

# Recodification of Gestures in Early Arabic Spoken Discourse Intralingually and Interlingually\*

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**Abstract**—This paper explores the symbolic values of gestures in early Arab discourse. The Prophet's traditions are selected for analysis because they are the most canonical Islamic texts after the Qur'an. The paper analyzes the implications of the Prophet's gestures as his traditions were related orally before they were recorded in scrolls later. Therefore, we can examine how these semiotic gestures are interpreted in the Arabic script as situated in the early oral culture and how they are codified or recodified intralingually, using corpus linguistics techniques. Findings show that the semiotic cues used by early generations should be situated in their original culture and re-codified to later generations for monolingual and cross-lingual communication. This study contributes to the understanding of the role of gestures in early Arabic discourse and provides insights into how they are recodified for different contexts and languages.

**Index Terms**—corpus-based semiotics, gestures, intersemiotic translation, orality vs. written communication, communication recodification

## I. INTRODUCTION

Our knowledge and experience of the world are often communicated either in writing or verbally among people without disabilities or in sign language among people with disabilities, though non-verbal communication mostly permeates the use of language by all individuals in society. To creationists, verbal communication is the first form of human communication. "In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1-18 NCV). On the other hand, Darwinists believe that sign language is the real communication prototype. Schein (1984) and Schein and Stewart (1995) argue that since about one hundred thousand years ago, when hominids developed and became erect (*homo erectus*), they no longer walked on four and used their hands for communication.

Most Arab linguists and theologians believe that Arabic is a divine language as stated in the Qur'anic verse that reads, "He taught Adam the names of all things" (Qur'an: Sura 2, 31, trans. by Khattab). Commenting on this verse, Ibn Abbas, a sixth-century exegete, noted, 'Allah taught him (Adam) all generic nouns such as animal, earth, valley, mountain, donkey, and so on' (Ibn Faris, d. 133, p. 33).

Learning the names of everything is believed by most Muslims to be conducted via the Arabic language, which they believe was revealed by God. However, most Mu'tazili<sup>1</sup> scholars believe that language is man-made; it was developed through *tawādu'*/*muwāda'ah* "mutual agreement/institution" and *iṣṭilāḥ* (mutual agreement). Weiss (1966, p. 100) argues that "the establishment of expressions was understood in a simple, straightforward manner: the author of language forms ideas of all the things that make up the world; for these ideas he appoints expressions, so that the ideas become the meanings of the expressions. Thus, meanings are located in the mind of the author of language". All people, regardless of their race, religion or language, have feelings and ideas about the external world and have the ability to communicate their feelings verbally and nonverbally. Speakers communicate their feelings and expressions through gestures, tone of voice and postures, and all these nonverbal elements play a role in direct human communication. While direct verbal communication could be interpreted differently from one situation to another and interlingually, the meanings of nonverbal communication are relatively inviolate, particularly within the same community. For instance, thumbs-up gesture that commonly means "Okay" or "Great" worldwide is very offensive in Iran.

On the other hand, verbal communication may be interpreted in different or opposite forms to the direct meaning of its components contextually and ironically. For example, "you are very smart" and "What a big money!" could be opposite to the message intended. What activates the opposite meaning is the context itself. For instance, in the first sentence, the addressee may have uttered or done something that is naïve or stupid. In the second, he may have been offered so little amount of money that he considers ironic. Grice (1989) refers to the meaning that is derived from an

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<sup>1</sup> A school of early Muslim thinkers who were known for their rational and logical thinking in argumentation as opposed to orthodox thinkers who only relied on textual evidence.

utterance as the conversational implicature. In the following example, one can think of many possible readings of the same words, depending on the context.

It is freezing in this room.

In fact, both the speaker and the addressee should be cooperative for the activation of any of the above meanings. If they both know that the cause of the freezing temperature in the room is the air-conditioning, so the request is to either turn it off or down. So, Grice's Cooperative Principle is substantially important in interpreting the message.

