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Iḥtibāk, Reciprocal Ellipsis, in the Qur'an: A Comparative Rhetorical and Translation Study

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Abstract

Iḥtibāk, commonly rendered as reciprocal ellipsis, denotes a rhetorical structure in which corresponding elements are omitted from two related expressions, each omitted component being recoverable from its counterpart in the text. In Qur'anic discourse, iḥtibāk combines concision with precision and produces a controlled movement of meaning between explicit expression and readerly inference. Although classical Arabic rhetoricians and exegetes examined this device in detail, its treatment in English translations of the Qur'an has received limited scholarly attention, particularly with regard to implied meaning, inferential processing, and the theory of naẓm. This article investigates iḥtibāk through a comparative rhetorical and translation-oriented approach. It begins with al-Zarkashī's formulation of al-ḥadhf al-muqābalī and then traces subsequent discussions in al-Suyūṭī and al-Biqāʿī. This theoretical grounding clarifies the technical meaning of the concept and distinguishes iḥtibāk from ordinary ellipsis. The study subsequently classifies selected Qur'anic examples according to the semantic relations linking stated and omitted elements, including contrast, correspondence, causality, and contextual implication. These examples are then analysed in five English translations of the Qur'an: Abdel Haleem, Yusuf Ali, Hilali-Khan, Pickthall, and Asad. The analysis demonstrates that iḥtibāk is not a merely accidental omission of wording but a purposeful rhetorical arrangement that contributes to the construction of meaning. The translations examined vary considerably: some preserve the compactness of the Arabic where English allows, others explicate the implied meaning, some adopt a tafsīr-oriented expansion, and others rely on notes to guide interpretation. The article concludes that translating iḥtibāk requires careful attention to the relationship between form and meaning in the Qur'anic text. Translators must therefore decide whether to preserve the elliptical structure, explicate it, or combine both procedures. The study calls for Qur'an translation approaches that more systematically account for rhetorical structure and the role of inference in completing meaning.

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الكلمات المفتاحية

الاحتباك، الحذف المتقابل، البلاغة القرآنية، الإيجاز، النظم، ترجمة القرآن، التفسير

الملخص

يُعدُّ "الاحتباك"، أو الحذف المتقابل، نسقاً بلاغياً مخصوصاً، تُحذف فيه ألفاظ متقابلة من تركيبين مرتبطين، بحيث يُستدل على كل محذوف بنظيره المذكور في النص. وفي السياق القرآني، يرتبط هذا الفن البلاغي بخصائص الإيجاز ودقة النَّظم، كاشفاً عن حركية المعنى بين المذكور والمسكوت عنه. وعلى الرغم من عناية البلاغيين والمفسرين قديماً بهذا الفن، إلا أن تمثيله في الترجمات الإنجليزية للقرآن الكريم لم ينل حظه الكافي من البحث، لا سيما في تقاطعه مع المعنى الضمني، واستدلال المتلقي، ونظرية النَّظم. انطلاقاً من هذه الفجوة، يعالج البحث ظاهرة الاحتباك معتمداً منهجاً بلاغياً مقارناً يتوسل بأدوات تحليل الترجمة. ويبدأ بتتبع التأصيل النظري لصيغة "الحذف المقابلي" عند الزركشي، مروراً بمعالجات السيوطي والبقاعي، بهدف ضبط المعنى الاصطلاحي للاحتباك وتمييزه عن الحذف المطلق. عقب ذلك، يُصنّف البحث مختارات من النماذج القرآنية بناءً على طبيعة العلاقة الدلالية بين المذكور والمحذوف (كالتقابل، والمطابقة، والسببية، والاقتضاء السياقي)، محللاً إياها في ضوء خمس ترجمات إنجليزية بارزة (عبد الحليم، يوسف علي، الهلالي وخان، بيكتول، وأسد). وتكشف نتائج التحليل أن الاحتباك ليس مجرد حذف عارض، بل هو ترتيب بلاغي مقصود يؤدي وظيفة مركزية في توجيه المعنى. كما أظهرت الدراسة تبايناً في استراتيجيات المترجمين؛ فبينما وازن بعضهم بين الإيجاز العربي وطبيعة اللغة الإنجليزية، مال آخرون إلى التصريح بالمعنى المضمر أو التوسع التفسيري، في حين لجأ فريق ثالث إلى توظيف الحواشي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن ترجمة الاحتباك تستوجب وعياً دقيقاً بالجدل القائم بين مبنى النص القرآني ومعناه، وبناءً عليه، توصي بتبني منهجية في ترجمة معاني القرآن تولي اهتماماً أعمق ببنيته البلاغية، وتستثمر دور الاستدلال في استكمال المعنى.

