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## Ellipsis in the Translation of Meaning of the Holy Quran: A Linguistic Analysis

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#### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the rhetorical analysis of translation of meaning in the Quranic text which is a rich area of investigation particularly of Quranic translation of meaning in English language. The specific level of analysis is ellipsis which is the emphasis of the current study. A handful verses of the Quranic text have been selected and analyzed based on their elliptical use. The data analysis process goes through three main areas of analysis: semantic, syntactic and context levels of analysis which shapes the whole process of investigation. Finally, the findings suggest how those three aspects of analysis collaborate in creating meaning with a special reference to ellipsis. Also, the findings provide answers to the three research questions of the current study.

Keywords: Arabic Rhetoric, Ellipsis, English translation, Linguistics, Quran, Semantics.

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### الملخص

ترتكز هذه الدراسة على تحليل البيان اللغوى لترجمة معانى القرآن الكريم إلى اللغة الإنجليزية. وتختص بتحليل ظاهرة الحذف اللغوي والبلاغي في دراسة لبعض الآيات القرآنية؛ وتم اختيار ثمان آيات قرآنية بطريقة عشوائية متنوعة تُلائم دراسة هذه الظاهرة اللغوية المحددة للوصول إلى النتائج المرجوة من البحث. وقد تمت عملية التحليل مرورًا بثلاث مراحل: الأولى هي تحليل المعنى للألفاظ بشكل مباشر؛ والثانية هي تحليل التراكيب المؤثرة في وجود ظاهرة الحذف في الآية المختارة؛ وأخيرًا التحليل السياقي للآية المرادة مع التركيز على دور ظاهرة الحذف في تكوبن هذا المعنى. وقد توصلت النتائج إلى تكامل الدور بين هذه المستوبات في التحليل في الوصول للمعنى المراد مع التركيز على الدور الذي كانت فيه ظاهرة الحذف فاعلة بشكل مباشر في المعنى المقصود؛ وكما أجابت على أسئلة البحث المحددة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغوبات، ظاهرة الحذف، الدلالة، علم المعاني، البلاغة، ترجمة معاني القرآن.

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#### 1.1Introduction

The Holy Quran is the divine book for Muslims since the time of revelation to prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) fourteen centuries ago. One of the distinct features of the Quran is that, its message is meant to address all human beings particularly Muslims regardless of their mother tongue. Moreover, it was sent down in Arabic language and can only be recited in that language in many instances including acts of worship. The Quran also has a miraculous side on its linguistic features, i.e. it challenged Arabs at the time of the prophet who were famous for their eloquent skills; moreover, the challenge includes writing a similar text till the day of judgement. This research is not going to be about the miraculous sides of the Quran, rather it sheds a light on specific areas of a linguistic device found in the Quran called Ellipsis.

Previous studies by Al-Hilfy (2014), Al-Salami (2022), Ariffin & Mansor (2022), and Mohammed (2022) investigated various aspects of translating the Holy Quran by focusing on different topics and language pairs. Mohammed (2022) examined the impact of translation variances on reader comprehension and proposed solutions for discrepancies. Furthermore, Ariffin and Mansor (2022) delved into the challenges faced in translating the Quran into Malay. Al-Salami (2022) explored ellipsis use in the Quran, thus emphasizing its effect on narrative style and reader engagement. Despite these studies, there is a need to analyze ellipsis translation at semantic, syntactic, and contextual levels for a comprehensive understanding of this research topic.

Therefore, this study aims to present this kind of analysis in English language to enrich the field of translation of meaning of Quranic linguistics in English. The study also aims to examine the cohesion and coherence structures with particular reference to ellipsis as a rhetorical device and to explore the intensified, prolific and creative meaning of some Quranic verses. Finally, the study focuses on how certain elements are ellipted in specific verses, and what kind of meaning contributions have been added. Since this study deals with the Quranic text, the author will always refer to previous Islamic linguists and scholars to support his analysis.

# 1.2 Significance of the study

We can trace the significance of the study from the significance of the Quranic text itself, i.e. the Quranic text is the most sacred text in the entire world.



