



Relevance Theory and *Muqtadha al-Hal*: Toward a Pragmatic *Balaghah* Framework for Arabic Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study discusses the relationship between Relevance Theory in modern pragmatics and *muqtadha al-hal* in Arabic *Balaghah* as a basis for developing a pragmatic framework for Arabic discourse analysis. The discussion is motivated by the need to reinterpret *Balaghah* not only as a theory of linguistic beauty, but also as a contextual and communicative theory of meaning. This study aims to identify the conceptual convergences and differences between Relevance Theory and *muqtadha al-hal* and to formulate an integrative model called pragmatic *Balaghah*. Using a comparative literature review, the study analyzes scholarly works on pragmatics, cognitive inference, Arabic rhetoric, *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, Qur'anic discourse, literary criticism, and text interpretation. The findings show that both frameworks emphasize context, speaker intention, audience reception, and communicative effectiveness. However, Relevance Theory is more receiver-oriented, focusing on inference, cognitive effect, and processing effort, whereas *muqtadha al-hal* is more speaker-oriented, focusing on rhetorical appropriateness and situational fit. The study concludes that pragmatic *Balaghah* offers a non-reductive framework for Arabic language studies, Arabic literature, Qur'anic discourse analysis, translation studies, and Islamic communication.

Keywords: Arabic *Balaghah*; Arabic Discourse Analysis; *Muqtadha al-Hal*; Pragmatic *Balaghah*; Relevance Theory

Abstrak

Kajian ini membahas hubungan antara Teori Relevansi dalam pragmatik modern dan *muqtadha al-hal* dalam *Balaghah* Arab sebagai dasar pengembangan kerangka pragmatik untuk analisis wacana Arab. Pembahasan ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kebutuhan untuk menafsirkan kembali *Balaghah* tidak hanya sebagai teori keindahan bahasa, tetapi juga sebagai teori makna yang kontekstual dan komunikatif. Kajian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi titik temu dan perbedaan konseptual antara Teori Relevansi dan *muqtadha al-hal* serta merumuskan model integratif yang disebut *Balaghah* pragmatik. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan pustaka komparatif, kajian ini menganalisis karya-karya ilmiah tentang pragmatik, inferensi kognitif, retorika Arab, *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, wacana Al-Qur'an, kritik sastra, dan interpretasi teks. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kedua kerangka sama-sama menekankan konteks, maksud penutur, penerimaan audiens, dan efektivitas komunikasi. Namun, Teori Relevansi lebih berorientasi pada penerima, sedangkan *muqtadha al-hal* lebih berorientasi pada penutur. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahwa *Balaghah* pragmatik menawarkan kerangka non-reduktif bagi studi bahasa Arab, sastra Arab, analisis wacana Al-Qur'an, studi penerjemahan, dan komunikasi Islam.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Wacana Arab; *Balaghah* Arab; *Balaghah* Pragmatik; *Muqtadha al-Hal*; Teori Relevansi



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INTRODUCTION

Introduction Arabic rhetorical studies have long placed communicative context at the center of meaning. In the classical tradition of Balaghah, an utterance is not judged only by its grammatical correctness or aesthetic beauty, but also by its suitability to the situation in which it is expressed. This principle is particularly visible in *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, which examines how language is organized according to contextual demands. The concept of *muqtadha al-hal*, or the demand of the situation, shows that effective expression depends on the relation between the speaker's intention, the addressee's condition, the communicative purpose, and the broader discourse context. This orientation indicates that Balaghah is not merely a theory of eloquence or ornamentation, but also a theory of contextualized meaning and communicative effectiveness (Huda & Buana, 2022; Syarif et al., 2023; Hasanah, 2021; Imam & Soleh, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Yasin, 2020).

In modern pragmatics, similar questions are addressed through Relevance Theory. This theory explains communication as an inferential process in which hearers or readers interpret linguistic expressions by connecting them with contextual assumptions, background knowledge, and expectations of relevance. Meaning is therefore not produced by linguistic form alone, but by the interaction between utterance, context, intention, and cognition. Relevance Theory argues that interpretation is guided by the search for optimal relevance, namely the achievement of adequate cognitive effects with reasonable processing effort. Recent studies in pragmatics continue to emphasize that context, inference, cognitive effect, and processing effort are central to the interpretation of spoken and written discourse (Dalle et al., 2024; Hasanah, 2021; Aflisia et al., 2022). This makes Relevance Theory relevant for Arabic texts that contain figurative language, rhetorical density, and layered contextual meanings.

The research problem addressed in this article is the lack of a systematic conceptual framework that connects Relevance Theory with *muqtadha al-hal*. Although both frameworks emphasize context, intention, audience reception, and communicative success, they have usually been studied in separate intellectual traditions. Relevance Theory is generally discussed within Western cognitive pragmatics, while *muqtadha al-hal* is commonly examined within Arabic Balaghah and *Ilm al-Ma'ani*.

Previous studies have connected Balaghah with pragmatics through discussions of *dilalah*, *majaz*, metaphor, Qur'anic interpretation, Arabic stylistics, and pedagogy (Aflisia et al., 2022; Nashoiha, 2023; Rojak & Addriadi, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024; Dozan, 2021). However, these studies have not yet provided a detailed mapping between the key concepts of Relevance Theory—context, inference, cognitive effect, processing effort, and

communicative intention—and the major categories of Balaghah, such as muqtadha al-hal, maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, and gharad al-kalam.

This gap is important because Arabic rhetorical concepts cannot simply be equated with modern pragmatic theories. Some studies suggest that muqtadha al-hal may be understood as a contextual constraint similar to context-sensitive interpretation in pragmatics. Other studies emphasize that Arabic rhetorical concepts are historically, culturally, and textually specific, especially in Qur’anic discourse, poetry, and classical prose (Syarif et al., 2023; Rizqi, 2023; Uswatusolihah, 2018; Miftahuddin, 2020). Therefore, the challenge is not merely to apply Relevance Theory to Balaghah, but to compare the two frameworks carefully without reducing one to the other.