Empirically, Mehrabian (1972) argues that the content of a given message is about 7% verbal (in spoken or written forms), 38% vocal (voice, tone, inflection) and 55% nonverbal (gesture, body language) (Mehrabian, 1972). Therefore, the nonverbal element is the most important key to facilitating spoken communication. As meaning is based on context and language use, corpus linguistics can offer a good and robust framework for the typical use of human communication in which gestures and body language constitute a considerable part. Malinowski (1923, p. 16) notes, "the meaning of an utterance does not come from the ideas of the words comprising it but from the ideas of its relation to the situational context in which the utterance occurs". In this respect, the gesture is an indispensable part of any context, spatially and temporally.

## II. GESTURES FOR NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Gestures and body language may differ from one culture to another. For instance, wobbling the head in India could mean "Yes", "Good", or "OK". It may also be used as a gesture of gratitude or kindness. In most parts of the world, "shaking your head left and right" means "NO", but in Bulgaria and Albania it means "Yes", and in Japan it means the addressee has heard your words but no agreement or disagreement is implied. On the other hand, in Greece, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Albania, and Sicily, a single nod of the head up (not down) indicates "no". In Italy, pinching one's fingers up means "what is this?" or what do you want? But in Egypt, it means "wait a moment", and in Turkey, it means "Great" or "Good".

A great deal of research has been written on the iconicity of gestures in English and other Western languages. One of the most comprehensive surveys of scholarly works on gestures is Kendon (2011), where he explores most theoretical aspects of gesture from the eighteenth century on. He points out that in the 18th and 19th century, there is an interest in examining the philosophical aspects of gestures as a shift from the rhetorical tradition in the 17th century. The waves of scholarly works on gestures receded during the first half of the 20th century. Then, studies on gestures began to flourish again since 1950, due to the popularity of three venues of research: "the process of communication", "paralanguage," and "semiotics". A lot of research has been done on gestures from these perspectives (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Birdwhistell, 1970; Kendon, 1980; Streeck, 2009). Another influential strand of studies focuses on the cognitive perspective of gestures, such as Freedman (1977), McNeill (2005) and de Ruiter (2007). On the other hand, gesture is under-researched in the Arabic language. One of the few studies that worked on Arabic gestures is Holtzman's (2019). Motivated by a paper written in German by an orientalist called Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) entitled "Gestures and Sign Language among the Arabs", where he notices that hand gestures prevail the Prophet's traditions, she conducts a project that examines the Prophet's gestures systematically as a central feature of theological discourse, focusing on the prophet's traditions on the divine attributes, particularly Hearing and Seeing. Holtzman's (2019) points out,

As linguists and interpreters, the Arab scholars recognized that gestures are intrinsic to human communication.

Their observations, however, are hidden among the thousands of pages of chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and other genres of the classical Arabic writing. A meticulous process of unearthing these observations from the literary sources is therefore needed to reconstruct the Arab scholarly view of gestures.

As gestures may differ from one culture to another and across time, they may have different interpretations, particularly with long-established texts like scriptures or ancient texts. They, in fact, are unresearched in hadith and religious language in general, notwithstanding a few comments made in passing. Examining gestures in Hadith may highlight how they were used in the past and could be a useful method for testing the accuracy of the message interpreted or translated today. This is because translation could account for verbal and non-verbal signs; interpretation of verbal signs by nonverbal signs and the other way round is called intersemiotic translation by Jacobson (1959). It is also a process of recodification according to Frawley (2000, p. 160) who notes that "Translation means 'recodification'. Hence, a theory of translation is a set of propositions about how, why, when, where ... coded elements are rendered into other codes. As such, translation is nothing short of an essential problem of semiosis: it is the problem of transfer of codes". Therefore, in this paper, we are concerned with two levels of semiotics: intralingual within the Arabic system of sign and interlingual through recodifying the semiosis interlingually.