Not only that, even people who do not embrace the religion of Islam have a great interest to study and understand the Quran for many reasons. Furthermore, being a native speaker of Arabic gave me a higher responsibility to deliver the deeper understanding of the Holy text in the original language in which it was revealed compared to translators' attempts. Finally, we do not say that we are going to cover all sides of the Quranic verses, yet it is an attempt to address one side of its linguistic features to non-Arabic speakers in particular.

#### 1.3 **Research questions**

The key research questions investigated in the current study in order to achieve the objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1. What ellipsis devices and rhetorical features are found in the selected verses of the Holy Quran in this study?
- 2. How do the context and ellipsis devices interact in creating meaning in the selected verses of the Holy Quran in this study?

#### 2.iterature

### **Review**

# 2.1 Ellipsis (Rhetoric vs. Grammar)

Ellipsis is used to mean the omission of constituent elements in specific verses in the holy Quran for the purpose of intensifying and beautifying meaning. Thus, the process of analysis will operate on two levels; rhetorical and grammatical levels. One of the common techniques of analyzing ellipsis by rhetoricians and grammarians is through comparing two examples where an element is ellipted in one structure and is present in another. The main job of grammarians when studying ellipsis is emphasized on when ellipsis should and should not be applied, whereas rhetoricians focus on when ellipsis is more expressive of the meaning (Al-Liheibi, 1999).

#### 2.2 Theoretical framework

Latif (2010) categorized ellipsis into two types: apparent (explicit) and implicit ellipsis. Apparent ellipsis is explicit, with a specific time reference like "a few years ago," but is uncommon in the Qur'anic narrative. On the other hand, implicit ellipsis, more prevalent in usage, involves omitting events understood from the context. Allaithy (2020) argued that ellipses maximizes the linguistic complexities in the Qur'anic text and challenges its translatability. Some scholars like Halliday (2006) and Leech and Short (2007) set some levels and categories for text analysis.



Halliday (2006) states that any type of literary text can be analyzed using various categories of linguistics methods. Halliday's approach is concerned with interpretation of linguistic features mainly through the descriptive linguistics and not the historical linguistics nor the institutional linguistics. Likewise, Leech and Short (2007) specified categories for linguistic analysis including: lexical categories, syntactic or grammatical categories, use of figures of speech and context and cohesion.

Studying the syntactic and semantic sentence analysis from rhetoric perspective is quite rare area of research particularly with the emphasis on ellipsis as a focus of the study. This linguistic aspect has been studied before in the Quranic text by ancient Arab scholars, however, not many recent empirical researchers studied this phenomenon as it deserves. One of the recent studies was by El Rays (2017) looked at three translations of meaning of the holy Quran with a focus on examining the cohesive devices of ellipsis utilizing the Halliday and Hassan's (1976) theory. Al-Hroot (1987). The researcher offered a detailed analysis of several aspects of deletion in Modern Standard Arabic utilizing Chomsky's transformational grammar.

### 2.3 Previous studies

Previous studies investigated the translation of meaning of the Holy Quran (Al-Hilfy, 2014; Shurafa, 1995; Al-Salami, 2022; Ariffin, A., & Mansor, 2022; Mohammed, 2022). These studies have focused at different topics and different language pairs. For instance, Mohammed (2022) explored the variances in translations of the Holy Quran and assessed their impact on the comprehension of general readers. Additionally, the study proposed solutions to address issues arising from these discrepancies. Ariffin and Mansor (2022) analyzed the challenges in translating the language of the Qur'an into Bahas Malay. Furthermore, Al-Salami (2022) analyzed the use of ellipsis in linguistic discourse, focusing on omitting time segments in the Qur'anic narratives that did not impact the narrative style or story development. By examining this technique, the study explored how rapid event progression enhances reader engagement, excitement, and tension, thus leading to a heightened sense of pleasure and interaction. Despite the significance of these previous studies, there seems a need to analyze the translation of ellipses at different levels, (i.e., semantic, syntactic and context).



