an al-Karim.

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