This study responds to that challenge by using a comparative literature review to identify their points of convergence, differences, and possible integration. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to formulate pragmatic Balaghah as a non-reductive framework for Arabic discourse analysis. Rather than treating muqtadha al-hal as identical to Relevance Theory, this article positions the two as dialogically related concepts.

Relevance Theory contributes an explanation of how readers or hearers infer meaning through contextual assumptions, cognitive effects, and processing effort. Muqtadha al-hal contributes a rhetorical account of how expression is adapted to the situation, addressee, purpose, and genre conventions of Arabic discourse. By placing these concepts in dialogue, this article offers a new way of reading Arabic texts through rhetorical appropriateness, communicative context, inferential meaning, and cognitive effect.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to Arabic language studies, Arabic literature, Qur’anic discourse analysis, translation studies, and Islamic communication. In Arabic language and literature, this framework helps explain that rhetorical devices are not merely decorative forms, but communicative strategies that guide interpretation. In Qur’anic discourse analysis, it provides a conceptual tool for understanding how contextual cues and rhetorical forms shape implied meaning. In translation studies, it helps clarify how rhetorical appropriateness and intended cognitive effects may be transferred into another language. In Islamic communication, it supports the analysis of how messages are shaped according to audience condition, purpose, and context.

Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to examine the conceptual relationship between Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal in Arabic Balaghah. Specifically, this article aims to explain the main concepts of Relevance Theory, describe the role of muqtadha al-hal in *Ilm al-Ma’ani*, identify the convergences and differences between the two frameworks, and propose pragmatic Balaghah as an integrative model for Arabic discourse analysis. The study argues that both frameworks share a concern with context, intention, audience, and communicative effectiveness, but differ in orientation: Relevance Theory emphasizes receiver-oriented cognitive inference, while muqtadha al-hal emphasizes speaker-oriented rhetorical appropriateness and situational fit.

METHODS

Method This study employed a comparative literature review design to examine the conceptual relationship between Relevance Theory in modern pragmatics and the concept of muqtadha al-hal in Arabic Balaghah. This design was selected because the focus of the study is theoretical and conceptual rather than empirical-field based. The study did not collect primary data from speakers, students, or respondents, but analyzed scholarly literature that discusses Relevance Theory, pragmatics, cognitive pragmatics, Arabic rhetoric, *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, muqtadha al-hal, and Arabic discourse interpretation. The comparative literature review was used to identify conceptual convergences, conceptual differences, and possible integration between a modern pragmatic theory and a classical Arabic rhetorical concept.

The object of this study consisted of academic literature related to Relevance Theory, inferential communication, cognitive pragmatics, Arabic Balaghah, *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, muqtadha al-hal, maqam, Arabic discourse context, and the relationship between Balaghah and pragmatics. Muqtadha al-hal was treated not merely as an isolated rhetorical term, but as a conceptual category related to situational demand, appropriateness of expression, speaker intention, addressee condition, and communicative purpose. Relevance Theory was treated as a cognitive-inferential model that explains how context, inference, cognitive effects, and processing effort guide interpretation. This conceptual positioning allowed the two frameworks to be compared at the level of communicative function rather than terminology alone.

The data sources consisted of books, journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, and other scholarly works relevant to the conceptual scope of the study. The literature was grouped into several categories: foundational works on Relevance Theory, studies on modern pragmatics, classical and contemporary works on Arabic Balaghah, studies on *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, writings on muqtadha al-hal, studies on the relationship between Balaghah and pragmatics, and research on Arabic and Qur'anic discourse analysis. This classification was used to ensure that the analysis represented both modern linguistic theory and Arabic rhetorical tradition.

The literature collection process was conducted through academic searches using relevant English, Indonesian, and Arabic keywords. The search terms included "Relevance Theory," "cognitive pragmatics," "inferential communication," "Arabic rhetoric," "Balaghah," "*Ilm al-Ma'ani*," "muqtadha al-hal," "مقتضى الحال," "علم المعاني," "البلاغة العربية," "Arabic pragmatics," and "communicative context." These keywords were selected because they correspond directly to the central concepts investigated in this article. The selection of literature prioritized works that discuss context, meaning, communication, rhetoric, inference, interpretation, and discourse.

The inclusion criteria required that the selected literature discuss at least one of the main conceptual domains: Relevance Theory, pragmatics, Arabic Balaghah, *Ilm al-Ma'ani*, or muqtadha al-hal. The literature also had to contribute to the discussion of language, context, meaning, communication, rhetoric, or interpretation. Works were excluded when they discussed Balaghah only in a general manner without addressing context, muqtadha al-hal,

or communicative appropriateness. General studies of pragmatics were also excluded when they did not engage with Relevance Theory, inference, context, or communication. Popular and non-academic sources were not used.

The analysis was carried out through five stages: conceptual identification, thematic classification, comparative analysis, conceptual synthesis, and critical interpretation. In the first stage, the key concepts in both theoretical traditions were identified. For Relevance Theory, the main concepts were context, inference, cognitive effect, processing effort, communicative intention, and ostensive-inferential communication. For Balaghah, the main concepts were muqtadha al-hal, maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, gharad al-kalam, rhetorical appropriateness, and communicative effectiveness. In the second stage, the literature was classified into thematic clusters. In the third stage, the two traditions were compared according to their scholarly origin, conceptual focus, understanding of meaning, role of context, role of speaker, role of addressee, communicative orientation, and scope of application.