1. Introduction

Iḥtibāk is not ordinary omission. It is a patterned form of ellipsis in which two related expressions complete each other. An element is omitted from the first expression, and another is omitted from the second. Each omitted element is understood through what appears in the corresponding expression. This structure produces a compact rhetorical unit marked by concision and semantic density (Abdulrahman, 2012). It also requires active reading. The reader must infer the omitted elements and reconstruct the full relation between the paired expressions (Essa, 2023; Al-Salami, 2022). In this way, *iḥtibāk* shows how Qur'anic meaning may depend on the interaction between wording, context, and reader inference.

This feature creates a clear challenge for translation. English often requires meanings to be stated more explicitly, while the rhetorical force of *iḥtibāk* depends on what remains unstated (Allaithy, 2020). This study argues that translating *iḥtibāk* is not only a matter of linguestic transfer. It is also an act of interpretation. The translator must decide whether to preserve the elliptical form, leaving the reader to infer part of the meaning, or to make the omitted meaning explicit through clarification, expansion, or

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notes. This decision reflects the translator's veiw of the relation between form and meaning in the Qur'anic text. It also reflects the translator's role in presenting the sacred text to English readers (Pink, 2015).

The study develops this argument in four stages. First, it traces the concept of Iḥtibāk in the classical tradition of Qur'anic sciences, *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*. Second, it proposes a functional typology based on the semantic relations between the omitted elements. Third, it analyzes selected Qur'anic verses to show how *iḥtibāk* works rhetorically in context. Fourth, it compares how these verses are rendered in selected English translations. The aim is to show why Qur'anic rhetorical structures require translation methods that account for both meaning and form.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative case-study approach. It does not attempt a corpus-based survey of all occurrences of *iḥtibāk* in the Qur'an. Instead, it examines three selected examples: Q 2:187, Q 2:282, and Q 25:27-28. These verses were chosen because classical authorities, especially al-Suyūṭī and al-Biqāʿī, identify them as clear examples of *iḥtibāk*. They also represent different types within the proposed typology: action-time interplay, morphological ambiguity, and oppositional regret. The examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They are intended to show the rhetorical mechanics of iḥtibāk and the translation challenges it creates, not to provide a statistical account of the device across the entire Qur'anic text. The translations examined, Abdel Haleem, Yusuf Ali, Hilali-Khan, Pickthall, and Asad, were selected because they represent different translation orientations, ranging from formal correspondence to exegetical expansion. The study also draws on Hassanein's (2023) dependency-grammar analysis of *iḥtibāk* to support the proposed typology through a linguistic framework.

2. Literature Review

The study of *iḥtibāk* stands at the intersection of classical Arabic rhetoric, *balāghah*, Qur'anic exegesis, *tafsīr*, and modern translation studies. The first two fields contain a long tradition of analysis, especially in relation to ellipsis, concision, and Qur'anic coherence. By contrast, the specific problems that *iḥtibāk* raises for translation have received more limited attention.

2.1. Classical and Modern Arabic Rhetoric

The basis for understanding iḥtibāk lies in the wider rhetorical treatment of ellipsis, *ḥadhf*, as a mark of eloquence, *balāghah*, and concision, *ījāz*. Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, d. 1239, discusses different forms of omission in *al-Mathal al-Sāʾir* and treats ellipsis as a means of achieving stylistic force and rhetorical precision (Ibn al-Athīr, 1960; Abdel-Haleem, 2020). His work is foundational for the study of omission in Arabic rhetoric, although it does not isolate reciprocal ellipsis as a separate named category (Al-Asʿad, 2013).