Al-Shurafa (1995) investigated the role of syntax and semantics in the translation of meaning of the Quran. The study attempted to compare/contrast different translations of meaning of Quran with regard to bringing different cultural and environmental backgrounds to the text through which syntactic and semantic choices are filtered. Ali (1992) examined the translation of ellipted structures in the Quran into English and the potential comprehension problems they may cause in the target language.

Most of the recent studies have investigated the sematic/syntactic elements of the Quranic verses using technological tools such the natural language processing (NLP) approach. Durie (2022) looked at four Quranic words and investigated their Semantic features using the NLP. The study provides explicit semantic explanations for core Islamic lexical terms crucial to the spiritual worldview of over two billion Muslims worldwide. It contrasts the NSM explication of rasul with biblical Hebrew terms, highlighting the nuances that are often lost in English translation. By employing Natural Semantic Metalanguage, the study offered precise semantic explications for challenging Quranic concepts like shirk, kāfir, and ittaga, thus enhancing understanding across languages.

Another study by Alduhaim (2021) compared between three translations of the meaning of Quran. Her findings suggest that the three translations failed to capture the accurate meaning throughout the Quran, leading to a semantic void, so it was a challenging mission for translators. She stated "each translator chose their own approach based on their translational goal or their educational and personal backgrounds".

Gunawan and Boulahnane (2022) employed a critical qualitative-cased study investigating one translation of meaning of Quran by Muhammad Thalib. The authors touched on techniques, methods, and ideology in the translation of Surah al-Wāqiah into the Indonesian language. Findings showed that this translation is not dependable and therefore, they urged translators to be more competent in declarative and procedural translation as well as in bilingual and cultural transfer. Another recent study was by Al-Salami (2022) who examined Quranic narratives using random sampling from the holy Quran. The minimum of two or more times mentioned of the story was the only criterion. This research relied on the descriptive analytical approach of ellipsis as a linguistic model which is the approach used in the current study.



# 3. Methodology

# Research design

The study utilized an analytical approach to analyze ellipsis, specifically the rhetorical devices with a special emphasis on the syntactic-semantic aspects used in the data. The study compares texts on two languages; i.e. Arabic (as being the original language of the Holy text), and English (as the target language of study). It is a descriptive kind of research that describes the assigned data and then analyzes them using a rhetorical analysis with an emphasize on the syntactic-semantic levels in each verse selected. This kind of analysis aimed to find the function of each linguistic item selected in the data of the study.

### Instrument and data collection methods

Data for the study were gathered purposefully. Eight verses of the Holy Quran were selected along with their translation. Rhetorical analyses with emphasis on syntactic and semantic aspects including: structure, lexicography, meaning and content were used. The prominent translation selected in this study is called Sahih International. Although the researcher benefited from the translation largely, the original Arabic text was studied as being a native speaker of Arabic language, an investigation of other translations where necessary was performed. The current research is descriptive; both the original Arabic text and the translation of the meaning of Quranic selected verses are used as primary data.

### Procedures for data analysis

After data collection, the procedure of data analysis was conducted. Each verse was written in Arabic along with the transliteration and English translation. A deep analysis was introduced to the verse depending on the interpretation of some scholars. The researcher unfolded the ellipses and how the rendering was dealt with such linguistic phenomena.

# 4. Findings

# - The first verse from Surah Azzumar 39:9

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَٰنِتٌ ءَانَاءَ ٱلَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَانِمًا يَحْذَرُ ٱلْاَخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُواْ رَحْمَةَ رَبِهِ ﴿ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِى ٱلَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ وَالْذِينَ عَلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ وَالْأَنْبَ

**Transliteration:** Amman huwa qanitun anaaallayli sajidan waqa-iman yahtharu alakhiratawayarjoo rahmata rabbihi qul hal yastawee allatheenayaAAlamoona wallatheena la yaAAlamoonainnama yatathakkaru oloo al-albab-



Saheeh International Translation: Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding. —

### **Analysis:**

The transitive verb know in this verse should have an object; however, the object is ellipted for deeper meaning. According to the linguistic context of the sentence that preceded the verb know, it seems obvious that the meaning intended here is the knowledge about the Hereafter and Lord's mercy. Thus, the rhetoricalsemantic aspect here indicates that the ellipted object used to emphasize the significance of knowledge about religion; i.e. this ellipsis use would indicate that who does not know about religion knows nothing. The meaning of nothing can be extracted from the omission of the required object for rhetorical and meaning purposes.