The fourth stage synthesized the comparison into an integrative framework. This synthesis did not assume that Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal are identical. Instead, it treated them as dialogically related frameworks: Relevance Theory explains how recipients infer meaning under expectations of relevance, while muqtadha al-hal explains how speakers or texts adapt expression to the demands of communicative context. In the fifth stage, the contribution and limitation of each framework were interpreted to formulate pragmatic Balaghah as a conceptual model for Arabic discourse analysis. This model was developed to connect rhetorical appropriateness, communicative context, inferential meaning, and cognitive effect while preserving the historical and genre-specific character of Arabic rhetorical tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1.1. Theoretical Position of the Study

The review positions the study at the intersection of modern pragmatics, Arabic Balaghah, and Arabic text analysis. The conceptual findings indicate that Relevance Theory and Arabic Balaghah both treat meaning as a product of linguistic form, context, intention, and audience reception, although they articulate these dimensions through different intellectual traditions. In Relevance Theory, meaning is constructed through ostensive-inferential communication, in which hearers or readers interpret utterances by balancing expected cognitive effects and processing effort within a contextually guided interpretive environment (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021). By contrast, Arabic Balaghah conceptualizes meaning through the relationship between Ma'ani, Bayan, and Badi', while foregrounding muqtadha al-hal, maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, and gharad al-kalam as constraints that shape rhetorical appropriateness and communicative impact (Huda & Buana, 2022; Rojak & Addriadi, 2022; Aflisia et al., 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024; Atabik, 2021).

The reviewed literature shows that Arabic text analysis benefits from combining pragmatic inference, rhetorical devices, and semantic interpretation. This integration allows scholars to account for implicit meaning, discourse goals, and audience effects in Qur'anic discourse, Hadith, poetry, and modern prose (Dalle et al., 2024; Rosalinda et al., 2022; Musyafa'ah, 2021; Darwish et al., 2021). The theoretical position of this study is therefore not limited to a comparison between Western pragmatics and Arabic rhetoric, but extends to a broader attempt to conceptualize Arabic Balaghah as a communicative theory. This position is supported by studies that reinterpret Balaghah as a pragmatic and semantic discipline rather than merely a system of ornamentation or stylistic embellishment (Qutbuddin, 2024; Atabik, 2021; Aflisia et al., 2022).

1.2. Relevance Theory in Modern Pragmatics

The review confirms that Relevance Theory remains a central framework in modern pragmatics for explaining how humans interpret meaning beyond the literal form of language. Its foundational claim is that communication is guided by the expectation of optimal relevance: an utterance is processed in order to produce sufficient cognitive effects with the least justifiable processing effort (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021). Context is not treated as a passive background, but as an active resource constructed through shared knowledge, discourse assumptions, speaker intention, and situational cues. Stronger contextual support tends to reduce processing effort and increase the possibility of relevant cognitive effects, while weak or ambiguous context may increase interpretive burden (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022).

The literature also shows that inference is the central mechanism through which communicative intention is recovered. Relevance Theory rejects a purely code-based model of communication and instead argues that hearers infer intended meaning from linguistic cues, contextual assumptions, and expectations of relevance (Nong, 2023; Mashhadi et al., 2021). This inferential model has been used in linguistic analysis, discourse studies, translation, and literary interpretation, especially where meaning is implicit, figurative, or dependent on discourse context (Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023; Zou & Yiye, 2022; Walton et al., 2020; Kovalenko, 2023). In translation studies, Relevance Theory explains how translators preserve intended cognitive effects while managing processing demands in the target language (Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023). In literary studies, it provides a way to explain how readers are guided toward specific inferential and emotional responses through contextual and stylistic cues (Zou & Yiye, 2022; Walton et al., 2020; Kovalenko, 2023).

1.3. The Concept of Muqtadha al-Hal in Arabic Balaghah

The findings indicate that muqtadha al-hal is a core concept in Arabic Balaghah, especially within *Ilm al-Ma'ani*. It refers to the situational demand that determines how an utterance should be formulated in order to be appropriate and effective in a given communicative situation. In this tradition, eloquence is achieved not only through beauty of expression, but through the fit between expression, context, speaker intention, addressee condition, and communicative purpose (Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024; Atabik,

2021; Muminov & Kenjaeva, 2023). Muqtadha al-hal thus functions as a rhetorical-contextual principle that governs how meaning is packaged and conveyed.

The concept is closely connected to maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, and gharad al-kalam. Maqam refers to the situational setting or discourse occasion in which an utterance occurs. Mukhatab refers to the addressee whose knowledge, expectation, status, and interpretive capacity influence the choice of expression. Mutakallim refers to the speaker, whose intention and role shape the utterance. Gharad al-kalam refers to the communicative purpose to be achieved through speech (Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024). Through these categories, muqtadha al-hal provides a structured account of audience design and contextual adaptation. Contemporary reinterpretations increasingly connect this concept to pragmatics, discourse analysis, and communication theory, suggesting that muqtadha al-hal may be read as a classical Arabic formulation of context-sensitive communication (Gao, 2024; Qutbuddin, 2024; Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rosalinda et al., 2022).

1.4. Conceptual Convergences between Relevance Theory and Muqtadha al-Hal

The review identifies four major areas of convergence between Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal. First, both frameworks place context at the center of meaning construction. In Relevance Theory, context guides inferential processing and determines which interpretation is most relevant. In Balaghah, muqtadha al-hal and maqam determine what an utterance must accomplish in a particular situation and how linguistic form should be adapted to that situation (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021; Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024). This convergence supports the argument that Arabic rhetorical theory contains a strong pragmatic dimension.

Second, both frameworks emphasize speaker intention and audience reception. Relevance Theory conceptualizes communication as an ostensive act through which the speaker guides the hearer toward intended meaning. Muqtadha al-hal, similarly, links the speaker's purpose to the condition of the addressee and the discourse setting (Gao, 2024; Qutbuddin, 2024; Dalle et al., 2024). Third, both frameworks explain communicative effectiveness. In Relevance Theory, effectiveness is measured by cognitive effects relative to processing effort; in Balaghah, effectiveness is achieved when expression satisfies the situational demand and produces the intended rhetorical effect (Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024; Dalle et al., 2024). Fourth, both frameworks move beyond literal meaning, especially in the analysis of figurative language, majaz, isti'arah, and other rhetorical devices that require inference (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapol, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Gusmian & Abdullah, 2023).