The formal treatment of iḥtibāk as a distinct rhetorical figure developed later. Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, d. 1392, offers one of the earliest systematic discussions in al-Burhān

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fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān, where he uses the descriptive term *al-ḥadhf al-muqābalī*, or reciprocal deletion (al-Zarkashī, 1957; Fatani, 2010; Jamshidi et al., 2025). Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, d. 1505, later gave wider circulation to the more metaphorical term *iḥtibāk in al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, presenting it as one of the rhetorical arts of the Qur'an (al-Suyūṭī, 1967). The exegetical use of the concept became especially prominent with Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, d. 1480, who employed *iḥtibāk* as a hermeneutecal tool for showing the Qur'an's coherence, naẓm, in Naẓm al-Durar (al-Biqāʿī, 1969).

Modern Arabic scholarship has continued this line of inquiry. Some studies examine *iḥtibāk* within specific *sūrahs*, while others attempt to describe its rhetorical function across the Qur'an as a whole (Ahmad, 2025; Al-Khatib & Saʿadah, 2023). Hassanein (2023) provides an English-language account of the device, proposing a five-part typology based on lexical-semantic relations and linking Iḥtibāk to dependency grammar.

2.2. Qur'an Translation and the Challenge of Ellipsis

Within translation studies, the rhetorical features of the Qur'an are widely recognized as a central challenge for translators (Parveen, 2021; Ahmed & Ahmed, 2024; Habibolahi, 2023; Shan et al., 2025). Ellipsis has attracted particular attention because Arabic often permits the omission of elements that remain recoverable from context, whereas English may require a more explicit expression of the same meaning (El Rays, 2017; Al-Rayes, 2024; Allaithy, 2020).

Ali (1992) and Al-Salami (2022) show that literal translation of Arabic ellipsis can create ambiguity or weaken cohesion in English. This problem has led to debate over the most effective strategies for rendering elliptical structures. Essa (2023) connects the eloquence of ellipsis to al-Jurjānī's theory of naẓm and argues that approaches limited to grammar may overlook its rhetorical force.

Compared with general ellipsis, *iḥtibāk* has received less focused attention in translation studies. Abdulrahman (2012) argues that many translators overlook its internal structure, which can lead to partial or ineffective renderings. He recommends an exegetical translation approach in which the omitted elements are made explicit in the target text to convey the full meaning. This position raises a central problem for Qur'an translation: whether the translator should preserve the source text's implicit structure or clarify it for the target reader.

2.3. Translation Theory: Explicitation, Implicitation, and Paratextual Strategies

Explicitation and implicitation are central concepts in modern translation theory (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/1995; Blum-Kulka, 1986). Explicitation occurs when information left implicit in the source text becomes explicit in the target text. Some scholars have even treated it as a translation universal (Baker, 1993). In Qur'an translation, explicitation often appears through brackets, footnotes, and other paratextual devices (Hawamdeh, 2018). Supporters of this strategy argue that such additions improve clarity

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and help bridge linguistic and cultural gaps (Abdelaal, 2019). Critics caution that they may interrupt the reading process, introduce exegetical bias, or produce unnecessary repetition (Hassen, 2018). The choice is therefore not only technical. It also reflects the translator's hermeneutical stance and view of the sacred text (Pink, 2015).

A full account of translation strategies for *iḥtibāk* must also consider the intended readership of each translation and its functional purpose, or skopos. In some contexts, explicitation may reduce rhetorical density but still serve a legitimate communicative function, especially for readers without access to Arabic rhetorical conventions (Abdelaal, 2019).

The existing literature has addressed ellipsis in general and explicitation in Qur'an translation. Yet a gap remains in the comparative study of how *iḥtibāk*, as a specific and complex form of reciprocal ellipsis, is handled across influential English translations. This study addresses that gap by linking the classical rhetorical account of *iḥtibāk* with a comparative analysis of its translation. It shows that rendering Qur'anic implicitness involves interpretive choices about form, meaning, and reader access.

