Recovering the Unsaid: Analyzing Translation Strategies for Elliptical Structures in the Holy Qur'ān

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This study explores the translation strategies employed by female translators to render ellipses in the Holy Qur'ān into English. Ellipsis, the omission of one or more words that are understood from context, poses unique challenges in translation, especially between languages with different syntactic and rhetorical conventions like Arabic and English. By analyzing various translations of specific Qur'ānic verses, the study identifies the strategies used by selected translators i.e. Amatul Rahmân, Samira Ahmad, Umm Muhammad, Aisha Bewley, Tahereh Saffarzadeh and Laleh Bakhtiar. The analysis reveals variations in translation strategies, including direct addition, the use of parentheses, and omission. The findings highlight the importance of context in understanding and translating ellipses, as well as the translators' choices to either preserve the original conciseness or provide clarity for the target audience.

Keywords: Holy Qur'ān, ellipsis, translation strategies, Women Translators, English translations.

Translation of Ellipsis:

In linguistics, ellipsis refers to omitting one or more words from a clause but still, those words are understood from the rest of the words and context of that clause. According to Biber, "ellipsis is the omission of elements which are precisely recoverable from the linguistic or situational context."[1] According to David Crystal ellipses are "used in grammatical analysis to refer to a sentence where, for reasons of economy,

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[1] Douglas Biber et al. *Longman Grammar of Spoken and* Written *English* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 199), 156.

emphasis or style, a part of the structure has been omitted, which is recoverable from a scrutiny of the context."[2]

In Arabic, ellipsis (*Hazf*) literally means cutting off, dropping, or rejecting. It is used for conciseness and briefness.[3] Dr. Tmām Hassān explains that ellipsis does not occur but only by evidence of a well-established syntactic structure or style, obvious reference, or a contextual meaning that does not fit but only by recovering the ellipsis.[4] In the Arabic linguistic tradition, both grammarians and rhetoricians have extensively discussed the ellipses of the Holy Qur'ān. Dr. Peter Mickan writes that "the grammarians focused primarily on its occurrence, reasons, and effect on sentence structure and meaning. The latter, on the other hand, paid more attention to pragmatic & semantic issues than to other aspects; and their approach partially overlapped with that of the Quran commentators for a proper understanding of the text."[5]

Data Analysis:

The following analysis examines the translation strategies employed by female translators to render ellipses in the Holy Qur'ān. For this purpose, initially, a verse of the Holy Qur'ān is given, followed by the same verse with the elided words included in brackets. Subsequently, women's translations of this verse are presented with analysis. The elided words have been sourced from some reliable commentaries of the Holy Qur'ān and books on Arabic Rhetoric.

Example [1]:

وَسْـئَلِ الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِيْ كُنَّا فِيْهَا وَالْعِيْرَ الَّتِيْ اَقْبَلْنَا فِيْهَا ۖ وَاِنَّا لَصٰدِقُوْنَ [6]

وَسْـئَلِ ﴿اَهْلَ﴾الْقَرْيَةَ الَّتِيْ كُنَّا فِيْهَا وَ ﴿اَصْحَابَ﴾الْعِيْرَ الَّتِيْ اَقْبَلْنَا فِيْهَا ۖ وَاِنَّا لَصٰدِقُوْنَ

AR: "And you may inquire of (the inhabitants of) the city we were in, and of (the people of) the caravan carrying the corn we accompanied. We speak nothing but the truth."(258)

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[2]   David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (Blackwell publishing ltd., 2008), 166.

[3]   Ibn Manẓūr, Jamāl 'l-Dān Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Mukarram, *Lisān 'l-Arab*, ed. A.M. 'Abdul Wahāb & M.S. al-'Ubaidy (Beirut: Dar 'l-Ihia al-Turāth 'l-Arabi, 199), 3: 93-94.

       Lane, *An Arabic-English*, 535.

[4]   Tmām Hassān, *Al-Bayān fi Rawai' 'l-Qur'an* (Cairo: 'ālim 'l-Kutub, 2000), 91.