1.5. Conceptual Differences between Relevance Theory and Muqtadha al-Hal

Although the two frameworks converge around context and communicative effectiveness, the review also reveals significant conceptual differences. Relevance Theory is a modern cognitive-pragmatic theory grounded in a descriptive account of how hearers recover intended meaning through inference. Its central concepts, such as cognitive effect and processing effort, describe the mental operations involved in interpretation (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021; Gao, 2024; Zou & Yiye, 2022). Muqtadha

al-hal, by contrast, is a classical Arabic rhetorical concept that functions normatively and contextually. It evaluates whether expression is appropriate to the discourse situation, the addressee, the speaker's aim, and the genre-specific conventions of Arabic rhetoric (Qutbuddin, 2024; Huda & Buana, 2022).

A second difference lies in agent orientation. Relevance Theory is largely receiver-oriented because it foregrounds the hearer's interpretive process. The speaker produces an ostensive stimulus, but the theory focuses on how the hearer derives the intended meaning through context-guided inference. Muqtadha al-hal is more speaker- and discourse-oriented because it evaluates how the speaker adapts form and content to situational demands (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024). A third difference concerns epistemological scope. Relevance Theory often aspires to cross-linguistic generalization, whereas muqtadha al-hal remains embedded in the historical, cultural, and genre-specific traditions of Arabic rhetoric, including Qur'anic discourse, Hadith, poetry, and prose (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rizqi, 2023; Miftahuddin, 2020; Thoha & Hannan, 2022). These differences indicate that the two frameworks should be treated as dialogically related but not identical.

1.6. Comparative Map of Relevance Theory and Muqtadha al-Hal

The comparative analysis produced a conceptual map that clarifies the relationship between Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal. Table 1 presents the main dimensions of comparison. The table shows that the two frameworks share concern for context, intention, interpretation, and communicative success, but differ in lineage, focus, agency, and analytical vocabulary. Relevance Theory contributes a cognitive-inferential model for explaining how meaning is processed, while muqtadha al-hal contributes a rhetorical-contextual model for explaining how expression is made appropriate to the communicative situation.

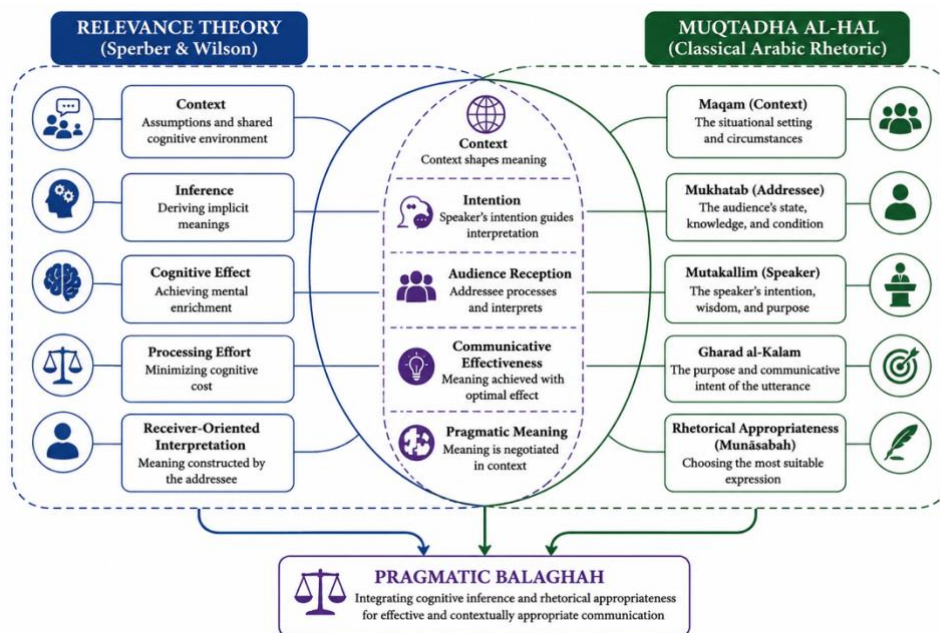


Figure 1. Conceptual Relationship between Relevance Theory and Muqtadha al-Hal in Pragmatic Balaghah

Table 1. Comparative map of Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal in Arabic Balaghah

| Aspect | Relevance Theory | Muqtadha al-Hal in Arabic Balaghah |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Scholarly tradition | Modern cognitive pragmatics | Classical Arabic Balaghah and Ilm al-Ma'ani |
| Main focus | Recovery of intended meaning through relevance-guided inference | Appropriateness of expression according to situational demand |
| Core concepts | Context, inference, cognitive effect, processing effort, ostension | Hal, maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, gharad al-kalam, dilalah |
| Orientation | Receiver-oriented interpretation | Speaker- and context-oriented expression |
| Meaning process | Cognitive-inferential and context-driven | Rhetorical-contextual and situation-driven |
| Role of context | Resource guiding inference and relevance | Constraint determining suitable form and meaning |
| Role of speaker | Provides ostensive stimulus and communicative intention | Adapts expression to hal, maqam, and addressee |
| Role of addressee | Infers intended meaning from context and linguistic cues | Receives expression according to status, expectation, and context |
| Main contribution | Explains processing of meaning and cognitive effects | Explains rhetorical appropriateness and communicative fit |
| Research implication | Supports empirical and cross-linguistic pragmatic analysis | Supports genre-sensitive Arabic rhetorical interpretation |

The table strengthens the conceptual transparency of the review. It makes visible both convergence and divergence, allowing the proposed integration to remain methodologically cautious. Comparative matrices of this kind are recommended in linguistic and rhetorical reviews because they clarify construct alignment, expose theoretical limits, and support future empirical or corpus-informed testing (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Gao, 2024; Qutbuddin, 2024).