3. Conceptualizing *Iḥtibāk*: A Refined Rhetorical Art

The term *iḥtibāk* derives from the Arabic root ḥ-b-k, which denotes tightening, strengthening, perfecting, and skillful weaving. Al-Suyūṭī, d. 1505, explains that the term comes from *al-ḥabk*, meaning the tightening of a cloth and the refinement of its workmanship. The image suggests a woven fabric whose threads are drawn together so that its gaps are closed, and its structure becomes firm and well-formed (al-Suyūṭī, 1988, pp. 128-129). This etymology provides an apt metaphor for the rhetorical function of *iḥtibāk*. The omitted elements resemble gaps in a woven pattern, while the reader's inference completes the structure and restores its coherence

In technical usage, *iḥtibāk* refers to a structure in which two corresponding elements appear in the discourse, while the counterpart of each is omitted because the other indicates it. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī defines it as a structure "wherein two counterparts meet in the discourse, and the counterpart of each is deleted because the other indicates it" (al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, 2004, p. 13). This definition establishes two basic features of the device. First, the discourse contains corresponding elements arranged in parallel or near-parallel relation. Second, deletion operates reciprocally, so that what is stated in one part helps the reader infer what is omitted in the other.

4. The Mechanics and Typology of Reciprocal Ellipsis

Iḥtibāk can be identified only when a structure meets specific rhetorical and semantic conditions. It is not an arbitrary form of omission. Its meaning must remain recoverable from the surrounding discourse, so that concision does not weaken clarity. Classical rhetoricians therefore treated *iḥtibāk* as a controlled rhetorical device, governed by indicators that allow the reader to reconstruct the omitted elements. These conditions also provide the basis for classifying its main types.

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4.1. Conditions for *Iḥtibāk*

Based on the definitions and analyses of classical authorities, four main conditions must be met for a structure to be classified as *iḥtibāk* (Al-Ansaari, 1985, as cited in Abdulrahman, 2012).

- *Presence of two corresponding clauses:* The structure must contain two parallel, paired, or thematically related clauses. These clauses may express comparison, contrast, sequence, or parallel situations.
- *Reciprocal deletion:* An element is omitted from the first clause while its counterpart appears in the second. Conversely, another element is omitted from the second clause while its counterpart appears in the first. The deletion, therefore, works in both directions.
- *Clear indicators (qarāʾin):* The omitted element in each clause must be indicated by a corresponding element in the other clause. The context must provide a sufficient clue, *qarīnah*, allowing the reader to reconstruct the intended meaning without confusion.
- *Rhetorical purpose*: The deletion must serve a rhetorical function. Its main purpose is to achieve concision, *ījāz*, without sacrificing clarity. This concision strengthens the aesthetic quality of the expression, engages the reader's inference, and gives the verse a compact rhetorical force.

2.4. A Working Typology

Although all instances of *iḥtibāk* share the same basic mechanism, they may be classified according to the semantic relation between the corresponding elements in the two clauses. Such classification helps identify the specific rhetorical effect produced in each case (Abdulrahman, 2012; Hassanein, 2023; Al-Rayes, 2025).

- **Oppositional iḥtibāk, *al-taḍādd***

This is the most frequent and easiest type to identify. The relation between the corresponding elements is based on opposition or antonymy. Common Qur'anic oppositions include believers and disbelievers, guidance and misguidance, Heaven and Hell, night and day, and good and evil. Hassanein (2023) refers to this type as *iḥtibāk ḍiddī* and represents its structure through dependency grammar.

- **Analogical or similar *iḥtibāk, al-tashābuh***

In this type, the corresponding elements are related by similarity, analogy, or equivalence. An action, attribute, or condition mentioned in one clause is understood as applying to the other because the two clauses describe parallel subjects or comparable situations.

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- **Negative and affirmative *iḥtibāk, al-nafy wa-l-ithbāt***

This type involves a relation between affirmation and negation. One clause affirms a concept, while the other negates its counterpart. An affirmative element may be omitted from the negative clause, and a negative element may be omitted from the affirmative clause, with each supplied through contextual inference.