## III. THE PROPHET'S TRADITIONS (HADITH)

Hadith is defined as the report of the words أقوال, actions أفعال, approval (or disapproval) تقرير of the Prophet of a behaviour. Given that Hadith refers to the oral transmission of the teachings, instructions, and practices of the Prophet, it incorporates various linguistic and paralinguistic elements that are characterize spoken discourse (Elewa, 2019). For instance, in spoken discourse, many factors shape up the overall meaning of the intended message such as gestures,

body language, pitch range, stress, pausing, etc. Such features must be considered in translating the Prophet's sayings. The definition of Hadith given above includes three types:

1. Words of the Prophet
2. Actions of the Prophet
3. The Prophet's approval or disapproval of any behavior

The first type of Hadith is exclusively uttered by the Prophet with no mediation. Secondly, the Prophet's actions are expressed by a companion who saw the Prophet do a given action. The companion reports any practice the Prophet does in his own words like for instance the Companions who reported the way the Prophet prays, walks, eats, drinks, etc. Thirdly, the companions used to report the facial expressions of the prophet when he approves or disapproves any behaviour that takes place in his presence.

#### IV. ORAL VS. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Having examined the Hadith collection of Al-Tayālīsī (d. 818) that contains 2,767 hadiths, Speight (1989) noted that “the ḥadīth texts now exist in books, they bear several marks of oral composition: unvarying style, frequent repetition of expressions, emphasis upon action rather than description, conversational tone, atomistic structure, and, above all, the use of formulas”. To sift out oral communication from written texts produced centuries ago is challenging to do computationally without identifying the various characteristic features of each register. By analysing the register of Hadith, one can recognize the language of the prophet as situated in its context and culture.

Halliday (1976) proposes three factors to identify the register of discourse: field, tenor and mode. With these three factors, we can understand the situation/context, purpose and type of hadith, in addition to the participants' active/passive roles and relationships in the discourse (the Prophet, narrator, and listeners of Hadiths), among many others. However, when the spoken discourse takes a written form, many extralinguistic features of communication may be overlooked such as pauses, tones, facial expressions, body language and eye contact (Draper, 2006, p. 78).

Written discourse differs in form and style from spoken communication as the main goal of the writer is to communicate a message to some audience that could live in a different place and time; it is reader-oriented. Those readers would have the text to consider or reconsider without restrictions. In contrast, the speaker who intends to make his words live long tries to make his speech memorable. For this reason, “mnemonic clues take prominence, including repetition, inclusion, formula, sound patterning, rhythm, balance, and verbal signals to mark divisions in thought” (Draper, 2006, p. 78). This is because “[i]n an oral culture, experience is intellectualized mnemonically” (Ong, 2002, p. 35).

Generally speaking, in spoken discourse, speakers tend to use some linguistic features to make their words memorable and appealing to the ear. In this respect, Kelber (2006) lists a number of features of spoken vis a vis written discourse that includes parataxis, coordinators, linking different word (or phrase) categories, and repetition of words, phrases or themes.

Interestingly, Ong (2002, p. 34) notes,

In a primary oral culture ... you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings, ... in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form.

Mnemonic cues could be easily realized by gestures for either interlanguage or intralanguage communication. Streeck (2009) points out that “hand-gestures can facilitate interaction also by foreshadowing—projecting— what may be said or done next.” He called this type of gesturing as forward-gesturing that would help the addressee anticipate the intended meaning in a conversation and enhance quick interpersonal communication. This is an indispensable part of oral communication and a distinctive feature of oral societies since in oral communities, words make sense in their actual context without the need to consult any written reference. Therefore, the iconicity of gestures and body language of the Prophet is examined to see how it is interpreted semiotically in the Arabic script as situated in the early oral culture during the lifetime of the Prophet.

#### V. METHOD

To analyse the different forms of gestures in Hadith and their translations, two online corpora are used: (1) Aldorar Alسانیyah Corpus (<https://www.dorar.net>) that contains all the source texts of Hadith collections of the Prophet. It is a huge platform of Hadith collections consisting of the exact texts of the Prophet's traditions and metadata about the narrators of Hadith, ranking and authenticity of hadiths, in addition to some explanatory notes. The Hadith section (<https://www.dorar.net/hadith>) on this website includes over 600 books containing hundreds of thousands of hadiths that could be queried by search terms, narrators, Hadith compilers or collections of Hadith. The total size of the corpus is 190,970, 91 words. (2) The second corpus is an online parallel corpus (<https://www.sunnah.com>) that is published online, containing the original Arabic text of 15 collections of Hadiths and their parallel translations, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
STRUCTURE OF HADITH CORPUS OF WWW.SUNNAH.COM