[5]   Peter Mickan and Zaid Alamiri, "Ellipsis in the Quranic Story of Joseph: a Textual view," The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics 6, (2013): 61-75.

[6]   Al-Qur'ān, Yūsuf, 12:82.

SA: "And ask/question the village/urban city which we were in it, and the caravan which we came in it, and we are, truthful (E)." (182)

UM: "And ask the city in which we were and the caravan in which we came – and indeed, we are truthful." (332)

AB: "Ask questions of the town in which we were and of the caravan in which we came for we are surely telling you the truth." (226)

TS: "And [tell him] ask the people of the town where we have been and the caravan in which we returned, [after inquiry he will find] that indeed we are telling the truth." (505)

LB: "And ask the *people of* the town where we had been and the *people of* the caravan in which we came forward. And, truly, we *are* ones who are sincere." (226)

In the translation of the Holy Qur'ān, "due to the way English uses ellipsis, it is sometimes necessary to add the elided words (which usually appear in brackets) to complete a sentence in the translation."[7]

This verse contains an ellipsis of adjunct *aṣhāb* i.e. companions that could be understood from the situational context of the verse because *alqariah* refers to Egypt and al'īr refers to caravan. So, it seems illogical to question a village or the camels. The deletion of the word 'people' will not affect or change the meaning of the verse. Nevertheless, it is easier to recover the deleted word in English to understand the verse's deep meaning. Literal translation or word-for-word translation is not suitable here.

Amatul Raḥmân translates the first elliptic unit as "inhabitants of," and the second as "people of," but she refers to both elliptic adjuncts in brackets. Umm Muhammad, Samira, and Bewley do not refer to the elliptic adjuncts. Bakhtiar includes the words "people of" directly in translation; she uses the addition strategy to represent both elliptic adjuncts. Saffarzadeh also renders the first adjunct by the use of the addition strategy, but she translates the second elliptic adjunct as a "caravan."

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7   Abobaker Ali, M Alsaleh Brakhw, Munif Zarirruddin Fikri Bin Nordin, and Sharifah Fazliyaton Shaik Ismail, "Some Linguistic Difficulties in Translating the Holy Quran from Arabic into English," International Journal of Social Science and Humanity 2, no. 6 (November 2012): 589.

Example [2]:

<div dir="rtl">

وَأُشْرِبُوا فِيْ قُلُوْبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ[8]

وَأُشْرِبُوا فِيْ قُلُوْبِهِمُ {حُبَّ} الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ

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AR: "Their hearts were, in fact, permeated with (the love of) the calf (worship) due to their disbelief." (15)

SA: "And they were made to drink/mix/saturate in their hearts/minds the calf with their disbelief." (8)

UM: "And their hearts absorbed [the worship of] the calf because of their disbelief." (18)

AB: "They were made to drink the Calf into their hearts because of their kufr." (12)

TS: "And their hearts absorbed the love of worshipping the calf because of their disbelief." (31)

LB: "and they were steeped with *love for* the calf in their hearts because of their ingratitude." (13)

Amatul Raḥmân and Umm Muhammad use the expressions "the love of" and "the worship of" respectively in brackets to refer to the elided possessed. Samira and Bewley render the verse literally. They do not represent the elided possessed therefore, the intended meaning of the verse is not clear. A reader will face difficulty to understand how calf can drink in hearts. Bakhtiar and Saffarzadeh again adopt the addition strategy to present the elided unit.

Amatul Raḥmân, Umm Muhammad, Bakhtiar, and Saffarzadeh are aware of the elided unit. Amatul Raḥmân, Bakhtiar, and Saffarzadeh render elided unit explicitly, however, Umm Muhammad expresses the elided unit implicitly "because the kind of love that is meant in the verse is 'worshipping the calf'."[9]

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8   Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah, 2:93.