- **Mixed or complex *iḥtibāk***

Some examples combine more than one semantic relation. Hassanein (2023) identifies a cross-categorial type, *al-mushtarak*, in which several lexical-semantic relations operate within the same verse. These cases require closer analysis because the reciprocal structure cannot be reduced to a single relation, such as opposition or similarity.

5. Analytical Study of *Iḥtibāk* in selected Qur'anic Verses

The rhetorical function of *iḥtibāk* becomes clearer when examined in Qur'anic usage. The following analyses consider selected verses in which reciprocal ellipsis shapes meaning through omission, correspondence, and inference. These examples show that *iḥtibāk* is not a purely grammatical feature. It is a rhetorical device that condenses expression, guides interpretation, and invites the reader to reconstruct the implied meaning.

5.1. Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:187: The Interplay of Action and Time

The verse on the rules of fasting in Ramaḍān contains a clear example of Iḥtibāk. The structure links permitted actions with their relevant times, while leaving part of the meaning to be inferred from the arrangement of the verse.

Text:

"وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ"

(...and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread of night. Then complete the fast until the night.) (Qur'an 2:187)

Analysis

This passage links permission with command. The first clause permits eating and drinking and sets the endpoint of this permission at dawn. It also points to the period in which these actions are allowed, namely the night. The second clause commands completion of the fast until nightfall. It marks the endpoint of fasting, while the acts from which the fasting person abstains, eating and drinking, are inferred from the previous clause. The structure depends on reciprocal indication between the two parts of the verse.

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- **Reconstruction, *al-taqdīr***

The expanded meaning may be expressed as follows:
"And eat and drink during the night until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread of night. Then complete the fast, abstaining from eating and drinking, until the night".

- **Rhetorical function**

The *iḥtibāk* in this verse produces concision without weakening the legal meaning. A fully expanded version would repeat both the permitted actions and the time limits in each clause. The Qur'anic wording avoids such repetition by linking action and time through a compact reciprocal structure. Night is associated with permission to eat and drink, while day is associated with fasting and abstention. The reader reconstructs this relation from the arrangement of the verse. The verse states the ruling clearly while preserving rhetorical economy and balance (Al-Asʿad & Ramadan, 2007; Abdulrahman, 2012).

5.2. Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:282: Action and Integrity

In the longest verse of the Qur'an, which sets out rules for recording debts, the wording uses *iḥtibāk* to express a legal and ethical instruction with marked concision.

Text

وَلَا يُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ

(...And let no scribe be harmed or any witness.) (The Qur'an, 2:282)

Analysis

The verb *yuḍārr* in Q 2:282 has been discussed by classical exegetes in relation to harm involving the scribe and the witness. The verse concerns two legal actors: the scribe, *kātib*, and the witness, *shahīd*. Both are needed to protect rights in debt transactions. The prohibition therefore works in two directions. The scribe and witness must not harm the process through distortion, concealment, refusal, or misuse of their role. At the same time, they must not be harmed, pressured, intimidated, or burdened because of their role (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Qurṭubī, 2006; Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

- **Reconstruction, *al-taqdīr***

The expanded meaning may be expressed as follows:
"Let no scribe cause harm, and let no scribe be harmed. Let no witness cause harm, and let no witness be harmed."

In practical terms, the scribe must not alter or distort the terms of the contract, and others must not pressure or harm him. Likewise, the witness must not conceal or distort testimony, and others must not intimidate or punish him for giving testimony.

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- **Rhetorical function**:

The *Iḥtibāk* in this verse condenses reciprocal duties and protections into a brief expression. The wording secures the integrity of the legal process by addressing both agency and vulnerability. The scribe and witness are warned against causing harm, while also being protected from harm. The reader reconstructs these paired meanings from the compact form of the verse. Legal clarity is therefore achieved through rhetorical economy (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Al-Khatib & Saʿadah, 2023; Alkhatieb, 2022).