1.7. Integrative Synthesis: Toward Pragmatic Balaghah

The synthesis of the review supports the formulation of pragmatic Balaghah as an integrative framework. Pragmatic Balaghah refers to an approach that reads Arabic texts through the interaction of rhetorical appropriateness, communicative context, inferential meaning, and cognitive effect. This framework does not replace classical Balaghah, nor does it absorb Balaghah entirely into Relevance Theory. Rather, it uses Relevance Theory to explain how audiences infer meaning and experience cognitive effects, while using muqtadha al-hal to identify the contextual and rhetorical constraints that shape expression in Arabic discourse (Qutbuddin, 2024; Nong, 2023; Huda & Buana, 2022; Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022).

In this synthesis, muqtadha al-hal provides the situational grammar of discourse, while Relevance Theory provides the inferential mechanism of interpretation. The speaker's hal-driven choices establish interpretive routes that the addressee navigates by relying on context, assumptions, and expectations of relevance. This framework is particularly useful for analyzing Arabic texts that contain majaz, isti'arah, taqdim and ta'khir, ellipsis, emphasis, and other context-sensitive rhetorical devices (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023). It also supports interdisciplinary applications in pedagogy, translation, and discourse analysis (Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023; Yaakob et al., 2020).

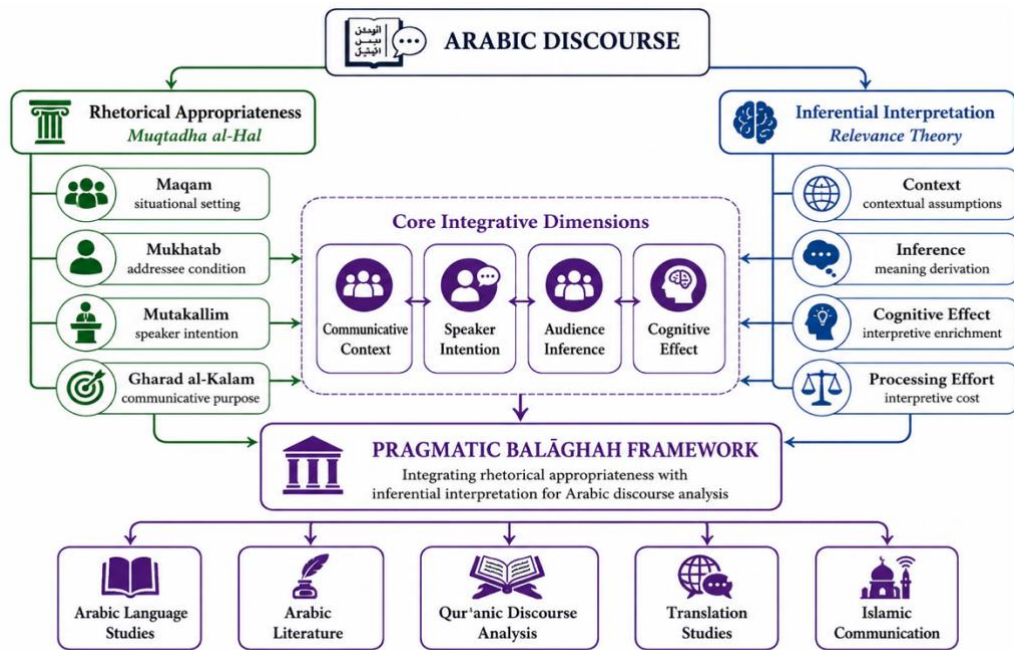


Figure 2. Integrative Framework of Pragmatic Balaghah for Arabic Discourse Analysis

1.8. Implications for Arabic Language and Arabic Literature Studies

The integration of Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal has several implications for Arabic language and literature studies. First, it expands Arabic linguistic analysis beyond structure toward context, inference, intention, and communicative effect. Arabic is not only analyzed through morphology, syntax, and semantics, but also through how utterances achieve relevance and rhetorical appropriateness in specific contexts (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021; Qutbuddin, 2024; Huda & Buana, 2022). Second, it strengthens Balaghah as a foundation for Arabic literary criticism by treating rhetorical devices as functional cues that guide interpretation rather than as decorative features alone (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024).

Third, pragmatic Balaghah can support Qur'anic discourse analysis and Islamic communication studies. Qur'anic language often relies on figurative, implicit, and contextually dense expressions that require inferential interpretation. A combined framework of Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal allows scholars to explain how readers derive intended meanings from contextual and rhetorical cues (Nashoiha, 2023; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Gusmian & Abdullah, 2023; Arib & Mokodenseho, 2023; Uswatusolihah, 2018). Fourth, the framework has pedagogical implications for higher education. Balaghah instruction can be strengthened by teaching students to identify hal, maqam, audience design, inferential pathways, and cognitive effects rather than memorizing rhetorical terminology in isolation (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rosalinda et al., 2022).

1.9. Main Argument of the Article

The central result of this review is that Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal are conceptually convergent but not identical. Both place context at the center of meaning construction and both connect speaker intention, audience reception, and communicative effectiveness. However, Relevance Theory emphasizes receiver-oriented cognitive inference, while muqtadha al-hal emphasizes speaker-oriented rhetorical appropriateness and situational fit (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021; Qutbuddin, 2024; Huda & Buana, 2022).

The article's main argument is that the two frameworks should be integrated through a dialogic and comparative model. Relevance Theory offers a general theory of ostension, inference, cognitive effects, and processing effort, while muqtadha al-hal offers a culturally and rhetorically grounded theory of contextual appropriateness in Arabic discourse. Their integration produces pragmatic Balaghah, a conceptual contribution to Arabic language studies, Arabic literary criticism, Qur'anic discourse analysis, translation studies, and Islamic communication studies (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023; Milah et al., 2023). This framework enables Arabic Balaghah to be understood as a contextual, inferential, rhetorical, and communicative theory, while also opening future research directions in corpus linguistics, experimental pragmatics, pedagogy, and cross-cultural translation.