9   Hassan, "Nominal Ellipsis," 651.

Example [3]:

<div dir="rtl">

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ اِدْفَعْ بِالَّتِيْ هِيَ اَحْسَنُ¹⁰

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ اِدْفَعْ{بِالْخَصْلَةِ الَّتِيْ }هِيَ اَحْسَنُ

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> AR: "And good and evil are not alike. Repel <u>(evil)</u> with that (benign and graceful way) which is best," (542)

> SA: "And the good/goodness does not become equal/alike and nor the sin/crime, pay/push/repel with which it is best," (350)

> UM: "And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel <u>[evil]</u> by that [deed] which is better;" (690)

> AB: "A good action and a bad action are not the same. Repel the <u>bad</u> with something better and," (466)

> TS: The good and the evil are not equal, so repel the <u>wrongdoing</u> of men with good treatment instead, (1055)

> LB: "Not on the same level *are* benevolence or the evil deed. Drive back with what is fairer." (461)

Amatul Ra<u>h</u>mân, Umm Muhammad, Bewley, and Saffarzadeh are aware of the elliptic unit but they choose different strategies to render it. Amatul Ra<u>h</u>mân and Umm Muhammad render the elliptic unit as "evil" in brackets. Bewley renders the elliptic unit as "bad" and Saffarzadeh renders it as "wrongdoing." Both translators use a strategy of addition. Samira and Bakhtiar ignore the elliptic unit and do not include it in their translation.

Example [4]:

<div dir="rtl">

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ سَيَنَالُهُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَذِلَّةٌ فِي الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَا ¹¹

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ{اِلٰهًا} سَيَنَالُهُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَذِلَّةٌ فِي الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَا

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> AR: "(The Lord said in answer to Moses' supplications,) 'The displeasure of their Lord and disgrace in the present life shall surely overtake those who took the calf <u>(for worship).</u>'" (175)

> SA: "That those who took/received the calf, anger from their Lord will take/receive/obtain them, and humiliation/disgrace in the life the present/worldly life," (107)

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¹⁰ Al-Qur'ān, Fuṣṣilāt 41:34.

¹¹ Al-Qur'ān, Al-A'rāf 7:152.

UM: "Indeed, those who took the calf [for worship] will obtain anger from their Lord and humiliation in the life of this world," (225)

AB: "As for those who adopted the Calf, anger from their Lord will overtake them together with abasement in the life of the dunya." (153)

TS: "[Allāh stated to Mūssā:] "Those who chose the calf [for worship], very soon wrath from their Creator&Nurturer through humiliation will come upon them in the life of this world;" (348)

LB: "Those who took the calf to themselves attain anger from their Lord and abasement in this present life." (155)

In this verse the elliptic object is recovered from the overall contextual framework of the Qur'anic discourse as the same situation has been described in the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān. [12] فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُم عِجْلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُوَارٌ فَقَالُوا هٰذا إِلٰهُكُم وَإِلٰهُ موسىٰ فَنَسِيَ

Amatul Raḥmân, Umm Muhammad, and Saffarzadeh know the elliptic object in this verse. They translate the elided unit the same as "for worship" between parentheses. However, "they do not represent it in a form of an object complement (which is the expected way of rendering this Arabic type of objects), i.e., 'God'; they put it in a form of a prepositional phrase, i.e., 'for worship', to express the act of worshiping."[13] Samira, Bewley, and Bakhtiar neglect the elliptic unit. However, Bewley appeals to a paralinguistic process to fill the gap; she begins the word 'calf' with a capital letter. In this way, she may rely on the reader's background knowledge offered by other religious texts, namely the Biblical.[14]

Example [5]:

وَاخْتَارَ مُوْسٰي قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِيْنَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيْقَاتِنَا [15]

وَاخْتَارَ مُوْسٰي{من } قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِيْنَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيْقَاتِنَا

AR: "Now Moses selected from his people seventy men (to take with him) to Our appointed place and time," (176)

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[12] Al-Qur'ān, Ṭā Ḥā 2:88.

[13] Sadiq Mahdi Kadhim, "Manipulating ellipses in some Translations of the Glorious Qur'an," Al-Ameed Journal 1, no. 5 (2012): 57.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Al-Qur'ān, Al-A'rāf 7:155.