2<sup>nd</sup> verse 2:91

وَاذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُواْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ قَالُواْ نُؤْمِنُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَآءَهُ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لَمَّا مَعَهُمْ ۖ قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْسِآءَ ٱللَّهِ مِن قَبْلُ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

Transliteration: Wa-itha qeela lahum aminoo bimaanzala Allahu qaloo nu/minu bima onzilaAAalayna wayakfuroona bima waraahu wahuwa alhaqqumusaddiqan lima maAAahum qul falima taqtuloonaanbiyaa Allahi min qablu in kuntum mu/mineen —

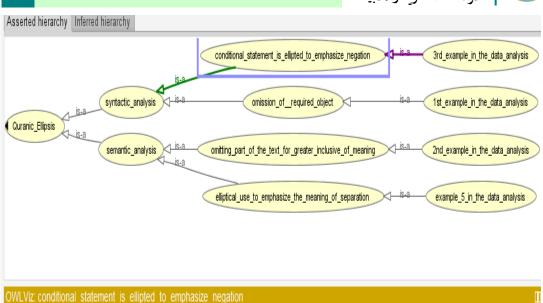
Saheeh International Translation: And when it is said to them, "Believe in what Allah has revealed," they say, "We believe [only] in what was revealed to us." And they disbelieve in what came after it, while it is the truth confirming that which is with them. Say, "Then why did you kill the prophets of Allah before, if you are [indeed] believers?" — **Analysis:** 

The part of the verse which says 'believe in what Allah has revealed' without specifying the name of that revelation was used for rhetorical-semantic purposes. This was done to signify the nature of the religion of Islam as not a religion of splitting or arguments; rather it is a religion of unifications which calls to the belief in all the previous books and prophets of God.

3<sup>rd</sup> verse 23:91

مَا آتَّخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِن وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ ۚ إِذًا لَّذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَٰهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَا بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۚ سُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ عَمَّا





**Transliteration:** Ma ittakhatha Allahumin waladin wama kana maAAahu min ilahin ithanlathahaba kullu ilahin bima khalaqa walaAAalabaAAduhum AAala baAAdin subhana AllahiAAamma yasifoon-

**Saheeh International Translation:** Allah has not taken any son, nor has there ever been with Him any deity. [If there had been], *then each deity would have taken* what it created, and some of them would have [sought to] overcome others. Exalted is Allah above what they describe [concerning Him]. —

# **Analysis:**

The statement that starts with "then each deity would have taken" is called a conditional response in Arabic language; i.e. it usually comes after a conditional statement. In this verse however, the conditional statement is ellipted for rhetorical-semantic purposes. The meaning is intensified due to the use of ellipsis in the sentence. In the beginning of the verse, God the Almighty negates firmly any existence of other deity; then He elaborated logically how this cannot even be imagined. The rhetorical-semantic aspect here is obvious where He neither mentioned the word deity nor the entire conditional statement which usually precedes the conditional response statement. This usage could be explained rhetorically to emphasize the impossibility of the existence of another god besides Him the Almighty.

Figure 1.



# 4<sup>th</sup> verse 34:51

Transliteration: Walaw tara ith faziAAoo falafawta waokhithoo min makanin qareeb-Saheeh International Translation: And if you could see when they are terrified but there is no escape, and they will be seized from a place nearby.

### **Analysis:**

Here is another conditional statement that says "if you could see when they are terrified"; the addressee here is the prophet Muhammad to visualize how terrified the situation of the disbelievers in the day of judgement. Unlike the previous example, the response here to the conditional statement is ellipted for rhetorical-semantic purposes. The meaning is intensified by this usage, i.e. the prophet cannot imagine how severe their situation, therefore a rhetorical style is more powerful than a direct description.