5.3. Sūrat al-Furqān 25:27-28: Regret over Companionship and the Path

The Qur'an often presents scenes from the Day of Judgment to express moral accountability. In this passage, the wrongdoer's regret appears through two linked wishes: one concerns the path he failed to follow, and the other concerns the companion he chose.

Text

"وَيَوْمَ يَعَضُّ الظَّالِمُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا * يَا وَيْلَتَى لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا "

(And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands, he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken with the Messenger a way. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken so-and-so as a friend.") (Qur'an 25:27-28)

Analysis

The passage presents two related forms of regret. The first concerns a path not taken: following the Messenger. The second concerns a harmful choice made in life: taking "so-and-so" as a close friend, *khalīl*. Classical *tafsīr* connects this regret with the wrongdoer's failure to follow guidance and his attachment to a misleading companion (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). The full meaning arises from the relation between these two choices. The wrongdoer regrets failing to follow the Messenger and regrets following the influence of a misguided companion.

- **Reconstruction, *al-taqdīr***:

The expanded sense may be expressed as follows:
"Oh, I wish I had taken a path with the Messenger and had abandoned the path of so-and-so. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken so-and-so as a close friend and had instead followed the Messenger's way."

- **Rhetorical function**:

The *Iḥtibāk* in this passage expresses misguidance through two connected acts: leaving the path of truth and attaching oneself to false companionship. The two regrets complete each other. One names the lost path, and the other names the harmful association. This reciprocal structure gives the lament a balanced form and a clear moral force. The

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reader links the two statements and understands them as one expression of remorse over a wrong choice in guidance and companionship (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

6. The Translational Challenge: Rendering Implicit Eloquence in English

The analysis of *iḥtibāk* in Arabic shows a rhetorical device based on omission, correspondence, and reader inference. Its implicit structure creates a clear difficulty for translators. Rendering such verses into English requires more than lexical substitution. The translator must decide how much of the omitted meaning should remain implicit and how much should be made explicit for the target reader.

6.1. Theoretical Framework: Explicitation and the Retention of Implicitness

Modern translation theory provides a useful framework for examining this problem. The main tension lies between two approaches. The first seeks to retain the implicit structure of the source text as far as possible. The second uses explicitation, making implicit information in the source text explicit in the target text to support comprehension (De Metsenaere & Vandepitte, 2017).

In the case of *iḥtibāk*, a translator who retains implicitness may follow a more formal approach. This strategy renders only the elements present in the Arabic wording and leaves the elliptical structure in place. Its strength lies in preserving part of the source text's rhetorical form. It also allows the English reader to encounter some of the interpretive work required by the Arabic structure. Yet this approach carries risks. A reader without access to Arabic rhetorical conventions or *tafsīr* may find the translation unclear, awkward, or incomplete (Abdulrahman, 2012; El Rays, 2017).

Explicitation offers another strategy. Here, the translator unfolds the *iḥtibāk* by stating the reconstructed meaning, al-taqdīr, in the English text. The aim is to make the message clear for the target reader (Abdulrahman, 2012). This may serve a valid communicative purpose, especially when readers lack access to the exegetical tradition. Abdelaal (2019), drawing on Skopos theory, argues that faithfulness in Qur'an translation must take account of the needs of the intended readership. This point is directly relevant to *Iḥtibāk*, where strict formal retention may preserve structure but reduce clarity.

Explicitation, though useful, also has a cost. It may weaken concision, reduce rhetorical density, and lessen the reader's role in reconstructing meaning. The translation may move closer to explanation than to representation of the source form. The problem, therefore, is not whether explicitation is right or wrong in itself. The issue is how far it can clarify the meaning without erasing the rhetorical work performed by omission.

6.2. The Role of Paratext: Brackets and Footnotes as Hermeneutical Tools

Many Qur'an translators use paratextual devices to handle implicit structures. Parentheses, square brackets, and footnotes allow the translator to balance form and explanation. The translated line may remain close to the Arabic wording, while added notes or bracketed phrases supply the inferred meaning.