SA:　　"And Moses chose (<u>from</u>) his nation seventy men, to Our appointed time/appointed time or place," (107)

UM:　　"And Moses chose <u>from</u> his people seventy men for our appointment." (226)

AB:　　"Musa chose seventy men <u>from</u> his people for Our appointed time." (153)

TS:　　"And Mūsā chose <u>out of</u> his people seventy men for Our place of meeting" (348)

LB:　　"And Moses chose <u>of</u> his folk seventy men for Our time appointed." (145)

All women translators refer to the elided unit in the verse.

Example [6]:

اِنَّآ اَنْزَلْنٰهُ فِيْ لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ ¹⁶

اِنَّآ {اَنْزَلْنَاالْقُرْ ان} فِيْ لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

AR:　　"We began to reveal it (<u>- the Qur'ân</u>) during the Night of Majesty (- a Night usually in the last ten days of the month of *Ramadzân*)." (712)

SA:　　"We (E) descended it in the predestined/destiny night." (474)

UM:　　"Indeed, We sent it [<u>i.e., the Qurān</u>] down during the Night of Decree." (912)

AB:　　"Truly We sent it down on the Night of Power." (626)

TS:　　"Verily, We sent down <u>the Holy Qur'ān</u> in the Night of Qadr." (1404)

LB:　　"Truly, We caused it to descend on the night of power." (594)

Translators adopt different styles to render this verse. Amatul Ra<u>h</u>mân and Umm Muhammad recover the omitted unit; they add 'the Qur'ân' and 'the Qur'ān' respectively between parentheses. Samira, Bewley, and Bakhtiar do not prefer to indicate elided units. Saffarzadeh adopts the strategy of addition; she adds "the Holy Qur'ān" in the TT.

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¹⁶　Al-Qur'ān, Al-Qadr 97:1.

Example [7]:

<div dir="rtl">

فَقَالَ اِنِّىْ اَحْبَبْتُ حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّيْ ۚ حَتَّى تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ ¹⁷

فَقَالَ اِنِّىْ اَحْبَبْتُ حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّيْ ۚ حَتَّى تَوَارَتِ {الشَّمْسُ }بِالْحِجَابِ

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AR: "He said, 'I prefer the love of good things because they make (me) remember (God), my Lord.' And (he remained busy in his devotion and prayer), when these (horses) disappeared (while passing by) behind the veil (of distance)," (513)

SA: He said: "That I, I loved/liked love (of) the good/honour/wealth on (over) mentioning/remembering my Lord, until it became hidden/concealed (disappeared) at the divider/protection." (474)

UM: 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]." (654)

AB: "he said, 'I have put the love of good things above the remembrance of my Lord until the sun disappeared behind its veil." (441)

TS: He said: "I preferred the worldly things to the remembrance of my creator&Nurturer until the sun is covered with the veil of the night [so I failed to perform my prayer on time.] (999)

LB: "he said: Truly, I cherished and loved the good instead of remembering my Lord when *the sun* secluded itself behind the partition *of the night*." (436)

Amatul Ra<u>h</u>mân selects the word "horses" rather than 'sun' to indicate the elliptic word. Umm Muhammad indicates the elliptic word by the use of parenthesis. Samira does not mention the elliptic word. Bewley and Saffarzadeh add the expression "the sun" in translation to refer to the elliptic word. Bakhtiar adds "sun" in italics. So, all translators except Samira indicate the elliptic word.

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¹⁷ Al-Qur'ān, Ṣād 38:32.

Example [8]:

<div dir="rtl">

اَلْحَقُّ مِنْ رَّبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُوْنَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِيْنَ ¹⁸

{هَذَا الْحَقُّ} مِنْ رَّبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُوْنَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِيْنَ

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AR: "It is the truth from your Lord, so (O reader!) do not be of those who doubt and so waver." (23)

SA: "The truth (is) from your Lord, so do not be (E) from the doubting/arguing." (12)

UM: "The truth is from your Lord, so never be among the doubters." (29)

AB: "The truth is from your Lord, so on no account be among the doubters." (20)