Hadith Collection	n/hadith	Translation
Sahih al-Bukhari صحيح البخاري	7563	Muhsin Khan
Sahih Muslim صحيح مسلم	7500	Abdul Hamid Siddiqu
Sunan an-Nasa'i سنن النسائي	5700	Nasiruddin Al-Khattab and Huda Khattab
Sunan Abi Dawud سنن أبي داود	5274	Nasiruddin Al-Khattab
Jami' at-Tirmidhi جامع الترمذي	4400	Abu Khalil
Sunan Ibn Majah سنن ابن ماجه	4341	Nasiruddin Al-Khattab
Muwatta Malik موطأ مالك	1942	Muhammad Rahimuddin
Musnad Ahmad مسند أحمد	28,199	Nasiruddin Al-Khattab
An-Nawawi's 40 Hadith الأربعون النووية	42	Ezzuddin Ibrahim & Denis Johnson
Collections of Forty الأربعينات	122	Unknown
Riyad as-Salihin رياض الصالحين	1,900	Muslims at Work Publications
Mishkat al-Masabih مشكاة المصابيح	6,000	James Robson
Al-Adab Al-Mufrad الادب المفرد	1322	UK Islamic Academy
Ash-Shama'il Al-Muhammadiyah الشمائل المحمدية	415	Abdul Aziz Suraqah & Mohammed Aslam
Bulugh al-Maram بلوغ المرام	1480	Darus-salam
Hisn al-Muslim حصن المسلم	267	Ismael Ibraheem

This website enables most search functions supported by concordancers, based on Lucene Core, a Java library providing powerful indexing and search features. For instance, it supports fuzzy, wildcard, and proximity searches as well as Boolean operators.

Exploring the data to capture all instances of the prophet's gestures is a daunting task without taking one of the following procedures:

1. We could search the occurrences of the body parts used for gestures in Hadith corpus: "hand/s", palm of the hand/s", "finger/s", "face", head". Analysing an adequate span of words could provide information on significant patterns. Creating an n-gram or bi-gram list of a corpus could enable us notice the most significant patterns for analysis.
2. We could search the occurrences of the main verbs that are used for gesturing such غمز winked. أومأ nod.
3. Or we could search the verbs that are often collocate with body parts gesturing like 'join his fingers', 'شبك بين أصابعه', 'أشار بيده', 'pointed with his hand'.

## VI. ANALYSIS OF THE PROPHET'S GESTURES

One of the main features of oral communication is the use of gestures and the prophet's traditions belong to oral communication, as mentioned earlier. They constitute the direct verbal statements of the prophet or the verbal description of his behaviour by a companion. Both modes of communication are transmitted orally for years before being recorded in writing. In this paper, all the body parts used for gesturing will be analysed semiotically, considering the nature of early oral cultural communication, to find out how they are interpreted and translated into English today. The body parts used for gestures by the Prophet are "hand/s", palm of the hand/s", "finger/s", "face", and "head".

The analysis aims to interpret or recodify the iconicity of gestures as situated in their early social contexts when first produced by the Prophet and then transmitted by his companions and later generations. "By decoding signs based on the context of use, all aspects of meaning may be figured out" (Elewa, 2022). Therefore, drawing on semiotics as a framework in recodifying the early religious discourse intralingually and interlingually would be effective to transfer the intended meaning of the source text.

The translations of hadiths used on the website could be a good indicator of how gestures are understood today by looking at the different translation choices adopted for each collection. It is argued that each society uses its own set of gestures for communication at predictable patterns among all members of the community, just as they use their own distinctive language. Haviland (2006) notes that "identical gestural forms, involving handshapes and movements, may have radically different meanings from one society to another, or even within a single communicative tradition, and conversely that different cultures use different ways of expressing similar 'meanings, in gesture'". These gestures are so institutionalized and conventionalized, like natural languages, that they become quotable (Kendon, 1992). The

quotability of gestures could be a feature of standardized iconicity that transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. This could enable us to examine how the Prophet's gestures are understood and transmitted by his companions during his lifetime and non-contemporary hadith reporters of the next generations. It is noteworthy to mention that the Prophet's gestures are added to the text of Hadith by the first narrator to complement the meanings of the messages that have been expressed by gestures. Later scholars or commentators of Hadith verbalized the iconicity of these gestures and in the present time translators maintain the same explanatory notes in the target text.

