**face/面子(Miàn Zi)**

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In the Latin language, three synonyms existed for the anterior part of the human head: *facies*, *visus* and *vultus*. The English term “face” comes from the Latin *facies*, just as the identic French word. French has also “visage”, from *visus*.

The etymology of *facies* is uncertain: some authors refer to *fax* (= flame, light) and to the Greek verb *phaino* (to appear), others refer to facere (to make). On the other hand, *visus* comes from *videre* (to see), as a past participle: it means “what is seen”.

Therefore, the face (the visage) is meant as a part of the body, which stands out and is the first to be seen and observed.

The face encompasses many other parts, whose form, colours and dimensions distinguish populations, families and individuals. The description of a person is always detailed on forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, chin. The portrait of a person is centred on the face, and before fingerprints it was the way to identify human beings as individuals.

A never ending synecdoche interplay links the words “front” (forehead) and “face”, used to describe a topological condition (to take place in front of something or somebody), which may carry several more meanings, linked to fear or challenge, to honesty or comparison. The verbal form “to face something” signifies the direction in which the head turns, but can carry a variety of meanings, more or less related to morality or destiny. In that sense, many popular sentences refer to the face as the focus of dignity: “to lose one’s face, to risk one’s face…”.

On the other hand, face can become synonym of surface: the face of a coin, the faces of a cube, the face of the Earth. But coming back from the world of metaphors to the world of humans, the face is where the feelings and the character of a person can be detected, as humans use to move their facial muscles in order to communicate, with or without a complete control of such movements. Hence another never ending series of slang uses of the word, playing on the facial expression as the sign of various states: health, happiness, sadness, hunger, rage… Representing feeling and emotions was for centuries a crucial issue for many famous artists, who wanted to pick up by their brush the instant of a facial expression, often ending up into caricature.

As the expression of the face can be controlled, the problem arises that the face itself can tell the truth, that is can express sincere feelings and the authentic inner being of the person, or it can show what the person wants to seem like. Therefore, sometimes the word “face” takes the meaning of an apparatus to hide the reality. This happens often with a popular derivate noun, that is “façade” (present also in French), used in architecture to mean the frontal part of a building, which uses to be designed with special and self-consistent decorative patterns. It is not warrantee that the façade patterns correspond to the internal structure.

Therefore, besides the countless popular uses, the most interesting question about face is that this word points out the place where the identity, the character and the feelings of a person can be detected, but it can be also an external representation, the put on stage of an identity, a character and feelings, which are not the real ones. The inner being could be disguised by a face mask, but the face itself can become a mask. The context will clarify whether face is referring to authentic realities or it is used to describe a hiding device.