TS: "[This is] the Truth [that you receive] from your Creator&Nurturer, so do not be one of those who doubt [about the Truth]" (49)

LB: "*it is* the Truth from **your** Lord. So be **you** not among the ones who contest." (20)

The translation samples reveal three strategies. Amatul Raḥmân recovers the elliptic unit; she adds "it is" directly in the target text. Umm Muhammad, Samira, and Bewley represent the elliptic unit by some irregular (non-clausal) structures, i.e., phrases. Saffarzadeh looks as if to be aware of the elliptic unit and preserves it between brackets. She includes the omitted unit in a form of elliptic subject and verb form, i.e., 'This is'.[19]

This analysis of translation strategies used by female translators of the Holy Qur'ān reveals several distinct approaches to rendering ellipsis. These strategies can be categorized as follows:

1. **Ignoring the Elliptic Unit**: In some instances, the translators chose to omit the elliptic unit in the target text (TT) without any reference, leaving the ellipsis as it is. This approach maintains the conciseness of the original text but may lead to ambiguity or lack of clarity in the translation. For example, Samira and Bewley often follow this strategy.

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[18] Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah 2:147.

[19] Kadhim, "Manipulating ellipses," 47.

2. **Direct Addition of the Elliptic Unit**: Another strategy involves directly adding the elided words into the TT, providing a more explicit translation. This method aims to enhance understanding and clarity but may compromise the brevity of the original text. Bakhtiar and Saffarzadeh frequently use this strategy.

3. **Indicating the Elliptic Unit with Brackets or Footnotes**: Some translators indicate the elliptic unit by placing it in brackets or using footnotes. This approach helps to clarify the meaning while distinguishing the added words from the original text, thus preserving the integrity of the original structure. Amatul Rahmân and Umm Muhammad often utilize this strategy.

Findings:

1. **Variability in Strategies**: Female translators employed diverse strategies to handle ellipses in the Qur'an, ranging from direct addition of elided elements to using parentheses and sometimes omitting them altogether.

2. **Contextual Clarity**: Translators often added elided words to enhance clarity for English readers, reflecting the importance of context in recovering the omitted information.

3. **Translation Consistency**: The strategies varied not only between translators but also within the works of individual translators depending on the type of ellipsis encountered.

4. **Literal vs. Interpretative Translation**: Literal translations sometimes failed to convey the intended meaning, whereas interpretative translations, which included elided words, provided a clearer understanding.

5. **Impact on Meaning**: The addition of elided words often helped in conveying the deeper meaning of the verses, although it introduced elements not present in the original text.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that translating ellipses in the Qur'an is a complex task that requires a balance between maintaining the original text's conciseness and providing clarity for the target audience. Female translators demonstrated varied approaches to this challenge, influenced by their understanding of the context and the needs of the readers. The findings underscore the necessity of contextually aware translation strategies to ensure the intended meaning of the Qur'anic text is preserved and comprehensible in English.

Recommendations:

1. **Use of Brackets for Clarity**: Translators should consider using brackets to insert elided words, providing readers with a clearer understanding of the text.

2. **Balancing Literal and Contextual Translation**: A balance should be struck between literal translation and the addition of contextually necessary words to maintain both fidelity and readability.

3. **Consulting Commentaries**: Utilizing reliable commentaries and linguistic resources can aid in accurately recovering and representing elided elements, ensuring a faithful translation.

4. **Inclusion of Annotations**: Where necessary, including annotations or footnotes to explain the elided elements can provide additional clarity without altering the original text.

5. **Training and Awareness**: Translators should be trained to recognize and effectively handle ellipsis, understanding when and how to recover elided units to preserve the original meaning.

6. **Collaborative Translation Efforts**: Collaboration among translators can facilitate the exchange of strategies and best practices, leading to more refined and accurate translations.

7. **Further Research**: Conducting further research on the impact of different translation strategies on the readers' understanding can inform better practices in translating religious texts.

By adopting these recommendations, translators can enhance the accuracy and readability of their translations, ensuring that the profound meanings of the Holy Qur'ān are effectively conveyed to a diverse audience.