B. Discussion

1. Integrating Relevance Theory and Muqtadha al-Hal as a Non-Reductive Framework

The findings of this review indicate that the integration of Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal contributes to contemporary debates on pragmatics and Arabic rhetoric by offering a non-reductive model of meaning interpretation. The proposed integration does not treat Arabic Balaghah as a subordinate application of modern pragmatics, nor does it claim that Relevance Theory merely restates what classical Arabic rhetoric has already formulated. Rather, it positions the two frameworks as dialogically related traditions that address similar communicative problems through different epistemological and methodological vocabularies. Relevance Theory explains interpretation through ostensive signaling, context-driven inference, cognitive effects, and processing effort, whereas muqtadha al-hal explains rhetorical appropriateness through the alignment of expression with hal, maqam, mukhatab, mutakallim, and gharad al-kalam (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021; Qutbuddin, 2024; Huda & Buana, 2022).

This non-reductive approach is important because it enables Arabic rhetorical theory to participate in broader pragmatic debates while retaining its historical and genre-specific identity. As shown in Table 1, Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal converge on context, intention, audience reception, and communicative effectiveness, but they differ in analytical orientation. Relevance Theory is primarily receiver-oriented and cognitive-inferential, while muqtadha al-hal is more speaker- and discourse-oriented, emphasizing contextual fit and rhetorical adequacy. This distinction prevents the study from collapsing Balaghah into a

universal pragmatic model and instead allows pragmatic Balaghah to emerge as an integrative framework grounded in both traditions (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Gao, 2024).

The integration also contributes to the ongoing effort to reinterpret Balaghah as a communicative and contextual theory rather than a discipline limited to linguistic ornamentation. Previous studies have shown that Balaghah concepts such as muqtadha al-hal, maqam, dilalah, majaz, and isti'arah are closely tied to interpretation, audience design, and rhetorical effect (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Qutbuddin, 2024). These concepts correspond to the concerns of modern pragmatics, particularly the relationship between context, inference, and communicative intention. By bringing Relevance Theory into dialogue with muqtadha al-hal, this study clarifies how Arabic rhetorical choices function not merely as aesthetic devices, but as mechanisms that guide inference and produce cognitive and communicative effects.

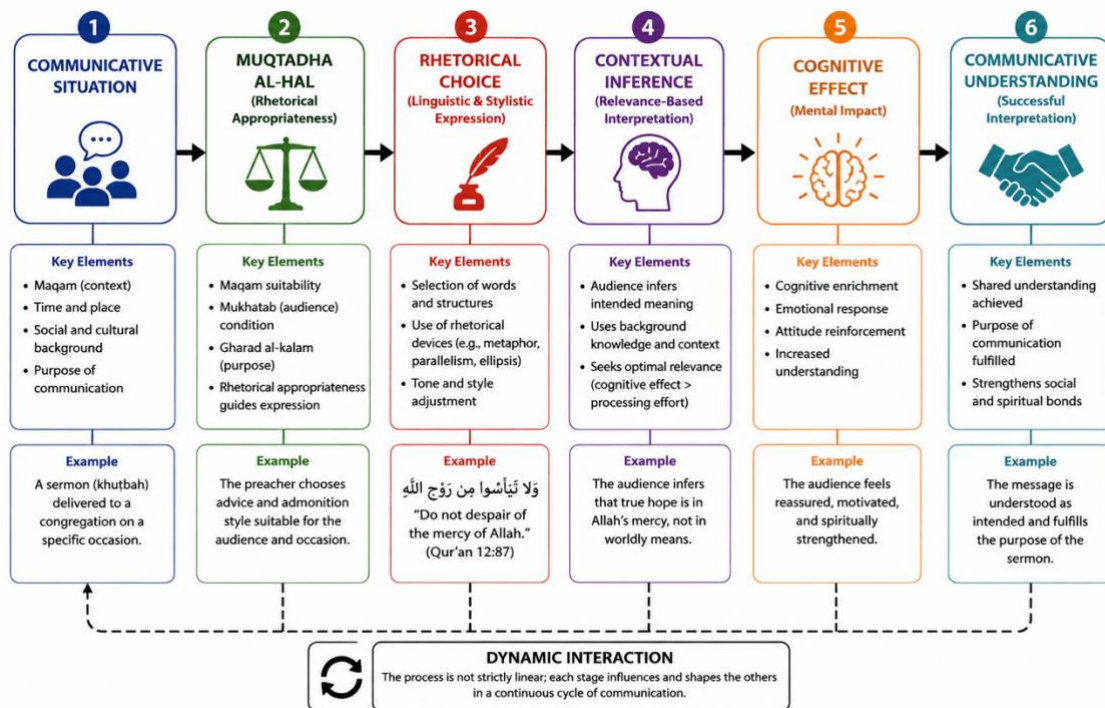


Figure 3. From Rhetorical Appropriateness to Cognitive Effect in Arabic Text Interpretation

2. Theoretical Strengths of Applying Relevance Theory to Arabic Balaghah

One theoretical strength of applying Relevance Theory to Arabic Balaghah lies in its capacity to explain implicit meaning. Arabic rhetorical discourse, especially Qur'anic language, Hadith, poetry, and classical prose, often depends on meanings that cannot be fully recovered from the literal surface of utterances. Devices such as majaz, isti'arah, ellipsis, emphasis, and shifts in structure require readers to infer intended meanings from contextual cues. Relevance Theory provides a rigorous explanation of how such meanings are recovered through the hearer's search for interpretations that yield sufficient cognitive effects with

reasonable processing effort (Nong, 2023; Niu & Dechsubha, 2022; Mashhadi et al., 2021). This makes it useful for explaining how rhetorical devices create persuasion, insight, emotional response, or belief modification in Arabic texts (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Zou & Yiye, 2022; Walton et al., 2020).

Another strength is its potential to make Arabic rhetorical analysis more methodologically explicit. Traditional discussions of muqtadha al-hal often emphasize appropriateness, context, and eloquence, but they do not always provide a systematic account of how readers process implied meanings. Relevance Theory supplies concepts such as processing effort, cognitive effect, contextual assumptions, and ostensive-inferential communication, which can be used to articulate more precise analytical procedures. This allows researchers to examine how a particular expression satisfies hal, guides inference, and produces interpretive outcomes. Such an approach is consistent with recent calls for theory-led mapping, corpus-informed pragmatics, and integrative theory-practice synthesis in studies linking classical linguistic traditions with modern theories (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rizqi, 2023).