## VII. BODY PARTS GESTURES

It goes without saying that hand gestures are the most commonly and frequently used worldwide. The hand is even the main body part for communication in sign language. Hand gestures can be performed with one or two hands to express different kinds of feelings or meanings by different postures or to point at objects for further meanings.

Using the word 'hand/s', and other body parts, as a search term could turn irrelevant results and would require a daunting process of manual editing. The word 'hand/s' occurred 2105 times in the selected collections of Hadith, but it is used for gesturing 271 times only. The same applies to the other body parts that are way less used for gesturing than 'hand/s'. Therefore, the verbs for gesturing are used to quickly capture all instances of body parts gestures without tedious manual editing. The gesturing verbs include: "أشار" 'to point', "أومأ" 'to nod', "ألوى" 'to wave', and "قال" 'to say'.

It is important to mention that *ashara* 'to point' has several meanings in different contexts. It could be followed by a number of propositions *bi* (with), *'ila* 'to', *li* 'to', and *'ala* 'on'. The most frequently used propositions that follow the verb *ashara* for gesturing are the first three prepositions. If followed by the proposition *cala*, it mostly means 'advise' as in "أشيروا علي أيها الناس" "Advise me O people". However, sometimes it gives the same denotations of gesturing regardless of the type of propositions. For example, the prophet says,

عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ " إِذَا أَشَارَ الْمُسْلِمُ عَلَى أَخِيهِ الْمُسْلِمِ بِالسَّلَاحِ فَهُمَا عَلَى جُزْفٍ جَهَنَّمَ فَإِذَا قَتَلَهُ حَزَا جَمِيعًا فِيهَا " . (سنن النسائي)

It was narrated that Abu Bakrah said: "The Messenger of Allah [SAW] said: 'If a Muslim points a weapon at his fellow Muslim, then they are on the brink of Hell, and if he kills him, then they will both fall into it'" (Al-Nasa'i, translated by Khattab & Khattab, 2007).

Therefore, we have one sense of *ashara* only to analyse for the purpose of this paper, namely 'to point'. To do this, all instances where *ashara* means 'to advise', are manually eliminated. Another step has been taken before data analysis: All repeated hadiths<sup>2</sup> that contain gestures are overlooked. Examining all the concordances of 'أشار' 'to point' followed by the propositions mentioned above throughout Hadith corpus highlights all the body parts and objects used by the Prophet for gesturing. A quick at the data, once can find that the verb *ashara* 'to point' is significantly followed by the preposition 'بـ' 'with' and 'إلى' 'to'. The prophet used to unrestrictedly point to an object (such as 'house', 'the moon', 'people', 'bow', etc.) or use one of his body parts while pointing, particularly 'hand, palm of hand', 'finger') or using something else to point to an object, such as 'whip' or an unidentified thing.

There are other verbs used for gesturing like 'أومأ' 'to gesture', 'ألوى' 'to wave', and 'قال' 'to say'. If we explore the items that follow these verbs<sup>3</sup> in Hadith collections, the most noticeable hits are the body parts, as in Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> The prophet's traditions have been reported by different Hadith compilers who classified these reports in several collections following different methods (themes, chains of narration, etc.). Therefore, there are hundreds of repeated hadiths that may differ in text or in the chain of narrators, but they still carry the same intended meanings.

<sup>3</sup> Other verbs used for gestures include 'أقرب' 'to close', 'أقرن' 'to join', 'أشبك' 'to interlace/interlock', 'أرفع' 'to raise' and 'أعقد' 'to knot'.