# 5<sup>th</sup> verse 6:94

Walaqad ji/tumoona furadakama khalaqnakum awwala marratin Transliteration: wataraktum makhawwalnakum waraa thuhoorikum wamanara maAAakum shufaAAaakumu allatheenazaAAamtum annahum feekum shurakao lagad taqattaAAabaynakum wadalla AAankum ma kuntum tazAAumoon—

Saheeh International Translation: [It will be said to them], "And you have certainly come to Us alone [i.e., individually] as We created you the first time, and you have left whatever We bestowed upon you behind you. And We do not see with you your 'intercessors' which you claimed that they were among you associates [of Allah]. It has [all] been severed between you, and lost from you is what you used to claim."—

# **Analysis:**

In a previous example, we have seen the use of ellipsis with a transitive verb "know" where the object was ellipted. However, in this example the subject was ellipted for semantic-rhetorical purposes when God the Almighty says "It has [all] been severed between you", we can see the translator put the subject between brackets to indicate that it is added by him and not found in the original text. In the original Arabic text, the subject of the verb severed is ellipted to intensify the meaning of separation and disconnection between those people and whom they worshiped beside God the Almighty. Then the next sentence continues "and lost from you is what you used to claim"; i.e. what you claimed to be gods during life, now you lost them and have no connection what so ever with them.



# - 6<sup>th</sup> verse 6:19

قُلْ أَيُّ شَيْءٍ أَكْبَرُ شَهَٰدَقً قُلِ آللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَأُوحِيَ إِلَىَّ هَٰذَا آلْقُرْءَانُ لِأُنذِرَكُم بِهِ - وَمَنْ بَلَغَ الْيَّكُمْ لَتَشْهَدُونَ أَنَّ مَعَ آللَهِ ءَالِهَةً أُخْرَىٰ اقُل لَّآ أَشْهَدُ اقُلْ إِنَّمَا هُوَ إِلَٰهٌ وَحِدٌ وَإِنَّنِي بَرِيٓ ءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ

**Transliteration:** Qul ayyu shay-in akbaru shahadatanquli Allahu shaheedun baynee wabaynakum waoohiyailayya hatha alqur-anu li-onthirakum bihiwaman balagha a-innakum latashhadoona anna maAAa Allahi alihatanokhra qul la ashhadu qul innama huwa ilahunwahidun wa-innanee baree-on mimma tushrikoon—

**Saheeh International Translation:** Say, "What thing is greatest in testimony?" Say, "Allah is witness between me and you. And this Qur'ān was revealed to me that I may warn you thereby and whomever it *reaches*. Do you [truly] testify that with Allah there are other deities?" Say, "I will not *testify* [with you]." Say, "Indeed, He is but one God, and indeed, I am free of what you associate [with Him]."

### **Analysis:**

Two examples of the ellipsis used here in this verse. The first one with a transitive verb "reach" where the object was ellipted. However, the ellipsis used for semantic-rhetorical purposes when God the Almighty says "And this Qur'ān was revealed to me that I may warn you thereby and whomever it reaches". In the original Arabic text, the object of the verb reach is ellipted to intensify the meaning of extension and expansion in time, space, and creation of man and jinn until the day of judgment.

The second example is with the verb testify when God says "I will not testify [with you]". We can see the translator put the object between brackets to indicate that it is added by him and not found in the original text. In the original Arabic text, the subject of the verb testify is ellipted to intensify the meaning of negating any testimony about the existence of other gods beside God the Almighty; i.e. this ellipsis usage can add to the meaning of negating this kind of testimony whether it is with them or with anyone else.

- 7<sup>th</sup> verse 56:82

وَتَجْعَلُونَ رِزْقَكُمْ أَنَّكُمْ تُكَذِّبُونَ

Transliteration: Wataj A Aaloona rizqakum annakum tukaththiboon

**Saheeh International:** And make [the thanks for] your provision that you deny [the Provider]?

# **Analysis:**

This example is with the word thanks for when God says "[the thanks for] your provision". We can see the translator put the word between brackets to indicate that it is added by him and not found in the original text. In the original Arabic text, this elliptical use to intensify the meaning of ungratefulness that you repay the One who gave you provision with denial.