The application of Relevance Theory also strengthens the pedagogical and translational value of Balaghah. In pedagogy, an RT-informed approach encourages students to examine not only rhetorical terminology, but also the contextual and inferential mechanisms that make rhetorical forms effective. In translation, it offers a way to analyze how implied meanings and intended cognitive effects may be preserved, explicated, or transformed in another language (Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023; Yaakob et al., 2020). This is particularly important for Arabic texts in which rhetorical effect is closely tied to context, genre, and audience expectation. When muqtadha al-hal is interpreted through Relevance Theory, translators and educators gain a framework for explaining why certain expressions are contextually appropriate and how their intended effects may be communicated across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

3. Limitations and Cautions in Applying Relevance Theory to Arabic Rhetoric

Despite its explanatory value, the application of Relevance Theory to Arabic Balaghah must be approached with caution. One limitation concerns the risk of overgeneralization. Relevance Theory aspires to provide a general model of human communication, but Arabic Balaghah is deeply embedded in specific textual, historical, religious, and literary traditions. The interpretation of Qur'anic discourse, Hadith, poetry, and modern prose is governed by genre conventions that cannot always be reduced to universal principles of processing effort and cognitive effect. Scholars have therefore emphasized the need for genre-sensitive and historically informed analysis when linking Relevance Theory to Arabic rhetorical traditions (Huda & Buana, 2022; Miftahuddin, 2020; Thoah & Hannan, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024).

A second limitation concerns the epistemological difference between the two frameworks. Relevance Theory describes how hearers infer meaning under cognitive constraints, while muqtadha al-hal prescribes or evaluates how expression should fit a communicative situation. This means that RT concepts such as processing effort and cognitive effect cannot simply be equated with Balaghah concepts such as maqam, gharad

al-kalam, or rhetorical appropriateness. The comparison must therefore remain functional and dialogic rather than identical. The comparative map in Table 1 is useful precisely because it clarifies the areas of convergence and divergence: it shows that both frameworks address context and communication, but through distinct theoretical logics.

A third limitation concerns empirical evidence. Although Relevance Theory has been applied across discourse, translation, and literary studies, empirical testing in Arabic discourse remains relatively limited compared with work on Indo-European languages. There is still a need for corpus-based annotation, reading-time studies, acceptability judgments, and other processing-oriented methods that can test whether hal-aligned expressions actually reduce processing effort or increase cognitive effects in Arabic contexts (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rizqi, 2023). Without such empirical work, the integration of Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal remains primarily conceptual. This does not weaken its theoretical value, but it indicates the need for future studies that can validate the framework across genres, audiences, and interpretive traditions.

4. Contribution of Classical Arabic Rhetoric to Global Pragmatic Studies

The discussion also suggests that classical Arabic rhetoric can contribute significantly to global pragmatic studies. Much of modern pragmatics has been shaped by theories developed in Western linguistic traditions. By bringing muqtadha al-hal into dialogue with Relevance Theory, this study shows that Arabic rhetorical thought contains sophisticated accounts of context, audience, intention, and communicative effectiveness. Concepts such as maqam, mukhatib, mutakallim, gharad al-kalam, dilalah, and majaz offer rich categories for examining how utterances are designed and interpreted in context (Huda & Buana, 2022; Qutbuddin, 2024; Atabik, 2021).

This contribution is particularly important for comparative pragmatics. Arabic rhetorical traditions provide a language- and culture-specific model of how context governs expression. Such a model can test, refine, or complicate universal pragmatic theories, including Relevance Theory. For example, while Relevance Theory emphasizes the hearer's pursuit of optimal relevance, Balaghah foregrounds the speaker's responsibility to adapt expression to the demands of the situation. This perspective enriches pragmatic theory by emphasizing rhetorical normativity, genre convention, and communicative ethics as part of meaning production. It also invites researchers to consider whether relevance, inference, and processing effort are shaped differently in sacred, literary, pedagogical, and public communication genres (Nong, 2023; Gao, 2024; Qutbuddin, 2024; Huda & Buana, 2022).

Classical Arabic rhetoric also offers valuable material for the study of figurative language and implicit meaning. The Balaghah repertoire, including majaz, isti'arah, taqdim wa ta'khir, and other rhetorical strategies, provides fertile ground for examining how readers infer meanings beyond explicit form. These phenomena are central to debates in semantics-pragmatics interfaces, literary pragmatics, and translation studies (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Zou & Yiye, 2022; Walton et al., 2020). Thus, Arabic Balaghah should not be viewed merely as a regional or classical discipline, but as a resource for expanding the theoretical and empirical scope of global pragmatics.

5. Future Research Trajectories in Pragmatic Balaghah

The development of pragmatic Balaghah opens several research trajectories. In Qur'anic discourse analysis, future studies can map hal-based constraints onto RT-style inferential pathways across different exegetical traditions. Such work could examine how readers derive implied meanings, cognitive effects, and ethical orientations from Qur'anic figurative language, including majaz and isti'arah (Nashoiha, 2023; Sapil, 2022; Nuha & Musyafaah, 2023; Nong, 2023). Corpus-based studies could identify recurrent rhetorical patterns, while processing experiments could examine whether contextual cues reduce interpretive effort or increase uptake among different reader groups.

In Arabic literature, pragmatic Balaghah can be applied to classical poetry, modern prose, and rhetorical prose traditions. Researchers may examine how maqam and muqtadha al-hal shape inferential paths, how literary devices guide cognitive and emotional effects, and how genre conventions affect the reader's pursuit of relevance. Such studies would extend Arabic literary criticism beyond formal stylistics toward a more integrated account of form, context, intention, and reception (Qutbuddin, 2024; Atabik, 2021; Nashoiha, 2023; Thoha & Hannan, 2022).