TABLE 2  
THE VERBS USED FOR GESTURING WITH THE BODY PARTS IN HADITH CORPUS  
N= 190,970,91

	F(X)		F(Y)	F(XY)	MI	P.
Verb	Freq.	Prep.	Freq.			
أشار to point	192	بيديه -بيده Hand/s	394	14	9.20	0.005972
		بكفيه- بكفه Hand palm/s	21	3	11.20	0.005972
		أصابعه (بأصبعه) Finger/s	18	11	9.95	0.005972
		بسيبائه index	29			
		الوسطى middle finger	24			
الخنصر ring finger	21					
		الإبهام thumb	92	(Total= 184)		
أوما to gesture	216	بيده	394	9	8.39	0.006719
		بكفه	21	1	9.45	0.006719
		برأسه	36	3	10.26	0.006719
		أصابعه (بأصبعه) Finger	18	3	9.34	0.006719
		بسيبائه index	29	(Total= 68)		
		الخنصر ring finger	21			
أوى to wave	21	بيديه -بيده Hand/s	394	20	12.90	0.016340
قال to say	318799	بيديه -بيده Hand/s	394	10	-1.98	9.915992
		برأسه head	36	3	-3.717	9.915992
		بأصبعه/ بأصبعيه Finger/s	18	6	1.73	9.915992

Analysing the context to understand how the strength of the bond between the verb used for gesturing and the following body part shows that the body parts 'hand/s' and 'finger/s' co-occur with the verb more significantly. In table 2, the most significant left collocates of the verbs are those that have the highest Mutual Information (MI) statistic scores. With MI test we can compare the probability of the joint and independent occurrences of (x) and (y). The most statistically significant body parts that co-occur with the verbs of gesturing, i.e., collocates of highest MI scores, are 'hand/s', 'palm of the hand/s' followed by 'finger/s' (by calculating the overall occurrences of all hits). According to Goldziher (cited in Hotzman, 2019), hand gestures characterize the Prophet's discourse in various contextual settings.

If we look at the probability values (p) in the table, we can notice that the p-values that are close to 0 show that they are more statistically significant than those close to 1, indicating that the difference is due to chance (the closer the p-value to 0, the more significant the difference). The verb 'قال' 'to say' is not commonly used for gesturing, unlike 'أوى' 'to wave' or 'أوما' 'to gesture' which uniquely co-occurs with 'hand/s' for gesturing.

Examining the contextual settings of hand and finger gestures in the prophet's traditions and how they are transmitted to later generations, and how they are interpreted and translated into English today, could be a good method for understanding the varied strategies of interpersonal communication of early communities. This could also be employed by Hadith commentators in their interpretations of this second source of the Islamic law that has been long criticised of lacking context<sup>4</sup>. Examining the Prophet's gestures could further the contextual analysis of Hadith and would serve as a method for recodification of these gestures to those who did not hear the hadith from the mouth of the prophet. Nonetheless, the prophet's gestures are mostly transmitted without explanations. This could be an indication that the companions and their succeeding generations, who have started the venture of recording hadiths in writing, understand the meanings of these gestures and share the same deictic traditions in relation to the use of body parts in combination with the verbs of gesturing. Only can we spot a few hadiths with explanatory notes added by the narrator. For example, the gesture of joining or pointing the index and middle fingers to refer to 'close proximity' or 'relatedness' has been used for measuring and further meanings are added to show the item measured as follows.

أن رسول الله ﷺ نهى عن الحرير إلا هكذا، وأشار: حدثنا قتادة، قال سمعت أبا عثمان النهدي، أتانا كتاب عمر ونحن مع عتبة بن فرقد بأذربيجان (البخاري) بأصبعيه اللتين تليان الإبهام، قال: فيما علمنا أنه يعني الأعلام

<sup>4</sup> Hadith is criticized from different perspectives, including historicity (Goldziher) and authenticity of the content and chains of narrators (Schacht). Some others argue that the texts of hadiths are very short and lack detailed information about the context (the addressee/s, time, tenor and circumstances of hadith narration); this could be linked to Al-Siyuti's (d. 1505) *asbab al-wuroud* (circumstances of Hadith narration).

Narrated Abu `Uthman An-Nahdi: While we were with `Utba bin Farqad at Adharbijan, there came `Umar's letter indicating that Allah's Apostle had forbidden the use of silk except this much, then he pointed with his index and middle fingers. To our knowledge, by that he meant embroidery (Al-Bukhari, translated by Khan, 1986).

