

A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF VERBS EXPRESSING HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN
ARABIC

Sotvoldieva Khilolakhon

Teacher, Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: the Arabic language possesses a highly intricate morphological system that encodes complex semantic nuances directly into the lexical architecture of its verbs. This article provides a comprehensive linguistic analysis of verbs expressing human behavior in Arabic, focusing on the intersection of morphology (*ṣarf*), lexical semantics (*dalāla*), and cognitive linguistics. By examining the derivational patterns (*awzān*) of the Arabic root-and-pattern system, specifically Forms II through X, this study demonstrates how intentionality, reciprocity, pretense, and psychological states are grammatically codified. Furthermore, the article explores the cognitive metaphors underlying behavioral lexicon, revealing how spatial and physical concepts map onto social and moral conduct. The findings illustrate that Arabic behavioral verbs do not merely describe actions but provide a microscopic view into the social pragmatics and psychological dimensions of the human actor.

Keywords: Arabic Linguistics, lexical semantics, morpho-semantics, verb derivation (*Awzān*), human behavior, cognitive metaphor, Sociolinguistics.

Introduction. The study of verbs expressing human behavior occupies a central position in lexical semantics and pragmatic linguistics. In Arabic, a Semitic language characterized by its non-concatenative morphology, the representation of human behavior is deeply embedded in the structural derivation of words. Unlike many Indo-European languages, which frequently rely on a base verb combined with adverbs or auxiliary constructions to denote the *manner* of behavior (e.g., «he acted arrogantly,» «she feigned ignorance»), Arabic encapsulates these complex psychological and social nuances within a single verbal form.

The fundamental architecture of Arabic relies on the interaction between a consonantal root (*al-jadr*), which supplies the core lexical meaning, and a vocalic pattern (*al-wazn*), which dictates the grammatical and specific semantic function. This dynamic allows for a highly economical yet semantically dense expression of human conduct. The primary objective of this article is to analyze how different morphological templates modulate the core meaning of roots to generate a wide spectrum of human behaviors, ranging from moral dispositions and emotional reactions to social pretenses.

This analysis is grounded in two primary linguistic frameworks: structuralist morpho-semantics and Cognitive Linguistics. From a structuralist perspective, the meaning of a behavioral verb is analyzed through its derivational paradigm. The Arabic verbal system traditionally recognizes fifteen forms, of which ten are in common usage. Each form (I through X) modifies the valency, aspect, and intentionality of the base root.

From a cognitive linguistics perspective, particularly the Conceptual Metaphor Theory pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson, human behavior in Arabic is understood through embodied cognition. Abstract behavioral concepts (such as morality, arrogance, or submission) are frequently lexicalized using roots initially grounded in physical, spatial, or physiological realities.

The true richness of Arabic behavioral verbs emerges in the augmented derivative forms (*al-af'āl al-mazīda*). The transition from the base Form I (*fa'ala*) to higher forms radically alters the nature of the behavior being described.

Form II (*fa''ala*): causativity and intensive action. Form II is characterized by the gemination (doubling) of the middle radical. While its primary function is often causative or



factitive (making someone do or be something), in the context of human behavior, it frequently denotes intensive, repeated, or highly deliberate social actions.

Root *ṣ-d-q* (truth/sincerity): form II *ṣaddaqa* means «to believe someone» or «to deem someone truthful,» indicating an active, deliberate behavioral stance towards another individual.

Root *k-dh-b* (lie/falsehood): form II *kadhhaba* means «to accuse someone of lying» or «to vehemently deny,» demonstrating an aggressive interpersonal behavior.

Form V (*tafa`ala*): reflexivity, acquisition and effort. Form V is paramount in the Arabic behavioral lexicon. Morphologically formed by prefixing *ta-* to Form II, its semantic core revolves around reflexive action, the acquisition of a state, and, crucially, the *effortful undertaking* or *affectation* of a behavior. It often implies that the subject is working to adopt a specific trait.

Root *k-b-r* (bigness/greatness): form V *takabbara* translates to «he acted arrogantly» or «he became proud.» The prefix signifies the subject taking the concept of «greatness» upon themselves.