# 8<sup>th</sup> verse 38:32

Transliteration: Fagala innee ahbabtu hubbaalkhayri AAan thikri rabbee hatta tawaratbilhijab

Saheeh International: And he said, "Indeed, I gave preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until it [i.e., the sun] disappeared into the curtain [of darkness]."

## **Analysis:**

This example is with the word the sun when God says "I gave preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until it [i.e., the sun] disappeared into the curtain [of darkness]". We can see the translator put the word the sun between brackets to indicate that it is added by him and not found in the original text. In the original Arabic text, this ellipsis was used to appropriate the meaning of forgetting the remembrance of Lord to the disappearing of the sun compared to preferring love of good things to intensify the significance of the remembrance of God the Almighty. Below are figures 1&2 to visualize the analysis above using OWL Ontology visualization.

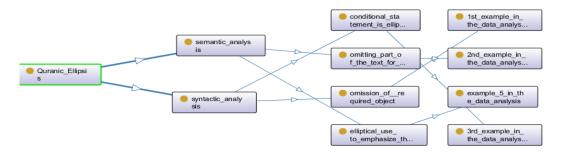


Figure 2.

# 6. Discussion and Conclusion of the Study

This study is a descriptive kind of study as mentioned above, therefore, most of the analysis had to have a subjective level of analysis. The study reported that ellipses are used for rhetorical-semantic purposes with the purpose of intensifying the meaning. This finding aligns with previous studies which asserted the linguistic intricacies of the Quran and its rhetorical devices (Al-Khawalda, 2011; Daraz, 2015). By highlightening the ellipsis and its rhetorical and thematic aspects, this study provides valuable insights into the Quranic text, particularly for non-Arabic speaking readers (Ali, 1992; Al-Shurafa, 1995; Al-Khawalda, 2011; Daraz, 2015) and thus provides a better understanding of the verses of the Muslims' Holy book.



The study revealed that context plays a major role in understanding ellipses. This is confirmed by various studies, such as Al-Khawalda (2011) and Daraz (2015) who highlighted the importance of ellipsis in the Arabic language and its impact on the interpretation of Quranic verses. Al-Khawalda (2011) provided an overview of ellipsis in Arabic, while Daraz (2015) conducted an applied study on the influence of linguistic ellipsis on the interpretation of Quranic verses.

The implications of this study are significant for a few reasons. First, the Quranic text holds immense importance in the Islamic world and attracts interest from individuals beyond the Islamic faith, who study and seek to understand the Quran for various reasons. Second, as native Arabic speakers, the authors of this study bear a heightened responsibility to convey a deeper understanding of the Holy text in its original language, as compared to the attempts of translators. While this study does not claim to cover all aspects of the Quranic verses, it aims to shed light on one of its linguistic features, particularly for non-Arabic speakers (Ali, 1992; Al-Shurafa, 1995; Al-Khawalda, 2011; Daraz, 2015).

### Conclusion

This study has clear objectives and goals to achieve. The main purpose was to link between the rhetorical level of specific verses in the Quran with regard to its syntactic-sematic structures. Also, it has a micro level of analysis which was the elliptical usage to serve the meaning of the selected verses. The study concludes that the rhetorical aspect of the Quranic text is a rich area of investigation particularly in English language. One of such aspects was ellipsis; this study selected randomly around ten examples of verses that have elliptical use. Three major areas influence the analysis of the data; they are semantic, syntactic and context levels of analysis shaped the process of investigating how they collaborated in creating meaning with a special reference to ellipsis.

#### Recommendation and future studies

It seems clear the gap of studying the translation of meaning of Quran from linguistics is quite big and needs to be further studied from both translation and language studies in general. Also, it is worth mentioning here that this research covered only handful verses of the Quran which focus on Ellipsis. Therefore, further research should be conducted on the same topic with more comprehensive covering of the entire holy text.

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