The underlined sentence is added by the narrator to disambiguate the deictic reference of this common gesture in this hadith. The word 'الاعلام' 'embroidery' is added to explain the size of silky embroidery that is permitted to insert in one's garment. The narrator who made the addition leaves the door open for further explanations by using introducing his own interpretation of the gesture by the phrase 'to our knowledge'.

On the other hand, to measure the impact of recodification of these gestures on understanding the intended meanings of hadiths today, we can further examine the implications of one gesture by the prophet in a number of hadiths to see whether the recodification of gestures is extended to similar hadiths. We can then see how these gestures are understood and represented to contemporary readers interlingually through translation.

أو يرحم، وإن الميت يعذب ببكاء أهله عليه. - إن الله لا يعذب بدمع العين، ولا بحزن القلب، ولكن يعذب بهذا - وأشار إلى لسانه: قَالَ النبي ﷺ (البخاري)

The Prophet pbuh said, "God does not punish for the tears the eye sheds or the grief the heart experiences, but He punishes for this (pointing to his tongue), or He shows compassion; and the dead is punished because of his family's weeping for him) (Al-Bukhari, translated by Khan, 1986).

The italicized lines in the translated version of the above hadith are added by the translator to underline the prohibition of wailing and lamentation for the death of someone, a common practice exercised in some Muslim communities. The gesture that was transmitted verbatim by the narrator is further explained by the translator based on some commentaries of the Hadith produced by scholars of later generations such as Al-Nawawi's (d. 1277) commentary on Sahih Muslim (n.d., vol. 3, 339).

The meaning of such gestures is based on real-life situations and undergoes change and development through time; it could be interpreted differently for different generations and interlingually. The prophet's traditions were recorded in writing having been circulated orally among early Muslim communities for decades. Therefore, we could notice some written features in interpreting the Prophet's traditions that influenced their translation into different languages today. For instance, in the following two Hadiths, one gesture is explained differently in the same collection of Hadith (Sahih Muslim) by later generation of commentators and scholars of Hadith. The first hadith contains a gesture for hand-counting (or finger-counting) that follows the verb *عقد* which literally means 'to knot'.

قلت: أخبرني عن حجة رسول الله ﷺ، فقال بيده فعقد تسعاً، فقال: إن رسول الله ﷺ مكث تسع سنين لم يحج، ثم أذن في الناس في العاشرة أن رسول الله ﷺ حاج. (صحيح مسلم)

Ja'far b Muhammad reported on the authority of his father: ... I said to him: Tell me about the Hajj of Allah's Messenger (May peace be upon him). And he pointed with his hand nine, and then stated: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stayed in (Medina) for nine years but did not perform Hajj, then he made a public announcement in the tenth year to the effect that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) was about to perform the Hajj. (Sahih Muslim translated by Siddiqui, 2007).

أن رسول الله ﷺ كان إذا قعد في التشهد وضع يده اليسرى على ركبته اليسرى، ووضع يده اليمنى على ركبته اليمنى، وعقد عن ابن عمّ، ثلاثة وخمسين، وأشار بالسبابة.

Ibn Umar says: When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) sat for *tashahhud*, he placed his left hand on his left knee and placed his right hand on his right knee, and he formed a ring like (fifty-three) and pointed with his finger of attestation. (Sahih Muslim, translated by Siddiqui, 2007).

First of all, the order of numbers among early Arabs differs from that in later generations. Early Arabs used to start with big numbers followed by small ones like in English today. The number 53 is pronounced 'خمسون وثلاث' 'fifty and three' not like the standardized counting pattern of today's Arabic: 'ثلاث وخمسون' 'three and fifty'. Secondly, using fingers for counting (dactylogy) was a common practice in early oral communities. It predates the advent of Islam and could be traced back to Persia and pre-Islamic Arabia (Bloom, 2001, p. 127). Early Arabs used it to represent numbers by finger shape and position. Al-Jahiz (d. 868) described this practice as 'العقد' 'arithmetic of knots', emphasizing that it is a method of arithmetic expression that lies in between utterance and writing, i.e., arithmetic sign language. The gesture made in the above hadith was commonly used by early Arab communities to make number 53 by folding one's fingers except for the index. According to Al-San'ani (n.d.), to early Arabs, folding the thumb makes 50, while closing the pinky finger stands for 1, the ring finger for 2, and the middle for 3, altogether making the sign of 53 which is commonly used at the final sitting in Muslim prayers as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Hand Sign Made by Muslims at the End of Prayers