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These devices are not neutral. They guide the reader's understanding of the verse. Hilali and Khan's Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an uses frequent parenthetical additions within the translated verse itself (Hawamdeh, 2018). This method places tafsīr inside the translation and directs the reader toward a defined interpretation of the omitted meaning. Abdel Haleem follows a different method. His translation tends to keep the English line smoother and places much of the explanation in footnotes. This approach protects the flow of the translated verse while giving the reader interpretive support outside the main text.

Every Qur'an translation involves some degree of Tafsīr, especially when the source text contains implicit structures such as Iḥtibāk. In this case, the exegetical element is structural. The translator cannot render the verse without first deciding what the omitted elements are. That decision is already an act of interpretation. Iḥtibāk, therefore, makes the interpretive nature of translation especially clear.

The chosen strategy also reveals the translator's view of the target text. A translation that preserves ellipsis gives the reader more space to engage with the rhetorical structure. A translation that adds explanations inside the verse gives stronger guidance and reduces the risk of misunderstanding. Neither strategy is sufficient in every case. Each serves a different readership and a different purpose. The central question is not only which translation is more accurate. It is also what kind of reading experience each translation creates, and what kind of interpretive guidance it provides (Pink, 2015; Hawamdeh, 2018; Abdelaal, 2019).

6.3. Comparative Analysis of Selected Translations

The following tables compare how selected English translations render the Qur'anic verses analyzed in Section 5. The comparison focuses on the strategy used in each translation and on how far each version retains, clarifies, or reduces the rhetorical effect of iḥtibāk. The selected translations represent different approaches, ranging from close formal rendering to explanatory translation.

Table 1.

Comparative Analysis of Translations for Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:187

Qur'anic Fragment	Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)	Abdel Haleem (2004)	Yusuf Ali (1934)	Hilali & Khan (1997)	Pickthall (1930)	Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss
"...وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا..."	...And eat [during the night] and drink [during the night]...	...eat and drink... Then fast until nightfall.	...and eat and drink... then complete	...and eat and drink... then complete	...and eat and drink... Then strictly	**Strategy**: All translators employ formal equivalence, rendering only

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Qur'anic Fragment	**Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)**	**Abdel Haleem (2004)**	**Yusuf Ali (1934)**	**Hilali & Khan (1997)**	**Pickthall (1930)**	**Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss**
ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ"	Then complete the fast [by abstaining from them] until the night...		your fast Till the night appears...	your Saum (fast) till the nightfall.	observe the fast till nightfall...	the explicit words. **Rhetorical Loss**: The concise and balanced reciprocity of the Arabic is lost. The English reader is given a sequence of commands and does not actively participate in supplying the implied context (the time for eating and the actions of fasting). The connection is sequential, not reciprocal. The rhetorical elegance is sacrificed for direct lexical correspondence.

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Table 2.

Comparative Analysis of Translations for Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:282

Qur'anic Fragment	Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)	Abdel Haleem (2004)	Yusuf Ali (1934)	Hilali & Khan (1997)	Pickthall (1930)	Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss
وَلَا يُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ•••	Let no scribe [cause] harm, nor [be] harmed; and let no witness [cause] harm, nor [be] harmed.	Neither a scribe nor a witness should be harmed...	Let neither scribe nor witness suffer harm...	Let neither scribe nor witness suffer any harm...	...let no scribe or witness be oppressed...	**Strategy**: All translations resolve the ambiguity of *yuḍārr* by selecting only the passive meaning ("be harmed" / "suffer harm" / "be oppressed"). **Rhetorical Loss**: The comprehensive legal and ethical scope of the original, which simultaneously prohibits causing harm and being harmed, is reduced by half. The semantic density and legal perfection achieved through the *Iḥtibāk* are completely lost, and the English reader receives only a fraction of the intended injunction. None

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Qur'anic Fragment	Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)	Abdel Haleem (2004)	Yusuf Ali (1934)	Hilali & Khan (1997)	Pickthall (1930)	Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss
						of the translations attempt to convey the dual meaning.

Table 3.