Translation studies also represent a promising area for pragmatic Balaghah. Arabic rhetorical meaning is often difficult to transfer because the target language may not share the same contextual assumptions, genre conventions, or rhetorical expectations. Relevance Theory can help translators evaluate how much implicit meaning should be made explicit, while muqtadha al-hal can help determine which contextual and rhetorical demands must be preserved (Gao, 2024; Whetsell, 2023; Yaakob et al., 2020; Milah et al., 2023). This approach may be especially valuable for translating Qur'anic discourse, classical literature, sermons, and culturally embedded Arabic rhetorical expressions.

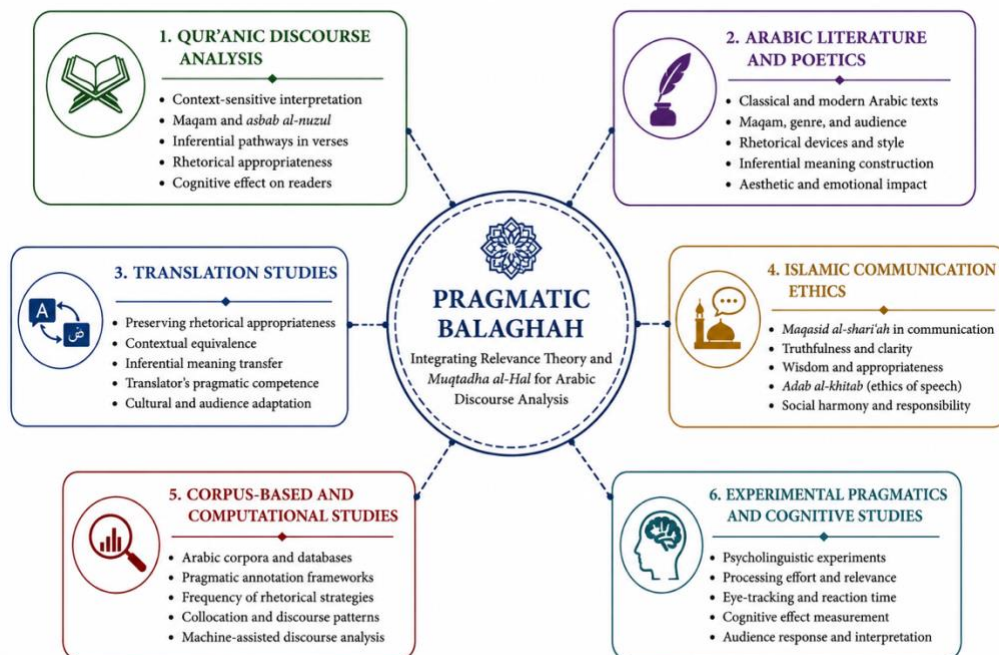


Figure 4. Research Trajectories of Pragmatic Balaghah

Pragmatic Balaghah also has implications for Islamic communication ethics. Religious discourse, including sermons, da'wah communication, and Islamic media discourse, depends heavily on audience design, contextual appropriateness, persuasive clarity, and ethical responsibility. The integration of RT and muqtadha al-hal can support analyses of how speakers construct messages that are relevant, contextually appropriate, and ethically oriented toward the audience (Gusmian & Abdullah, 2023; Arib & Mokodenseho, 2023; Uswatusolihah, 2018). This line of research can be extended to contemporary digital communication, where the absence of contextual clarity often increases misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or rhetorical manipulation.

6. Methodological Implications for Future Studies

Methodologically, the findings support a multi-method research agenda. Conceptual analysis remains necessary for clarifying the relationship between RT constructs and Balaghah categories. However, future studies should also employ corpus-assisted and empirical methods. Corpus analysis can identify patterns of muqtadha al-hal, maqam, dilalah, and rhetorical devices across Qur'anic, literary, pedagogical, and media texts. Experimental pragmatics can test whether contextually appropriate expressions influence processing effort, inferential accuracy, and cognitive effect among Arabic readers (Dalle et al., 2024; Aflisia et al., 2022; Rizqi, 2023).

The comparative matrix presented in Table 1 can serve as a methodological starting point for such studies. It provides categories for mapping Relevance Theory and muqtadha al-hal in terms of tradition, focus, orientation, context, speaker, addressee, and contribution. Future research can extend this matrix into a coding framework for corpus annotation or classroom analysis. It can also be adapted into a pedagogical tool for teaching students how to compare modern pragmatic theories with classical Arabic rhetorical concepts. By combining conceptual mapping, textual analysis, corpus annotation, and empirical testing, pragmatic Balaghah can develop from a theoretical proposal into a robust research program for Arabic linguistics, Arabic literature, Qur'anic studies, translation, and Islamic communication.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the conceptual relationship between Relevance Theory in modern pragmatics and muqtadha al-hal in Arabic Balaghah and to formulate an integrative framework for Arabic discourse analysis. The findings show that both frameworks share a strong concern with context, intention, audience reception, and communicative effectiveness. Relevance Theory explains how meaning is inferred by readers or hearers through contextual assumptions, cognitive effects, and processing effort, whereas muqtadha al-hal explains how speakers or texts adapt expression to situational demands, audience condition, communicative purpose, and rhetorical appropriateness. Therefore, the two frameworks are conceptually convergent but not identical. Their integration produces pragmatic Balaghah, a non-reductive model that connects rhetorical appropriateness, communicative context, inferential meaning, and cognitive effect. This framework has

important implications for Arabic language studies, Arabic literature, Qur'anic discourse analysis, translation studies, Balaghah pedagogy, and Islamic communication because it positions Arabic rhetoric as a contextual and communicative theory rather than merely a theory of linguistic ornamentation. However, this study is limited to conceptual and comparative literature analysis; it does not test the framework through corpus-based data, classroom application, or empirical reader-response methods. Future research should validate pragmatic Balaghah through corpus annotation, experimental pragmatics, translation analysis, Qur'anic interpretation, and pedagogical implementation across different Arabic discourse genres.

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