Bloom (2001, p. 127) notes, that “[E]arly Muslims described or interpreted certain gestures made by the prophet Muhammad as indicating numbers, although the traditional accounts do not agree with later practice”. For example, in his commentary on Sahih Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hajar interpreted the meaning of the prophet’s gesture that occurred in the following prophet’s hadith as referring to shapes of signs representing numbers.

ويل للعرب من شر قد اقترب، فتح اليوم من ردم يأجوج ومأجوج مثل هذه وعقد سفيان تسعين أو مئة

Woe to the Arabs, from the Great evil that is nearly approaching them. Today a gap has been made in the wall of Gog and Magog like this.” (Sufyan illustrated by this forming the number 90 or 100 with his fingers.) (Al-Bukhari, translated by Khan, 1986).

Ibn Hajar (n.d.) notes that the sign for 90 is similar to that of 100; both of them make a ring shape. The figure 90 is made by folding the index finger of the right hand to make a narrow opening against the thumb. On the other hand, the figure 100 is similarly made by folding the pinky finger of the left hand as in Figure 2 and 3.



Figure 2. The Hand Sign of 90



Figure 3. The Hand Sign of 100

The underlined words in the translated version of the hadith, “Sufyan illustrated by this forming the number 90 or 100 with his fingers”, are vague and do not portray the Arab tradition of counting (dactylonomy) as explained in Ibn Hajar’s commentary on this Hadith. The first thing that comes to one’s mind when looking at the original Arabic text and its translation today is the written forms of these numbers. As life became more sophisticated and with the shift from orality to writing, our communication is influenced by writing and print. This is why we should revisit early resources from the perspective of early oral traditions vis-à-vis literacy and writing systems of today in all spheres of knowledge, including religion.



## VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper examines the significance of gestures in early Arabic discourse, with a focus on the Prophet's traditions. The study investigates how these gestures were interpreted in the Arabic script and how they were recodified intralingually using corpus linguistics techniques. The findings suggest that semiotic cues used by early generations should be situated in their original culture and recodified for later generations for monolingual and cross-lingual communication. The paper also highlights the importance of nonverbal communication in facilitating spoken communication, with gestures and body language constituting a considerable part. Many of the gestures we have taken for granted in early Arabic discourse, and even in long-established religious texts, do not have the same symbolic meanings as such but they have appeared in different contexts and different communication system. The Prophet's traditions are the verbal narratives of his teaching, instructions and practices, having the same features of oral communication that is facilitated mostly by nonverbal elements (like gestures and body language). Such non-verbal elements may not be fully committed to writing because of the lapse of time and differing codification systems. Writing the Prophet's traditions represents a shift from oral traditions and practices to written forms of communication. In addition to the necessity of reinterpreting and recodifying gestures to the readers of the new written discourse, many extralinguistic features of communication may be overlooked such as pauses, tones, facial expressions, body language and eye contact which are as substantial as the utterance itself. Therefore, we should revisit these written resources which are originally transmitted orally to have a better understanding of these texts as situated in their contexts.

Our analysis of the use of the different body parts gestures in the Arabic corpus of Hadith shows that they are mostly transmitted without explanations. Unlike the Arabic Corpus, the translated corpus provides more explanations about the meanings of gestures. This indicates that the prophet's companions during his lifetime and the following generations could understand the implications of the prophet's gestures. Some compilers of Hadith started to recodify and interpret these gestures to their audience a few decades after the death of the Prophet. Today, the process of recodification and interpretation of the prophet's gestures is heavily practiced in translation based on the lengthy commentaries of Hadith. Nevertheless, some gestures remain confusing to today's readers because they are deeply rooted in a remote oral culture of different communication system, literacy practices and traditions. Overall, oral resources that have been transformed into a written form should be revisited for today's readers intralingually and interlingually.

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