Comparative Analysis of Translations for Sūrat al-Furqān 25:27-28

Qur'anic Verses	Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)	Abdel Haleem (2004)	Yusuf Ali (1934)	Hilali & Khan (1997)	Asad (1980)	Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss
يَا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا (27) يَا وَيْلَتَىٰ لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا (28)	"Oh, I wish I had taken a way with the Messenger [and abandoned the other way]. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken so-and-so as a friend [and had taken the Messenger instead]."	'If only I had taken the same path as the Messenger! Woe is me! If only I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!	"Oh! Would that I had taken a path with the Messenger! Ah! Woe is me! Would that I had never taken such a one for a friend!	"Oh! Would that I had taken a path with the Messenger. Ah! Woe to me! Would that I had never taken so-and-so as a friend!	"Oh, would that I had taken a path with the Apostle! Oh, woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!	**Strategy**: All translations opt for formal equivalence. They render the two expressions of regret sequentially. **Rhetorical Loss**: While the core meaning of regret is conveyed, the rhetorical structure that links the two verses into a single,

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Qur'anic Verses	Reconstructed Meaning (*al-taqdīr*)	Abdel Haleem (2004)	Yusuf Ali (1934)	Hilali & Khan (1997)	Asad (1980)	Analysis of Strategy & Rhetorical Loss
						reciprocal lament is lost. The English reader perceives two separate wishes, whereas the Arabic structure presents them as two inseparable facets of one disastrous decision. The cognitive process of connecting the abandonment of good with the embrace of evil, which the *Iḥtibāk* compels, is absent.

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7. Conclusion

Iḥtibāk shows the layered character of Qur'anic discourse. Through reciprocal omission, meaning moves across paired expressions and depends on the reader's ability to infer what has been left unstated. The device is not a decorative feature. It contributes to concision, semantic density, and rhetorical balance. In Qur'anic expression, the omitted element may carry as much interpretive weight as the stated one. This feature creates a clear problem for translation. English often requires fuller syntax and more explicit links between ideas, while *Iḥtibāk* gains much of its force from omission and inference. The comparative analysis shows a recurring pattern in the selected translations. Some versions preserve the explicit wording but leave the reciprocal structure unclear. Others clarify the meaning through expansion or notes, but reduce the compactness of the Arabic construction.

The examples examined in this study show the range of this problem. In Q 2:187, the relation between action and time depends on inference. In Q 2:282, the wording condenses reciprocal duties and protections involving the scribe and witness. In Q 25:27-28, the two statements of regret complete each other through contrast between the path abandoned and the companion chosen. In each case, translation requires a decision about how much of the implied meaning should appear in the target text.

The study has clear limitations. It examines three Qur'anic examples and five English translations. The findings are illustrative rather than generalizable to all cases of *iḥtibāk* or to all English translations of the Qur'an. The study does not use corpus analysis, frequency data, or reader-response evidence. Future research may address these limits by surveying a broader set of examples, comparing more translations, and examining how different readers respond to varying degrees of explicitation.

Based on the analysis, the study proposes a preliminary framework for evaluating the translation of Iḥtibāk. The framework has three dimensions. The first is structural preservation, meaning the extent to which the elliptical form is retained in English. The second is semantic completeness, meaning whether the reconstructed meaning, *al-taqdīr*, is accessible through the main text or through paratextual aids. The third is rhetorical interactivity, meaning whether the translation preserves any part of the reader's role in reconstructing the omitted meaning.

No translation strategy resolves all three demands in the same way. Formal rendering may preserve structure but leave the meaning unclear. Explicitation may improve access but weaken concision and reader inference. Footnotes and brackets may offer a middle path, though they also shape the reader's interpretation. The framework is therefore diagnostic rather than prescriptive. It helps identify what each strategy preserves and what it loses.

The main contribution of this study lies in showing how Iḥtibāk makes the interpretive nature of Qur'an translation visible. Before rendering the verse, the translator must first identify the omitted elements and decide how they function in context. This step is already exegetical. A rhetorically aware translation of Iḥtibāk should therefore account

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for form, meaning, and reader inference together. Future work may build on this approach through a larger corpus-based study, closer engagement with functionalist translation models such as Skopos theory (Abdelaal, 2019), and empirical research on reader reception.

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