Root *ḥ-l-m* (patience/forbearance): form V *taḥallama* means «to force oneself to be patient» or «to act with forbearance.» It highlights the psychological effort required to exhibit the behavior.

Root *sh-j-* (courage): form V *tashajja`a* means «to summon up courage.»

Form VI (*tafā`ala*): reciprocity and feigned behavior. Form VI, created by adding the prefix *ta-* to Form III (*fā`ala*), is unique in its dual behavioral functions.

Firstly, it expresses **reciprocal social behavior** (*al-mushāraka*), indicating actions that require mutual participation between two or more parties:

Root *'w-n* (help): form VI *ta`āwana* (to cooperate / mutually help).

Root *s-m-ḥ* (tolerance): form VI *tasāmaḥa* (to treat one another with mutual tolerance/forgiveness).

Secondly, and perhaps more intriguingly for behavioral analysis, Form VI is the primary vehicle for expressing **feigned, false, or simulated behavior** (*al-tazāḥur*). It denotes a subject projecting an outward behavior that contradicts their internal state:

Root *j-h-l* (ignorance): Form VI *tajāhala* means «to feign ignorance» or «to deliberately ignore someone.»

Root *m-r-d* (illness): Form VI *tamāraḍa* means «to feign illness» (malingering) to escape a social duty.

Root *gh-b-y* (stupidity): Form VI *taghābā* means «to play dumb.»

Form X (*istaf`ala*): evaluation and seeking. Form X, featuring the prefix *ista-*, frequently denotes seeking (*talab*) or evaluating (*i`tiqād*) a quality in oneself or others. In behavioral terms, it dictates how a subject perceives the actions or status of another, which subsequently governs their reaction.

Root *kh-f-f* (lightness): form X *istakhaffa* means «to take lightly,» «to disdain,» or «to belittle.» It describes a behavior of disrespect based on evaluating the other as «light» or insignificant.

Root *ḥ-s-n* (goodness): form X *istaḥsana* means «to approve of» or «to deem good,» reflecting an internal behavioral judgment.

Root *k-b-r* (greatness): form X *istakbara* means «to deem oneself great,» similar to *takabbara*, but with an added nuance of demanding that greatness be recognized by others (often used in theological contexts for deep-seated hubris).

Verbs of human conduct in Arabic can be classified into distinct semantic sub-fields based on the nature of the interaction.



Moral and ethical conduct (*Al-Akhlāq*). Arabic possesses a vast vocabulary dedicated to ethical behavior, heavily influenced by pre-Islamic concepts of chivalry (*muruwwa*) and later synthesized with Islamic ethical frameworks.

Istaqāma (to behave uprightly/with integrity).

Anṣafa (to act equitably/justly).

Nāfaqa (to act hypocritically). The root *n-f-q* originally relates to the tunnels made by jerboas (desert rodents) that have two exits, perfectly capturing the two-faced nature of hypocritical behavior.

Social etiquette and diplomacy (*Adab* and *Mudārāh*)

The management of face and social harmony is crucial in Arab culture, reflected directly in the verbs.

Dārā / *Mudārāh* (Form III): to treat with diplomacy, to cajole, or to use tact to avoid conflict.

Jāmala (Form III): to act courteously, to flatter, or to exchange pleasantries (from the root *j-m-l*, meaning beauty).

Tawaqqaha (Form V): to behave with insolence or impudence.

Verbs describing the exertion of power over others form another critical category.

Tajhama (Form V): to scowl at someone, to behave with hostility.

Ista'ada (Form X): to enslave, or to treat someone in a subjugating, domineering manner.

Qahara (Form I): to oppress, conquer, or force someone into submission.

This demonstrates that analyzing Arabic verbs of behavior requires examining the verb-preposition phrase (phrasal verbs or collocations) as a single semantic unit, as the preposition dictates the vector of the behavior (towards, against, or with the other).

Conclusion. The linguistic analysis of verbs expressing human behavior in Arabic reveals a highly systematic, deeply embedded matrix of socio-psychological meaning. Through the elegant mechanics of the root-and-pattern system, Arabic speakers can articulate minute distinctions between natural dispositions, acquired traits, reciprocal social contracts, and feigned performances.

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